Results of a Thematic Analysis of Summer 2024 Student Interviews

Presenters:

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Methodology: Individual Student Interviews

Questions (39 Total):

- Validation and Servingness – General (9)

- Validation and Servingness – SECURE for Student Success Project (14)

- CRT – General and in SECURE for Student Success (5)

- Physical Health and Emotional Wellbeing – SECURE for Student Success Project (6)

- Familial Capital – Family Background, Family Life, and Relationships (5)

# Methodology: Group Sessions

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Group Session 1 Photo Scavenger Hunt

- Take 1-2 photos that tells something about you.

- Take 1-2 photos of a space or spaces or that represent a space or spaces on campus where you feel supported.

- Take 1-2 photos that represent a dream or goal that you have for the future.

Group Session 2 Photography Reflections

- Take 5-7 photos of the day in the life as a College Student in SfS2.

- Take 1-2 photos that represent ways that you feel supported as a college student

- Take 1-2 photos that represent ways that you could be supported more as a college student.

- Reflection on CSUN and SfS2 Experiences

Student Photos
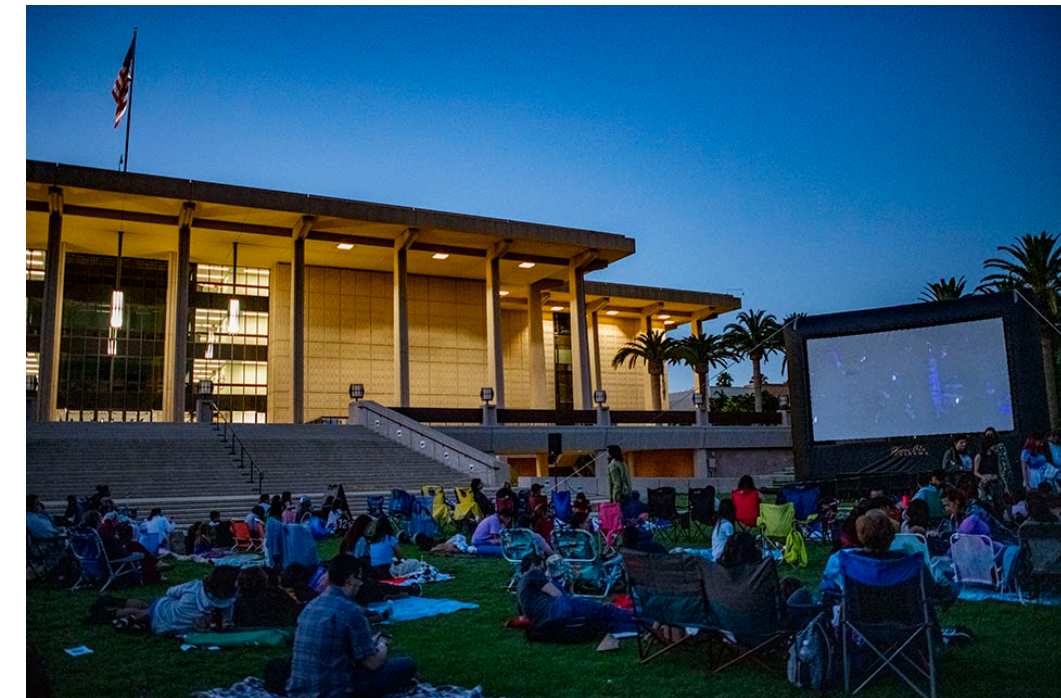
Sense of Belonging in Academic and Social Spaces

Academic Belonging

Academic belonging grows when students are engaged in their field, through research, supportive faculty, or peer collaboration. Feeling valued and connected affirms their identity as scholars, showing that belonging comes from both intellectual engagement and community support.
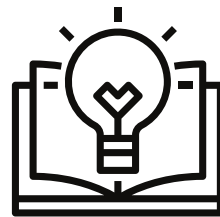
"I believe that being part of the research does tell me, feel valued in my major just because I'm utilizing my major currently, and it's something that I understand that most people will like to do or hope to do like. Currently, in my job. Some people don't really utilize their major... So I do believe that being part of the research, right currently is something that makes me feel part of my major, or it makes me feel useful."

"I think, mainly the teachers in my major courses. Since they were mostly in Jacaranda, and they were like the engineers. They kind of made me feel more connected to my major, just because they would give a lot of out of eyes, or always they would be if I heard anything about like in the future. You know about careers and things like that. It was mainly through them."

"The library is also another like supportive environment. I get to meet a lot of people. That we have the same majors. And we have like study groups for different like classes. So I would always meet them here in the library. And you know, it's also a very supportive environment, where we can help each other. find success in our classes by studying together and doing well in our finals and midterms or whatnot."

Sense of Belonging in Academic and Social Spaces

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Social Belonging

Belonging on campus can also come through social connection, shared resources, and opportunities to get involved.

Involvement makes the difference: students who engage in clubs, programs, or peer networks describe feeling more connected and supported.
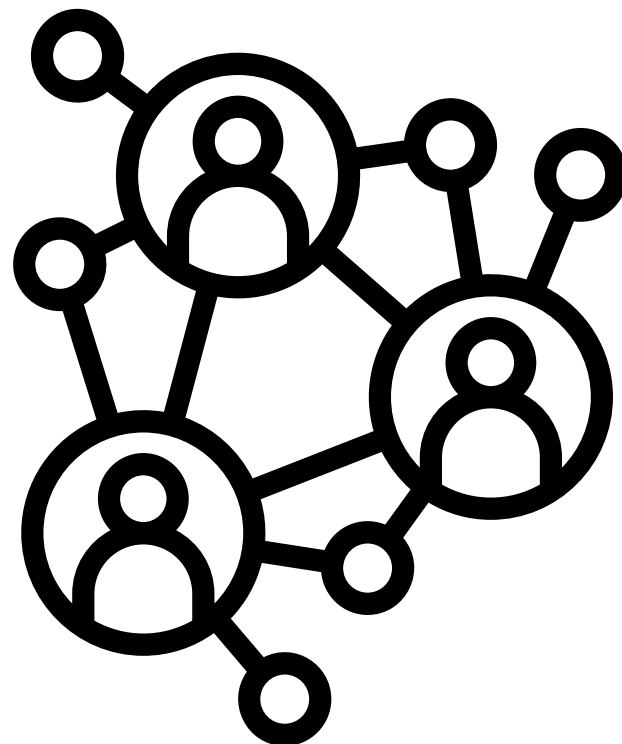
"This is Meet the Clubs. So, it's always in the beginning of each semester. and makes me feel welcome on campus, just because I'm always able to find a club that relates to me, or is something that I look into like being part of in the future"

"I don't think I felt as much of a connection until this last semester where I joined like Machine Shop Club. And I learned about this research. So I feel like my 1st year didn't feel that much of a connection cause I wasn't that involved."

"I felt very welcomed at EOP. They're very nice, and it just feels like a community among us...I always felt supported because they always provide us with things like study nights. And they provide snacks and stuff like that. So they've always kind of provided us with these extra resources to help us succeed."

Sense of Belonging in Academic and Social Spaces

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Identity-Based Belonging

Identity-based belonging emerges less from explicit conversations and more from diversity, representation, and cultural communities that help students feel comfortable and included.

> "I don't feel weird or like left out. You know. I feel comfortable like I'm in an environment, It's pretty diverse."

> "But I feel like all the programs that we have on campus that I've seen advertised do make it feel pretty inclusive for most of the campus life."

While race and gender are not always at the forefront of academic or club experiences, seeing peers and programs that reflect their backgrounds reinforces a sense of connection and inclusivity.

> "So as far as identity goes, that hasn't really come up."

> "I believe it's not certainly like it's not really take it into topic. It's nothing that we would be talking about at the at our at our meetings, like it's mainly just engineering work"

Barriers to Connection and Inclusion

Lack of Engagement & Program Limitations

While students valued the flexibility of the virtual components of the program, varying expectations and the absence of in-person check ins or events limited their ability to foster a genuine connections.

"As far as the peer mentorship program goes. I definitely think it would be helpful to have maybe some events maybe an in person meeting with the mentors and the Mentees at an event posted by the Sfs. or some like mid program, check, Ins or something in person."
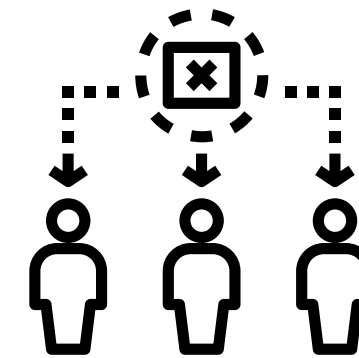
"Because everything is being done through online stuff. I don't really feel much connection."

"Through some mandatory event, I guess would be would be help build the connection a little bit faster than purely online communication."

Support Systems that Foster Student Success

Peer and Mentor Support

Peer and mentor support are essential for student success, whether through encouragement, accountability, shared problem-solving, or simply knowing they had a community to turn to during challenges.

"I was able to luckily meet a friend. and I was with him throughout like my entire 1st year and we were able to get really good grades. As we would push each other, help each other out. And it was essential for me mainly because sometimes my friend would understand like math very well, and I would have to like provide a lesson essentially for him, going over. And then, like as I'm teaching him how to do the problems help me understand them like much more."
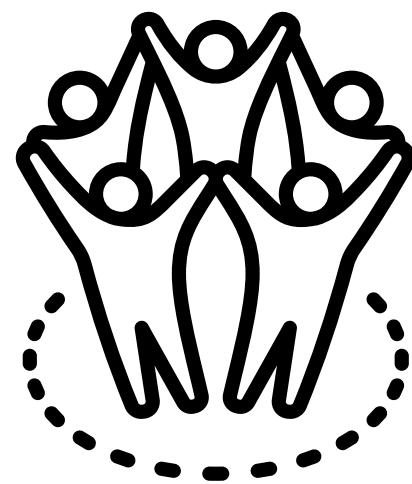
"So we're always like keeping each other accountable for what we have to do, but also they also make me feel like comfortable in the sense that if I need help I know I could ask them. They need help. They know they could ask me, you know. So we definitely fostered like a good like team."

"And my mentor was very, very supportive when I like through every difficulty that I encountered, saying, like, this is okay, this is normal. So she was very helpful in giving me that sort of reassurance that things will go wrong and it's okay, has helped me greatly over the past."

Support Systems that Foster Student Success

Institutional and Programmatic Support

Access to Resources: Counseling, advisors, labs, research opportunities, and program guidance were seen as critical supports.

Preparation for the Future: Programs and mentors not only offered academic support but also encouraged professional growth, networking, and career exploration.

TECHNOLOGY
SCIENCE
MATH
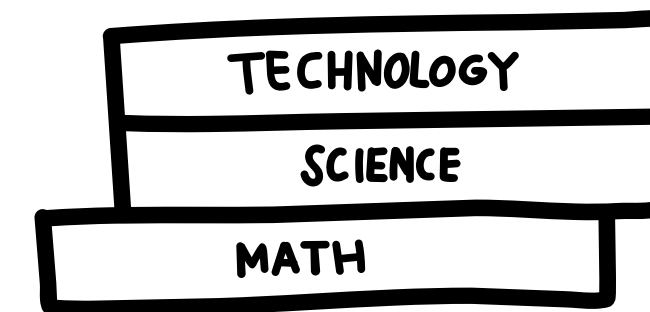
"I feel like we all have our own ways of feeling supported in this whole community and campus. You know there's always something to be a part of, whether it's the game room, whether it's church, whether it's the classroom to talk and collaborate with colleagues. There's always some place that we have, and it's all different for us, you know, because it depends on our interests and all that. But it feels good to have like these sort of environments and resources available for us so that we can feel supported on campus and in in every way possible."

"Programs like this that help me be more involved on campus just cause it. It helps you with like or anybody in general just helps with networking, you know, meeting new people and getting involved in these projects. There's just overall good for, like, you know, for your future and your career."

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Support Systems that Foster Student Success

Family Support & Motivation

Trust and Autonomy: Families supported students by trusting them to make their own academic and career decisions.

Work Ethic and Inspiration: Many students mentioned their parents' hard work and sacrifices as the foundation of their own drive and persistence.

Practical Support: Families provided encouragement, transportation, and reassurance, reinforcing a sense of confidence.

Identity and Foundation: Students described family as central to who they are, shaping both their values and their sense of belonging.

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"If I were to like describe it. In one word, it's like the foundation of who I am, you know I grew up with my family, and then they're the ones who, like your family, is always the one who knows who you truly are, you know, like they're the ones who always see you on your bad days and your good days, but they always, for me at least, they've always. I'm the way I am because of them."

"I also think my work ethic, like literally almost everything I got is just by looking up to my parents. You know, I've always seen them as hard workers. and then I just like appreciate. You know, all the struggles they've done to help me succeed."
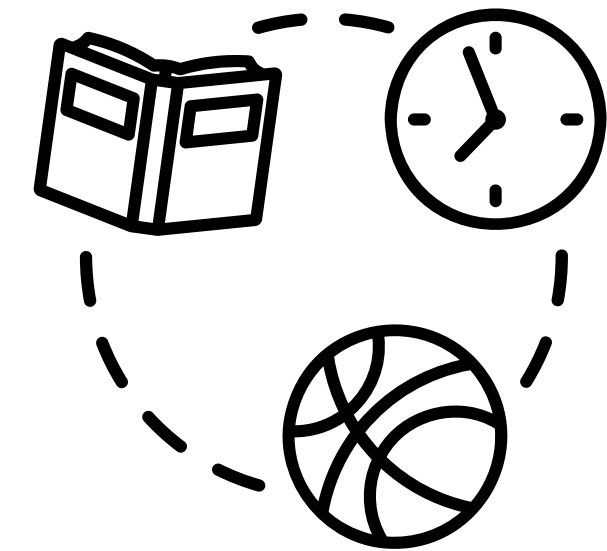
Wellness

Mental and Physical Health

Stress and Burnout: Students described school as draining and noted the challenge of balancing academics with personal well-being.

Self Care: Activities like going to the gym, visiting the Oasis, and spending time with friends were seen as essential outlets for stress relief.

Balance and Perspective: Students valued opportunities, such as summer schedules and leisure/free time, that allowed them to maintain a healthier balance between work and personal life.

"So I think an important thing about wellness is not only doing good in your academics, but in your own personal life, you know. like, I try to go to the gym, just because it makes me feel good about myself like I'm not I wasn't just sitting all day like I did my work, and I was active today."

"Since it's the summer, you know, I think it's a much more even balance of like leisure time. And then working on the project, you know. So it's not something that that I don't look forward to. It's something that I'm like Oh, you already have my fun, and tomorrow I'll work on the project. You know, I'm relaxed."

Wellness

Struggles with Burnout or Overload

Pressure: Students described feeling like they were in a constant "war," with no time for breaks and ongoing pressure to pursue research, internships, and jobs.

Responsibility Overload: Taking on extra responsibilities, such as mentoring peers or leading projects, added to exhaustion and feelings of being overburdened.

Work Life Imbalance: The lack of conversation around balance in academic, combined with repetitive daily routines, left many students feeling drained and unmotivated.

"For the overall for peers, it's been pretty negative, and leads to some of that exhaustion that I was talking about where it's like I'm expected to fix everything for every project."

"I'm essentially mentoring every single person on every project because of the skill gap …it can be exhausting. And I feel like, if I don't take on the project that it will not get done successfully."

"In the 1st semester. I was not willing to go out at all, like I just did not want to go out at all, just because I wanted to make sure I had my work done and everything finished…I was making sure to like, have my priorities change like in the next upcoming semester, and making sure to go out with my family, and like, spend as much time as I can with them."

Conclusion:

- *Key Takeaways*

    - Belonging is built through academic engagement, social involvement, and identity-based inclusion.

    - Support systems (peers, mentors, programs, and family) are crucial for student success.

    - Students thrive when wellness and balance are prioritized alongside academics.

- *Recommendations*

    - Expand in-person engagement opportunities (peer events, mentorship meet ups, student/faculty mixers).

    - Increase visibility of academic resources (labs, tutoring, research opportunities).

    - Encourage faculty awareness of student workload and burnout signs.