



Employee Campus Climate Fall 2024: Sense of Belonging

Institutional Research Office

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Background

CSU Channel Islands administered its third in-house designed campus climate survey for employees at the end of the Fall 2024 semester. The survey opened on November 26, 2024, and closed on December 20, 2024 (with a handful of in-progress surveys completing in the following weeks). The survey was primarily focused on sense of belonging but also covered topics such as shared governance and community impact. These topics were identified by university employees as most critical for tracking and improving as determined by a campus survey in Spring 2022. Aggregated climate survey responses are available to all employees, and reviewed by senior leadership and Critical Learning Collectives (CLC) teams¹. For more information about the survey development process, see the [Fall 2022 Campus Climate Survey Report](#).

Survey Design, Administration, and Analysis

The survey was distributed through email to all university employees (staff, faculty, administrators, and student assistants; both California State and Auxiliary employees). The survey was conducted anonymously, with respondents asked (but not required) to provide basic demographic and employment information. All respondents were asked to reflect on their experiences during the *past twelve months* and all questions but the final, open-ended question were on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Respondents who identified as faculty were asked somewhat different questions (e.g., about their “department” rather than their “area,” about the “Provost” rather than the “Vice President,” and about their Chair and Dean). After completing the closed-ended questions, respondents were prompted with this open-ended question: “This campus climate survey is intended to measure your sense of belonging. What aspects of your work at CI are most impactful to your sense of belonging, whether positively or negatively, and why?”

Overall, 461 employees responded to the survey, for a response rate of 34% of faculty, 39% of staff (excluding student employees), and 59% of administrators. Individual survey responses were only visible to Matthew Zivot, the Chief Data Officer (and report author), who coded the open-ended responses for themes, and designed and maintains an internally accessible [Tableau dashboard](#) of the aggregate survey results.

¹ See [Critical Learning Collective \(CLC\) Recommendations to President Yao and Cabinet](#) for recommendations made by the CLCs from the previous climate survey and progress as of March 2025.

Climate Questions

Sense of Belonging

Colleagues create belongingness for each other

Survey respondents felt most positively about their own contributions to the sense of belonging of those around them (see Figure 1). For instance, 93% of staff and administrators and 91% of faculty Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they, “Offer to help other colleagues in [their] area/department”, 94% of staff and administrators and 90% of faculty Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they , “let other colleagues in [their] area/department know that [they] appreciate them,” and 92% of staff and administrators and 85% of faculty Agreed or Strongly Agree that they, “help new employees in [their] area/department feel welcome.”

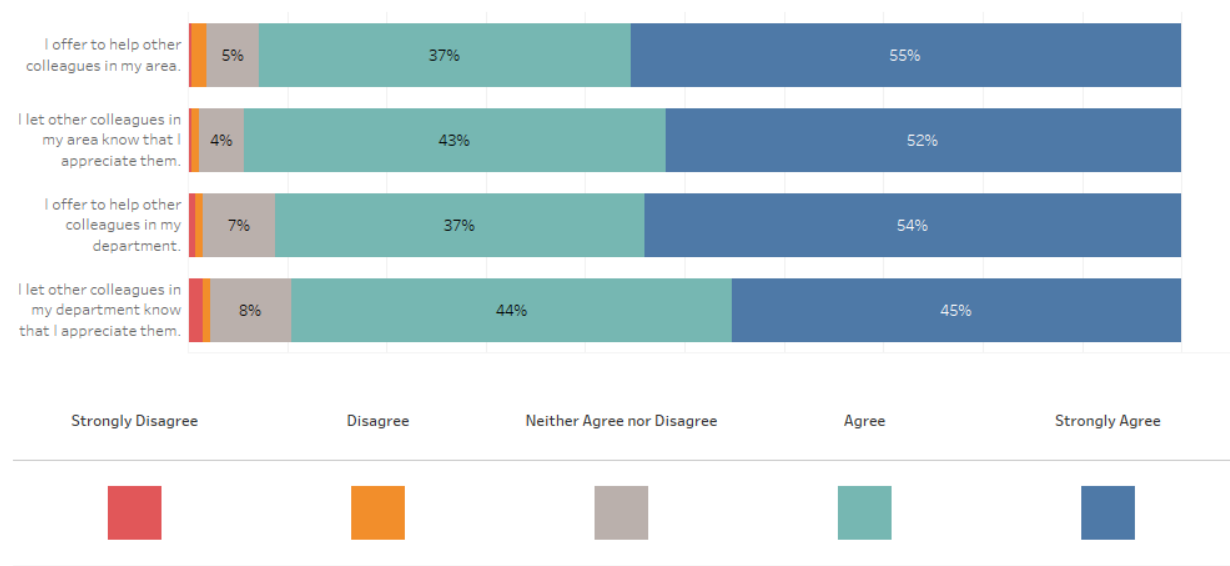


Figure 1: Caring for colleagues

Respondents across the university reported feeling made welcome and supported by their immediate colleagues. For instance, 88% of staff and administrators and 86% of faculty Agreed or Strongly Agreed that “Colleagues in [their] area/department treat [them] as a competent professional,” 89% of all respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they “get along with the colleagues [they] work with,” and 83% of all respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed that, “One or more colleagues in [their] area/department confide(s) in [them].”

Managers and leaders are less a source of belongingness, diminishing with their contact with the respondents

Somewhat less than the sense of belonging engendered by their colleagues, 67% of staff and administrators Agree or Strongly Agree that their supervisor had a positive impact on their sense of belonging. While 73% responded that they felt comfortable going to their supervisor with issues and 72% said that their supervisor sets a good example, while 67% responded that their supervisor has clear goals for the area. Similarly, 70% of faculty responded that they are “satisfied with the level of support [they] receive from [their] chair/dean (if chair).”

Respondents largely viewed leadership as less supportive of their sense of belonging (see Figure 2), although the modal response for senior leaders was the neutral “Neither Agree nor Disagree.” Outside of Academic Affairs, 45% of respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the President had “a positive impact on [their] sense of belonging,” while 43% responded similarly about their Vice President. Within Academic Affairs, 37% of faculty Agreed or Strongly Agreed that leaders within their College or School had a positive impact on their sense of belonging and only 14% responded similarly regarding the Provost. On the other hand, 48% of Academic Affairs staff and administrators Agreed or Strongly Agreed that their vice president² has “a positive impact on [their] sense of belonging.” For interpreting these questions, it is important to note that the time span respondents were asked to reflect on encompasses substantial transition across the roles of Provost, Deans, and Associate Deans and the open-ended responses did not clarify who respondents had in mind as they answered these questions. Thirty-four percent of both staff and faculty within Academic Affairs Agreed or Strongly Agreed the “The President of CSUCI has a positive impact on [their] sense of belonging.”

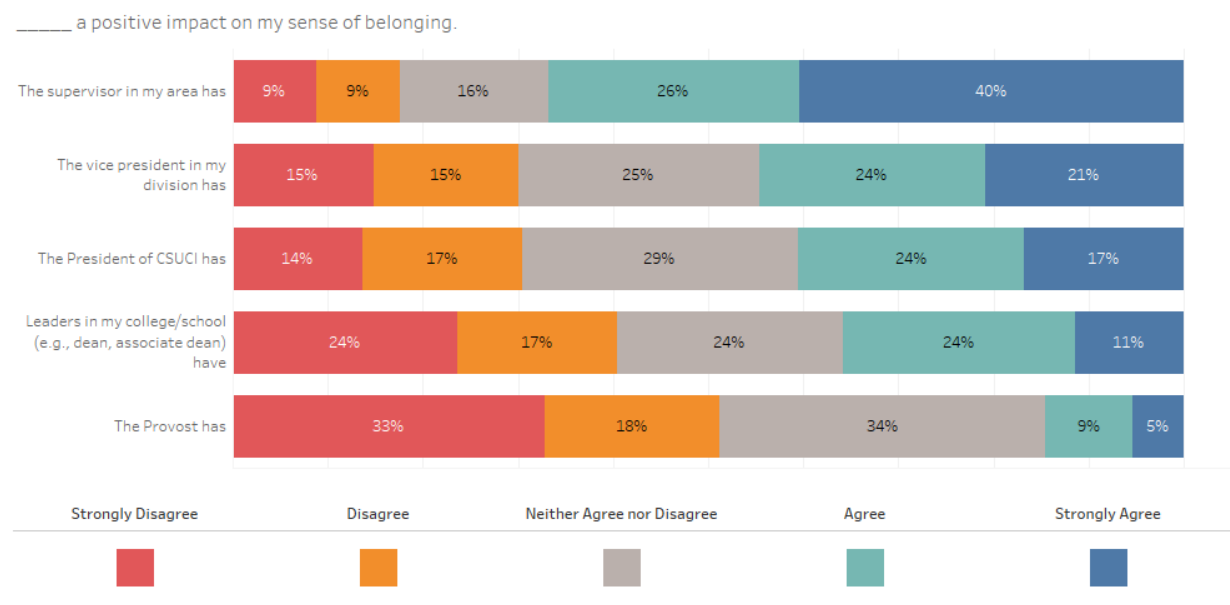


Figure 2: Impact of leaders on belongingness

Shared Governance

Employees value being able to influence decisions about their work but don’t always have the opportunity

A few survey questions were asked about the University’s decision-making process (see Figure 3). While only 62% of respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they “have opportunities to participate in decision-making processes that impact [their] work,” when they did, 76% of respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the participation was meaningful. On the other hand, only 58% of respondents agreed that when they participated, “whether or not things go the way [they] want to, [they] understand why,” indicating a need to improve the explanation component of the decision-making process. There

² Note, the Vice President of Academic Affairs is the Provost.

were notable differences by Campus Role for these questions, with 78% of Administrators reporting that they have opportunities to participate in decision-making processes that impact their work while only 59% of all other respondents agreed to this question. Similarly, 72% of Administrators reported understanding the outcomes of the decision-making process while only 55% of all respondents agreed to this question. In the reverse, is noteworthy that 22% of administrators don't agree that they have the opportunity to participate in decision making processes that impact their work and 28% did not agree that they understood the outcomes of those processes.

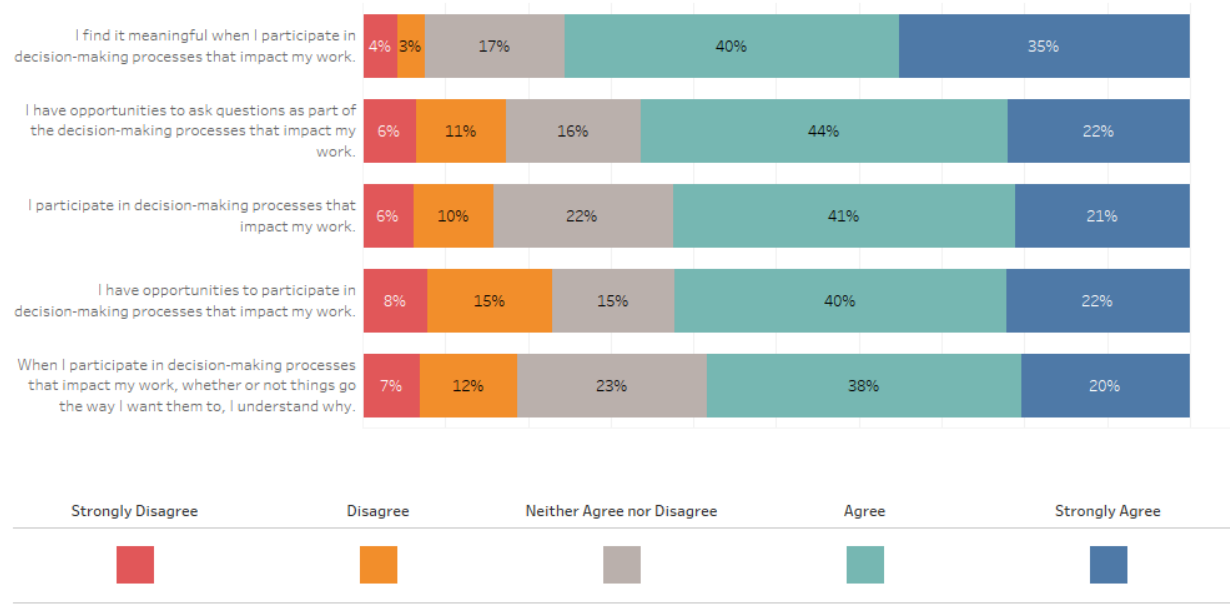


Figure 3: Shared governance

Community Relations

Community impact comes from its graduates

Respondents were asked about how CSUCI contributes to its community and generally they felt more positively about the impact that graduates have on their community than the impact the university has directly on the community (see Figure 4). When asked about graduates, 72% percent of respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed that “CSUCI provides educational experiences that help graduates contribute to their communities.” In contrast, only 58% of respondents agreed that “CSUCI contributes to the environmental wellness of the region” and only 44% agreed that “CSUCI is perceived as a resource for surrounding communities.”

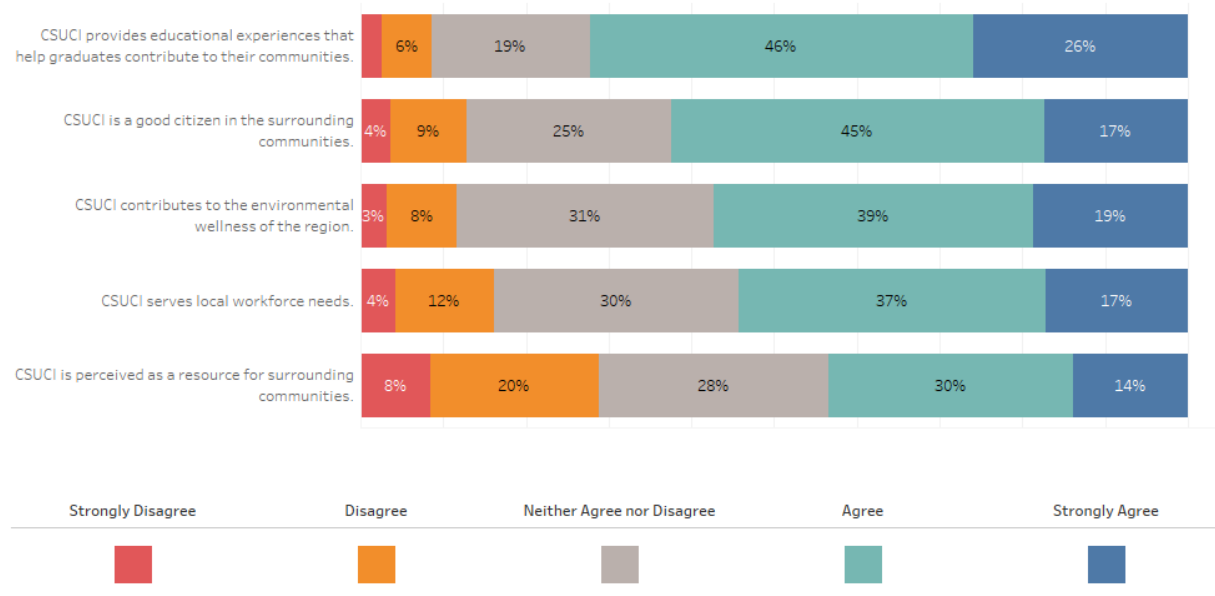


Figure 4: Community impact

Open-Ended Responses

Overall, 186 respondents (40%) provided a response to the open-ended prompt. When asked to reflect on the factors that improve or hinder their sense of belonging, responses were notably similar regardless of whether the employee was staff, faculty, or an administrator (see Figure 5). Thirty-five percent of those who provided feedback wrote about valuing the connections they have with their immediate colleagues, 25% discussed negative impacts of senior leadership and institutional structures, 25% indicated that their sense of belonging is grounded in the meaning they derive from serving our students, and, among staff, 17% of respondents wrote of the positive impact of a good supervisor.

	Staff	Faculty	Admin	Other	Student Assistant	Grand Total
Immediate Colleagues Improve	21	33	8	2	1	65
Senior Leadership Hinders	16	23	5	2	1	47
Dedication to Students	14	23	7	2		46
Supervisor Improves	13	7	3	1	1	25
Impact of Recognition	10	7	3	1		21
Excluded from Decision-Making	8	7	1			16
Salary and Advancement	8	6		1		15
Dedication to Community/Future	3	5	4			12
Turnover Hinders	3	4	1	2		10
Desire to be Perceived as Experts	4	1	5			10

Figure 5: Topics with 10 or more occurrences, by campus role

Many of the respondents who wrote about how their immediate colleagues positively contribute to their sense of belonging contrasted that with the feeling of working within the university as an institution or their views of senior leadership. One administrator wrote:

“The people I work with, my direct reports are AMAZING colleagues and we operate collaboratively to complete our work. I’m technically the administrator, but we work together to make decisions, I value their input, and could not do my job without their partnership in our work. The climate within which we (me and direct reports) is toxic (*sic*). Time is typically spent complaining and focused on what’s going wrong and not taking a look at how systemic structures contribute to challenges.”

Similarly, a staff member wrote, “My direct colleagues make easy to come into work. My frustration lies with how slow action items take to occur.” Questions related to the point about quickness of campus action were also low-scoring items within the first internally developed campus climate survey administered in [Fall 2022](#) and will be worth closely attending to when those questions are readministered.

Contrasting the warmth of close friends with the detachment of data, a faculty member wrote:

“The stress here is nearly constant. Support for me and my work is basically confined to my program and a few close friends. The President and Provost appear to care little about individuals (data driven). Students report this as well, while also reporting how much they value relationships with professors who know them well.”

Additionally illustrating a recurring theme that administrators don’t sufficiently hold people accountable, one staff member wrote:

“The people I work with (literally the people who work in the same hallway as I do) and my student assistants are the reason why I feel like I belong here... Administrators make decisions without taking staff perspective into consideration and managers are constantly getting away with being bad managers, which sometimes makes it hard to want to stay employed at CI.”

In addition to discussions of the impact of collegiality on sense of belonging (feelings of friendship and shared purpose), respondents wrote about the impact of educating and supporting students on their sense of belonging, expressing a sense of accomplishment through educating them, and valuing the opportunity to positively impact a community they identify with. Highlighting the sense of accomplishment that teaching provides, one faculty member wrote, “The students give me a sense of belonging - interacting with them, seeing them grow, learning of their successes.”

Addressing the opportunity working at CSUCI has provided to give back to the larger community, one administrator wrote,

“My values align with the university mission, and as someone who was born and raised in the surrounding community, I am proud to work at this institution and for the privilege of helping to support students, and the transformational impact that their educational experience will have on their and their families social mobility and overall health.”

Additionally, the response of one staff member showed how this orientation towards helping students develop and thereby supporting the community feeds back to creating a sense of common purpose among colleagues, writing:

"Doing work that is impactful for our region, the students today and the future society (students and employees) is what makes me feel connected to CI. Being able to shape society in ways that are both visible and not is important to me and as such working in higher education (CI) helps us do that! Impacting societal change provides a sense of belonging. In addition, the hundreds of people who work here who also think and operate that way make me feel connected.”

Finally, the theme emerged among staff respondents about what characteristics help make a supervisor a positive influence on sense of belonging, namely, providing support when needed, stepping back when not needed, and acknowledging good work when it has been done. To this point, one staff member wrote:

“I also deeply value managers who are approachable and available to support their employees—whether to spot-check an email, discuss ongoing work, or simply provide a moment to connect and decompress. At the same time, there’s a balance to be struck: managers who are too hands-off can seem disengaged, while those who micromanage can stifle productivity and morale.”

Also present was the idea that a good supervisor can provide opportunities to safely extend the learning opportunities gained while being a student. One former student assistant turned staff member wrote:

“I found community and belonging while working with them as a Student Assistant, continuing that relationship has been a defining factor in my confidence as a recent CI graduate. I feel incredibly supported as a young professional. I do not become anxious when I make a mistake as I know that my supervisor will use it as a teaching opportunity for the entire team. I am confident that if I need to make adjustments to my work/life balance (i.e. working out an effective work schedule) my supervisor will endeavor to accommodate me to the best of their ability.”

Conclusions

Overall, survey respondents felt like they made efforts to generate a sense of belonging in their coworkers and valued their coworkers for their collegiality and the sense of belonging they engender. As a recurring theme across the past three campus climate surveys, CSUCI employees feel strongly connected to the students and the university’s mission of placing them at the center of the educational experience. Leadership was applauded when recognizing employees’ successes and called out for not holding bad actors accountable. It is inherently easier to see the day-to-day work of those closest to you and there may be an asymmetry in the public nature of the former and the private nature of the latter. To improve sense of belonging and belief in the institution, we must find ways to always explicitly ensure our work is grounded in the students and consistently display good faith efforts to make the university a more fair and effective tool that “facilitates learning within and across disciplines.”