

Results of a Europe-wide survey on student sense of belonging

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Dropout & Sense of belonging

- Starting point: dropout-model by Tinto (1975, 1993): “Failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the [higher education] institution” as **one of three reasons for student departure** (other two reasons: academic difficulties, having chosen wrong study programme).
 - “In dropout research there is a trend to a **heightened recognition of the relevance of ‘soft’ factors**, including relationships, pedagogy, trust, emotional security and sense of belonging.” (Nairz-Wirth 2017; also Kahu 2020)
 - Students are less likely to leave if they have **positive relationships with their peers and educators** (Thomas, 2012).
 - **Academic staff play a key role** in a sense how they can help or break the fragile sense of self and capability that many students have as they begin university (Burke et al., 2016).
- Research questions: What affects (beginner) students’ sense of belonging?
- Which of the three Tinto reasons impacts the student experience the strongest?

ENTRANTS survey on belonging in HE

- Europe-wide survey on students' academic and social integration into their HEI
- November 2022 – Feb. 2023, 3995 responses from first semester students, data weighted by country based on Eurostat-data
- Sample: 65% female, 32% male, 1% diverse (2% prefer not to say)
- Survey items focusing on:
 - **Transition** („It was easy for me to adapt to university life“)
 - **Academic habitus** („The way people express themselves at university is very different from what I am used to.“)
 - **Relationship with staff**
 - **Social contacts with students**
 - **Motivation** („Often I don't want to go to class.“)
 - **Integration/belonging** („Sometimes I wonder if I really fit in.“; „I feel part of a community“, „I feel that I belong“)
 - **Anonymity** („I could disappear for days and no one would notice“)
 - **Support** structures & (financial) support (**family**)
 - **Workload** („I feel overwhelmed by what is asked of me.“ „It is easy for me to follow content in my class.“)
 - **Choice of study**
 - **Satisfaction** („I like it at university“, Stars-rating: „How was your first semester“)
 - **Likelihood of drop out**

The first semester experience

Overall, how was your first semester (stars rating): 3,5 stars out of five

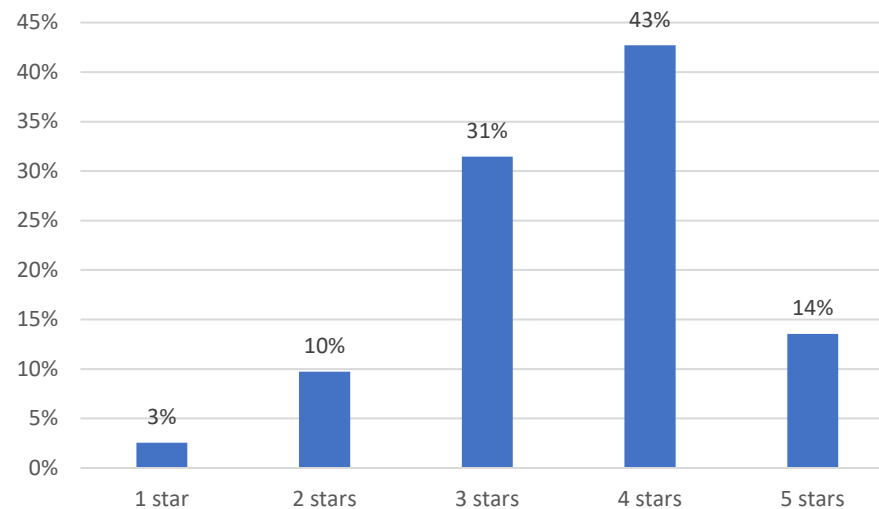
- „**Adjusting to a new beginning can be hard**, and I feel like only having online courses made it just so much worse. **I felt like I graduated and left my beloved high school for some weird new professors and some online courses.** But I give it a 3 star because my next semester will be in the mixed scenario.”
- “A little bit stressing, **a completely different lifestyle**, really advanced material all at once, depression, eating disorders, there's no possible way to study all at once or you're gonna fail [...]”.
- “A lot of long days at uni made it hard to stay focused till the end. Also some planning from our faculty was very poor when organising the chronology of lectures. The **teaching style is obviously very different from my other years of education** hence it was harder to pick up a study method/ routine.”
- “Could've been better, but I think it's more about how I felt moving out from home and **basically starting a new life.**”
- “Enjoyable! Difficult to **get used to independent learning.**”
- “Felt really **lonely and unsupported.**”
- “Felt very much **out of my depth and underprepared.**”

Belonging and satisfaction

	Agree*	Disagree	Ar. Mean
I feel that I belong at university.	66%	14%	3,8
I like it at university.	76%	7%	3,99

* Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements: Scale of 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (fully agree); Agree=4 and 5; Disagree= 1 and 2

Overall, how was your first semester?



Entry phase, Habitus

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements

Scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Going to university was the right decision.	87%	4%	4,4
I feel I have chosen the right study programme.	74%	7%	4,0
It was easy for me to adapt to university life.	53%	18%	3,5
The way people express themselves at university is very different from what I am used to.	34%	38%	3,0

<i>Correlations (Spearman rho)</i>	I belong at uni.	I like it at uni.	Satisfaction on 1st sem
Going to university was the right decision.	,543**	,552**	,415**
I feel I have chosen the right study programme.	,389**	,500**	,395**
It was easy for me to adapt to university life.	,379**	,446**	,380**
The way people express themselves at university is very different from what I am used to.	-,081**	,013	,023

Relationship to staff

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements

Scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

	Agree	Disagree	Mean
Overall, I have a good relationship with my teachers.	60%	11%	3,7
Most of my teachers know my name.	26%	58%	2,4
In case of problems, I feel I can turn to teachers for help and guidance.	53%	23%	3,4
My teachers are concerned when I am absent from classes.	16%	66%	2,1
I can easily approach administrative staff.	47%	25%	3,3
I found staff at my institution really welcoming.	59%	18%	3,6

		I belong at uni.	I like it at uni.	Satisfaction on 1st sem
Correlations (Spearman rho)				
Overall, I have a good relationship with my teachers.	P (rho)	,299**	,326**	,425**
Most of my teachers know my name.	P (rho)	,173**	,204**	,283**
In case of problems, I feel I can turn to teachers for help and guidance.	P (rho)	,300**	,341**	,409**
My teachers are concerned when I am absent from classes.	P (rho)	,146**	,159**	,282**
I can easily approach administrative staff.	P (rho)	,337**	,294**	,312**
I found staff at my institution really welcoming.		,274**	,329**	,387**

Support structures

In which areas would you need more support?

No. 1: Psychological support, mental health, counselling

Then: financial support, career services, Admin/organisational support, academic writing, languages

Most/Least accessed support structures:

Administrative support/organisation of studies	52%
Library services	49%
Tutoring/peer learning groups	27%
Language courses	20%
IT services	18%
Financial aid/support	17%
Psychological support/counselling	17%
Mentoring	17%
Support for international students	13%
Career services	12%
Buddy programme	10%
Academic writing	7%
Equal treatment/non-discrimination counselling	5%
Disability or learning difficulties support (Accessibility)	5%
Bridging courses (for example, Maths)	4%
Social skills training	4%
Childcare	1%
Other:	1%

Social integration

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements

Scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

	Agree	Disagree	Mean
Looking back, it was easy for me to work together with other students.	58%	17%	3,5
I met with fellow students outside of the classroom.	61%	25%	3,6
At my institution students help each other.	72%	9%	3,9
I feel part of a community at my university.	49%	25%	3,4
I could disappear for days and no one would notice.	29%	54%	2,6
Sometimes I wonder if I really fit in.	39%	36%	3,0

	I belong at uni.	I like it at uni.	Satisfaction 1st sem
Correlations (Spearman rho)			
Looking back, it was easy for me to work together with other students.	,375**	,367**	,384**
I met with fellow students outside of the classroom.	,320**	,329**	,339**
It was easy to make new friends.	,367**	,340**	,438**
At my institution students help each other.	,419**	,440**	,395**
I feel part of a community at my university.	,618**	,533**	,478**
I could disappear for days and no one would notice.	-,383**	-,379**	-,398**
Sometimes I wonder if I really fit in.	-,479**	-,472**	-,385**

Academic difficulties, workload

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements

Scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

	Agree	Disagree	Mean
It was easy for me to follow the content in my classes.	58%	15%	3,5
I was able to handle the workload.	54%	15%	3,5
The courses I am currently enrolled in are too difficult for me.	10%	68%	2,2
I feel overwhelmed by what is asked of me.	26%	42%	2,8

Correlations (Spearman rho)		I belong at uni.	I like it at uni.	Satisfaction 1st sem.
It was easy for me to follow the content in my classes.	P (rho)	,260**	,316**	,464**
I was able to handle the workload.	P (rho)	,268**	,283**	,413**
The courses I am currently enrolled in are too difficult for me.	P (rho)	-,258**	-,262**	-,254**
I feel overwhelmed by what is asked of me.	P (rho)	-,230**	-,321**	-,268**

Demographics and sense of belonging

	I feel that I belong at university - agree	I like it at university agree
Migration background - yes	58%	72%
Migration background – no	68%	77%
Ethnicity – yes	59%	67%
Ethnicity – no	67%	78%
Disability – yes	63%	72%
Disability – no	66%	76%
Work – yes	66%	70%
Work – no	71%	79%
Entry - high school	66%	76%
Entry - alternative route	56%	76%
Financial difficulties – no	68%	77%
Financial difficulties – somewhat	61%	76%
Financial difficulties – high	47%	52%
Gender – male	66%	78%
Gender – female	66%	74%
Gender – diverse	42%	56%

Satisfaction with 1st semester and community

Strongest correlations with the stars rating on the first semester experience („**Overall, how was your first semester?**“)

I like it at university.	,486**
I feel part of a community at my university.	,478**
It was easy for me to follow the content in my classes.	,464**
It was easy to make new friends.	,438**
I feel that I belong at university.	,431**
Overall, I have a good relationship with my teachers.	,425**
Going to university was the right decision.	,415**
I was able to handle the workload.	,413**
In case of problems, I feel I can turn to teachers for help and guidance.	,409**
Often I don't want to go to classes.	-,406**

Strongest correlations with the item „**I feel part of a community at my university.**“

I feel that I belong at university.	,618**
I like it at university.	,533**
I could disappear for days and no one would notice.	-,482**
It was easy to make new friends.	,479**
How was 1st semester	,478**
Looking back, it was easy for me to work together with other students.	,451**
Sometimes I wonder if I really fit in.	-,448**
At my institution students help each other.	,445**
I met with fellow students outside of the classroom.	,429**

Reflection

- *In your role as administrator or teacher in higher education, how can you contribute to community-building and enhancing social interaction among students? Where do you see your responsibilities ending?*