



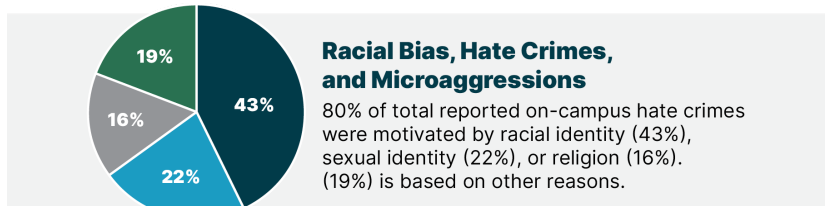
Impact of the Campus Climate on Students

The research literature supports that the campus climate influences the levels to which students thrive.¹ When students feel they have a “sense of belonging”, they report higher levels of perceived academic success and are more likely to persist.² Contrarily, if students experience microaggressions or biases, they are more likely to consider leaving³. A sense of belonging is integral to student persistence and retention, especially for students of color, LGBTQ+, and first-generation students. Here you will find robust research that explains why climate assessments are an important opportunity to engage, learn and act to further enhance the community experience for students.

Influence of Microaggressions

Several empirical studies reinforce the importance of the perception of nondiscriminatory environments for positive learning and developmental outcomes.⁴ For example, first generation students who experience microaggressions are more likely to drop out and report higher levels of anxiety.⁵ This is illustrated in data from the Pell Institute: only 21% of first generation and low-income students graduate within six years of enrolling in a postsecondary institution as compared to 66% of neither low-income nor first generation.⁶

This can partially be explained by the fact that discriminatory environments have a negative effect on student learning.⁷ Research supports the pedagogical value of a diverse student



¹ Harper & Hurtado, 2009; Maramba. & Museus, 2011; Mayhew, M. J., Rockenbach, A. N., Bowman, N. A., Seifert, T. A., & Wolniak, G. C. 2016; Patton, 2011; Strayhorn, 2012; Buckley, J. B., & Park, J. J., 2019, Fernandez, F., Merson, D., Ro, H. K., & Rankin, S., 2019

² Booker (2016); Garcia & Garza (2016)

³ Ibid.

⁴ Dugan et al. (2012); Eunyong & Hargrove (2013); Garvey et al. (2018); Hurtado & Ponjuan (2005); Mayhew et al. (2016); Oseguera et al. (2017); Pascarella & Terenzini (2005); Strayhorn (2012)

⁵ Ellis, J. M., Powell, C. S., Demetriou, C. P., Huerta-Bapat, C., & Panter, A. T. (2019). Examining first-generation college student lived experiences with microaggressions and microaffirmations at a predominately White public research university. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 25(2), 266.

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http://pellinstitute.org/downloads/publications-Indicators_of_Higher_Education_Equity_in_the_US_2021_Historical_Trend_Report.pdf

⁷ Mayhew, M. J., Rockenbach, A. N., Bowman, N. A., Seifert, T. A., & Wolniak, G. C., 2016, Shelton, L. J. 2019, Yosso, T. J., Smith, W. A. Ceja, M., & Solórzano, D. G., 2009; Crisp, G., Taggart, A., & Nora, A., 2015

body and faculty for enhancing learning outcomes.⁸ For example, queer students who perceived their campus as homophobic reported poor academic success.⁹

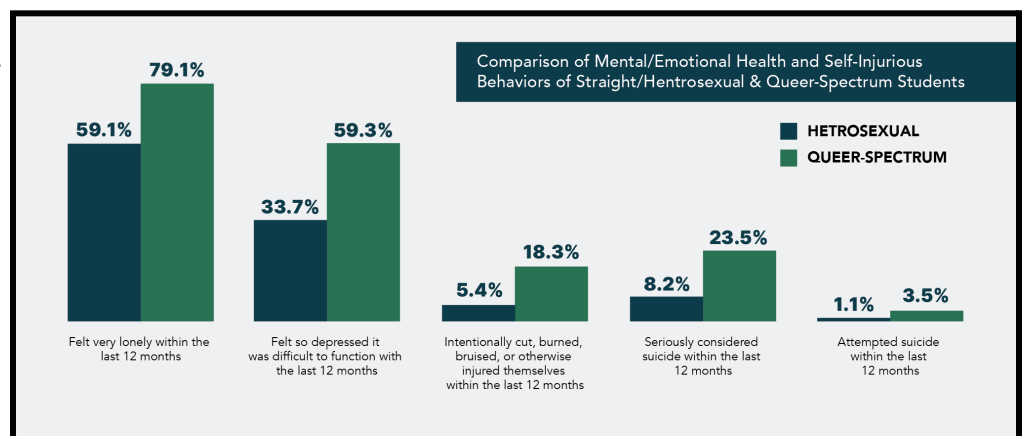
However, colleges and universities that are perceived as welcoming or celebratory of students' background and identity can significantly impact a student's sense of belonging, learning outcomes, and mental health in the positive direction. For example, institutions that engage with and celebrate student's cultural background have a greater sense of belonging among both White and students of color.¹⁰ In addition, Black students who perceived college campuses to be more welcoming to first generation students, LGBTQ+ members, and low SES students report less anxiety and depression.¹¹

Mental Health Implications

The visible outcomes of a lower likelihood of academic success and graduation among students of color, LGBTQ+ members, and first-generation students are often the bi-product of the often-invisible impact of microaggressions: mental health implications.

Experiencing harassment or victimization, often through microaggressions, leads to a lack of social support, which can lead to feelings of hopelessness, which can then lead to suicidal ideation and self-harm.¹²

For example, when comparing the mental/emotional health of straight/heterosexual & queer-spectrum students, researchers found that the climate had a more significant influence for queer-spectrum students. While 59.1% of heterosexual students felt very lonely in the last 12 months, 79.1% of queer-spectrum felt the same. When it came to self-harm, the differences were stark: 18.3% of queer-spectrum students intentionally cut, burned, bruised or otherwise injured themselves within the last 12 months in comparison to only 5.4% of heterosexual students. Almost 25% of queer-spectrum students seriously considered suicide and 3.5% actually attempted suicide in comparison to 8.2% and 1.1% respectively.



⁸ Hale, 2004; Harper, & Hurtado, 2009; Harper & Quaye, 2004; Hurtado, 2003; Nelson & Niskodé-Dossett, 2010; Strayhorn, 2013; Samura, M., 2016; Museus, S. D., Shiroma, K., & Dizon, J. P., 2016

⁹ Garvey, J. C., Squire, D. D., Stachler, B., & Rankin, S. (2018). The impact of campus climate on queer-spectrum student academic success. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 15(2), 89-105.

¹⁰ Museus, S. D., Yi, V., & Saelua, N. (2018). How culturally engaging campus environments influence sense of belonging in college: An examination of differences between White students and students of color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 11(4), 467.

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¹² Liu and Mustanski, 2012, Watson 2019

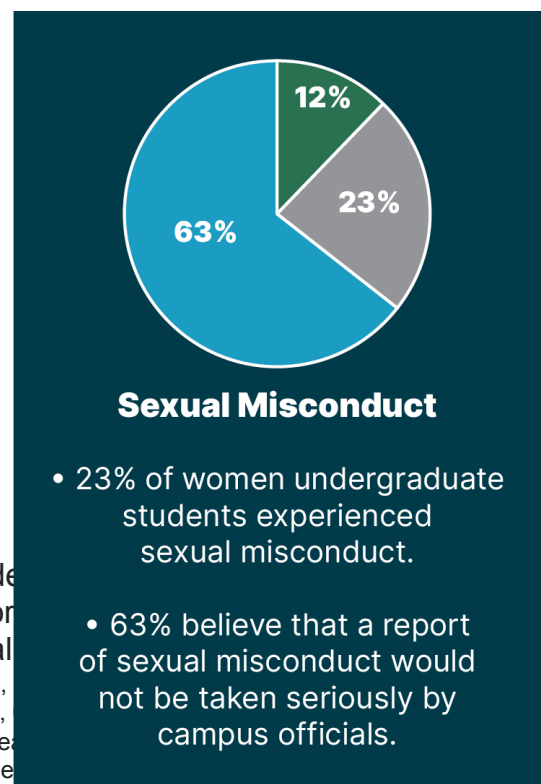
1.1%, respectively, of heterosexual students.¹³

When students do not feel safe on campus, it leads to implications far beyond poor academic outcomes. We know that all students face academic impediments such as anxiety, stress, drug use, eating disorders, finances, roommate difficulties, discrimination, and more. In a study that compared cisgender to non-binary students, non-binary students experienced these impediments at a much higher rate than their cisgender peers. For example, 33.4% of cisgender students experience stress while almost half of non-binary students reported stress as a significant academic impediment.¹⁴ Among nonbinary students, Black nonbinary students reported less safety, higher stress, and greater suicidality than White nonbinary students, and multiracial nonbinary students were more likely to be stalked than their White nonbinary peers.¹⁵

Impact of Sexual Misconduct

Students who experience sexual misconduct (cyber and in person), including sexual assault, sexual violence, dating violence, and intimate partner violence, are impacted mentally, emotionally, and academically. For example, they report increased post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)¹⁶ and depressive symptoms.¹⁷ They are also more likely to miss class, fail/don't complete assignments, fail exams, drop classes, fail courses, and consider withdrawing from university. It impacts their grades negatively and often takes them longer to complete their degree overall.¹⁸

In the 2015 [Association of American Universities survey](#) on sexual assault and misconduct, 12% of student respondents and 23% of women undergraduate students reported experiencing non-consensual sexual contact since they enrolled at their university. Overall rates of reporting to campus officials and law enforcement were low: running from 5% to 28% with rationale such as: “not considered serious enough”, “embarrassed”, “emotionally difficult” and “did not think anything would be done about it.” The last statement is particularly concerning with 63% of the respondents believing that a report of sexual misconduct would not be taken seriously by campus officials.



¹³ Rankin, S., Garvey, J. C., & Duran, A. , 2019

¹⁴ Rankin, S., Garvey, J. C., & Duran, A. , 2019

¹⁵ Marx, R. A., Maffini, C. S., & Peña, F. J. (2022). Undergraduate students' experiences on college campuses: An exploration of campus involvement, victimization, and safety. *Journal of American college health*, 92(1), 1-10.

¹⁶ Voth Schrag, R. J., & Edmond, T. E. (2018). Intimate partner violence, female community college students. *Journal of American college health*, 88(1), 1-10.

¹⁷ Wood, L., Voth Schrag, R., & Busch-Armendariz, N. (2020). Mental health and intimate partner violence among IHE-attending women. *Journal of American college health*, 90(1), 1-10.

¹⁸ Speak Out Iowa 2021 Survey.