

STUDENT SENSE OF BELONGING AND DRINKING

Partners in Prevention is a statewide coalition dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses in Missouri. The coalition is comprised of 21 public and private colleges and universities across the state. Partners in Prevention implements the Missouri College Health Behavior Survey (MCHBS) in the spring each year to assess student behaviors.

SENSE OF BELONGING

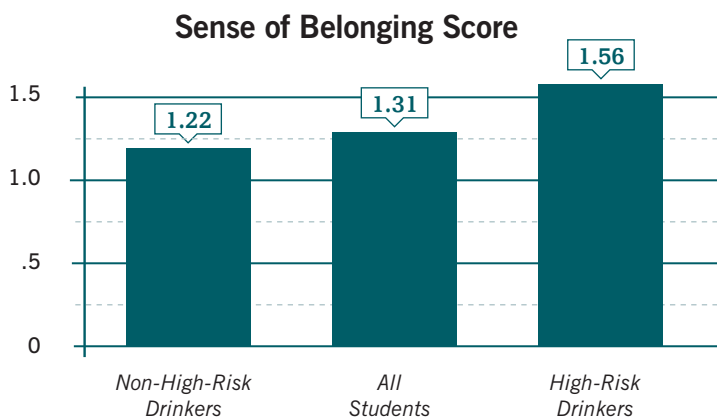
Sense of Belonging is emerging as a powerful construct in student affairs. "Belonging - with peers, in the classroom, or on campus is a crucial part of the college experience. It can affect a student's degree of academic achievement or even whether they stay in school" (Strayhorn 2012). In recognition of the potential interest in this construct, a "Sense of Belonging" scale was added to the 2013 MCHBS survey.

Questions Added to 2013 MCHBS

- a) I see myself as a part of the campus community
- b) I feel that I am a member of the campus community
- c) I feel a sense of belonging to the campus community

RESULTS

Results of the 2013 MCHBS survey indicate Missouri college students report high levels of belonging. While there was a large degree of variation by campus, 62% of students statewide reported positive sense of belonging scores. The majority of Missouri students see themselves as a welcomed and an integrated part of their campus.



DRINKING PARADOX

According to the 2013 MCHBS data, an inverse relationship emerged with student drinking behaviors. As Sense of Belonging scores increased, so did high-risk drinking. High-risk drinking is defined as students who consume five or more standard drinks in a two-hour period within the past two weeks. In other words, high-risk drinking students, reported greater "Sense of Belonging". These results present a paradox for our campuses. This phenomena may require campuses to review their data and ask the following questions.

Sense of Belonging Campus Self-Assessment Questions

- a) What are our campus specific Sense of Belonging scores?
- b) What are our campus specific high-risk drinking rates?
- c) Are the scores related? What can we do to increase student sense of belonging **and** reduce high-risk drinking?

DISCUSSION

With the importance of encouraging a sense of belonging on our campuses and reducing high-risk drinking, we are presented with a paradox. Possible resolutions may be found in deliberate implementation of alcohol free alternative events, such as those offered at many of our campuses. Partners in Prevention will continue to monitor these scales and provide more in-depth analysis following the 2014 implementation of the Missouri College Health Behavior Survey.

**Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students, Routledge.*

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551
 Report Prepared by Partners in Prevention Research & Evaluation Staff
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