

Student Experience Survey

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Student Experience Survey was designed by a university-wide committee of students, faculty, and administrators in the spring semester of 2018. The goal of the survey was to better understand the full Boston College student experience, both in and outside of the classroom, with the purpose of identifying areas of strength and areas where BC could focus greater attention. The survey asked a range of questions about university mission, community, culture, academics, and student services. This customized survey was designed to provide data about the BC student population and experiences, but does not allow for comparisons with peer institutions.

The results from the Student Experience Survey reveal a positive experience for the majority of Boston College students. Students are overwhelmingly satisfied with the quality of teaching. They report taking time for reflection, developing a stronger sense of purpose, and engaging in retreats and community service.

Student
Reflection

“The Jesuit teachings of social justice that emphasize service and reflection have been the most important and life-changing part of my BC experience. This includes discussions in and outside of class that have pushed me to think deeply about serious issues.”

Most students report a sense of belonging, and would recommend BC to others, indicating a positive overall experience. Themes of community and strong relationships were frequently mentioned as aspects that students value the most about BC.

Student
Reflection

“I value the expertise of my professors and how accessible they are to me. I love that I attend a prestigious university, but the classes are small enough that the professors know me and I do not usually have a TA or grad student teaching a class by themselves like other large institutions. The student body is large enough that you can find many pockets of friends that have different interests and are like you in many ways. I find my courses to be challenging and interesting for the most part. Our campus is always beautiful and I have many spots on campus [where] I like to study.”

The survey results also provide feedback on how BC can improve the student experience for particular populations. For example, students who identify as AHANA, LGBTQ, or high financial need generally responded less favorably, especially on items measuring a sense of belonging. Additionally, the majority of students reported high levels of academic and social pressures.

Methodology

The survey was administered online from October 2018 through December 2018 to all enrolled undergraduate students. It yielded a 26% response rate, which is typical for a general student survey (e.g., the National Survey of Student Engagement, or “NSSE,” yielded a 28% response rate when last administered at BC in 2016, and averaged 23% for peer institutions). A total of 2,417 students participated in the Student Experience Survey. In general, the sample was representative of the undergraduate population. Aggregate findings included in this report have sufficient sample sizes for demographic subgroup analysis.

Survey Respondents by Demographic Group

	Sample		Population	
	%	N	%	N
College				
MCAS	65%	1563	65%	6140
Carroll School	21%	496	24%	2249
Lynch School	9%	213	7%	621
CSON	6%	145	5%	433
Race/Ethnicity¹				
American Indian or Alaska Native	0%	0	< 1%	2
Asian	15%	363	10%	967
Black or African American	3%	75	4%	372
Hispanic of Any Race	11%	252	11%	1035
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	< 1%	2	< 1%	3
Two or More Races	5%	115	3%	329
White	66%	1581	60%	5632
Gender				
Male	35%	843	47%	4444
Female	65%	1563	53%	4999
Other	<1%	11	Not available	
Family Income²				
Below \$50,000	11%	238	14%	531*
\$50,000-\$149,999	30%	643	31%	1205
\$150,000 and over	42%	918	55%	2102
Not sure	17%	374	-	-
Sexual Orientation				
Heterosexual	90%	1963	Not available for population	
LGBQ	9%	195		
Other	1%	23		
International				
International	6%	126	8%	723
Not international	94%	2061	92%	8720

¹ Race/ethnicity is reported based on IPEDS federal definitions.

² Population data are estimated using The Freshman Survey.

* Category for population data is "Below \$60,000."

Key Findings

OVERALL BC EXPERIENCE

Approximately 86% of students *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statement “I would recommend BC to others,” and three-fourths (75%) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that “if I could start over again, I would choose to go to BC.”

MISSION

Participants were asked about mission and faith-related aspects of their BC experience. Over three-fourths of students *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they have a better understanding of what is different about a Jesuit education (79%), and have developed a stronger sense of purpose (76%) during their time at BC.

The majority of students reported involvement in mission or faith-based activities while at BC. Specifically, students reported that they have taken time during the week for reflection (91%), done volunteer work (87%), attended Mass or a faith-based service on-campus (65%), and participated in a retreat (61%) at some point while at BC.

Student
Reflection

“I most value the personal and spiritual growth I have experienced at Boston College. I truly felt like here I've been able to ‘care for my whole person.’”

SERVICES / PROGRAMS / EXPERIENCES

Students were asked to rate many BC services, programs and experiences based on the level of importance to them and their satisfaction with those services. These ratings provide indicators for how well BC is meeting students' needs.

For nearly all services, programs, and experiences (including advising, extracurricular and career opportunities, health, counseling, and financial aid services), the majority of students rated these areas as *very important* or *essential*, and the majority of students reported being *satisfied* or *very satisfied* with these areas. For example, 85% of students rated “Residential Life Environment” as *very important* or *essential*, and 78% were *satisfied* or *very satisfied*.

The housing lottery and food options on campus were the two areas rated as *important* or *essential*, but the majority of students were not *satisfied* or *very satisfied*.

ACADEMICS/FACULTY

Overall, students rated academic and faculty items favorably. Nearly all students (nine in 10) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that they were generally satisfied with the quality of teaching at BC. Students across all four schools cited high levels of agreement: CSON (94%), Carroll School (93%), Lynch School (91%), and MCAS (88%).

In addition, 93% of students *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that BC students are intellectually engaged. High levels of agreement were cited by students across all four schools: CSON (97%), Lynch School (97%), Carroll School (94%), and MCAS (91%).

Nearly 400 students identified faculty, academics, or the intellectual climate as an element they value most about BC.

Student
Reflection

“[What I value most about my BC experience is] being able to engage in deep conversations with intellectual people who have similar and different opinions, along with taking different classes that help me become more well-rounded.”

ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL PRESSURES

While students positively rated their overall experience at BC, the majority of students reported experiencing academic and social pressures. For example, 94% of students *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that BC is a competitive environment. The survey also revealed that students feel pressure to fit in with their peers, and that alcohol abuse is an issue on campus.

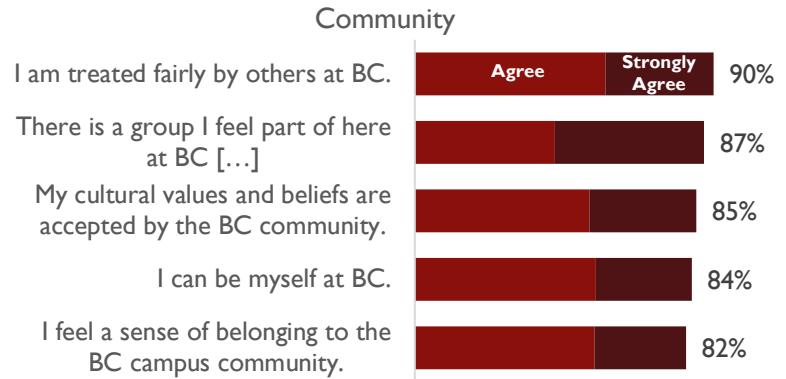
UNFAIR TREATMENT

Students were asked if they *observed* or *experienced* unfair treatment or harassment during the past year due to one’s sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, country of origin, (dis)ability, or religion.

Overall, unfair treatment or harassment was most commonly *observed* based on race/ethnicity, political views, and gender. Of students who identify as Black or African American, most reported they had both *observed* and *experienced* unfair treatment/harassment based on race/ethnicity. Other groups who most commonly *experienced* unfair treatment or harassment were international students based on their country of origin, and LGBTQ students based on their sexual orientation.

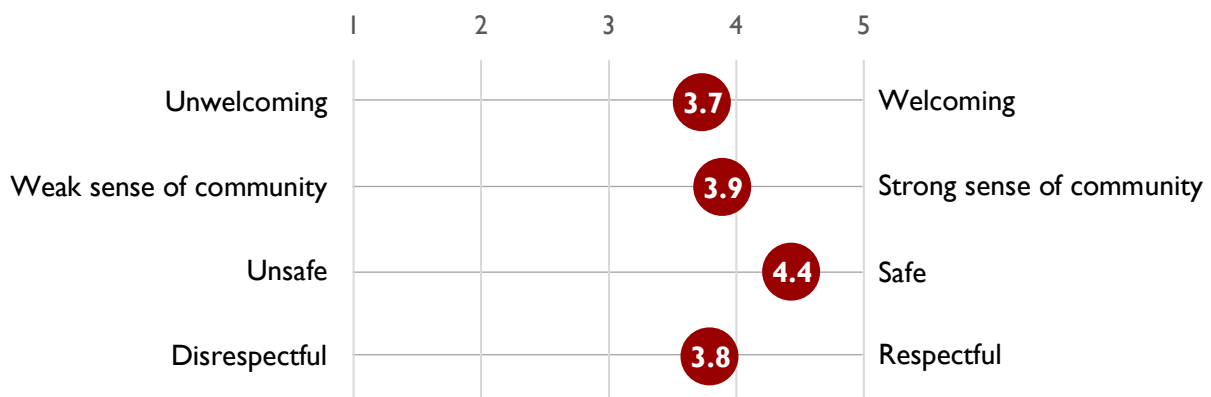
COMMUNITY

Overall, the majority of students feel a sense of belonging at BC. Over eight in 10 students rated items concerning the BC community positively. However, students with high financial need (family income lower than \$50,000) rated these items less favorably than others.



Students were asked to rate aspects of the BC environment on a scale of 1 (lowest rating) to 5 (highest rating). Overall mean scores were relatively high for every item, exceeding the midpoint of the scale (rating of 3), especially on the measure of safety (mean score of 4.4).

Mean Ratings of BC Environment – Overall



While ratings were positive overall, differences emerged by demographic characteristics, particularly race/ethnicity. As the table shows, mean ratings of the BC environment were lower among students who identified as Black or African American than among students who identified with any other race/ethnicity.

Mean Ratings of BC Environment – By Race/Ethnicity

	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic of Any Race	Two or More Races	White
Unwelcoming/Welcoming	3.5	2.9	3.6	3.4	3.9
Weak/Strong sense of community	3.6	3.0	3.7	3.6	4.1
Unsafe/Safe	4.3	3.7	4.2	4.5	4.5
Disrespectful/Respectful	3.6	2.8	3.7	3.7	3.9

DIVERSITY

Nearly all respondents (95%) *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that diversity is important to them. Most *agreed* or *strongly agreed* (70%) that “my courses include diverse perspectives” and 62% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that “the BC community welcomes open discussions about issues of difference.” However, among students who identify as Black or African American, less than half *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with these two statements.

The majority of students reported that they had meaningful discussions at BC with people of a different socio-economic status (65%), race/ethnicity (56%) or religious backgrounds (56%) *often* or *very often*. However, students expressed a desire for more inclusive and integrative space and programming, as well as a desire for opportunities to engage with diverse people and perspectives. Over 450 students cited shortcomings in diversity or inclusivity as something they “would change about BC,” making this one of the most frequently mentioned topics in response to this question.

Student Reflection

“I think the fact that the culture is so homogeneous is an issue. Students lose out on real world experience and exposure to different perspectives by virtue of going to a school that is so uniform. I think that the school needs to make a more concerted effort to diversify or, at the very least, facilitate discussion about race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, etc. in order to create a more inclusive, more aware campus.”

Next Steps

The findings of the survey will be shared with the University-wide Diversity Steering Committee. This committee includes administrators, faculty, staff and students and will be charged with reviewing the results and proposing actionable initiatives to address the concerns raised in the survey.