

Students' Motivation for Being in College Drives Engagement in High-Impact Practices

Those motivated by personal growth and "giving back" are more likely to participate in HIPs and to report higher levels of wellbeing.

WASHINGTON, D.C., TN, UNITED STATES, May 27, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A second report from the new survey, ["What Students Value in College,"](#)

“

Knowing this gives colleges and universities more insight into widening the participation levels of these valuable experiences and engaging those students who might benefit the most”
Keith Buffinton, Executive Director, LearningWell Coalition

finds that students who enter college with community and growth-oriented motivations are more likely to engage in high-impact practices (HIPs) like mentorship, internships, and service-learning. Those experiences, in turn, are associated with higher levels of wellbeing.

“These findings indicate that why students go to college influences how they participate in the experiences that lead to improved wellbeing, among other benefits. Knowing this gives colleges and universities more insight into widening the participation levels of these valuable experiences and engaging those students who might

benefit the most,” said Keith Buffinton, executive director of the LearningWell Coalition, the non-profit organization that conducted the survey in partnership with the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and Morning Consult.

The survey of 872 undergraduate students explored students' motivations for attending college and their engagement in and perception of high-impact practices. The first report in the series showed that while more than a third of students cited career outcomes as their primary reason for attending college, a similar share (38 percent) cited factors related to intellectual and personal growth, identity formation, and giving back to their community.

The second report groups students into broad motivation types based on their primary reason for attending college. “Community-oriented” students are those who report attending college to give back to their community. “Growth-oriented” students are motivated by learning, personal growth, and identity development, including gaining knowledge and developing a sense of who they are and what they are good at. “Career-oriented” students are primarily focused on getting a good job and advancing their careers. “Externally-oriented” students are motivated by external factors such as affordability and societal or family expectations.

At one end of the spectrum, community-oriented students show the highest levels of participation across nearly all high-impact practices. These students demonstrate especially high engagement in internships (74 percent), mentorship (86 percent), service-learning (78 percent), research with faculty (67 percent), and study abroad (46 percent), far exceeding other groups. However, only 3 percent of respondents listed this as a top reason for being in college (23 percent ranked it in the top three reasons).

Growth-oriented students, who are motivated by personal growth, learning, and developing their identity, also engage at relatively high levels across many experiences. Seventy-one percent of those motivated by personal growth participate in mentorships, as do 51 percent of those motivated by learning, and 55 percent of those motivated by developing their sense of identity. Sixty-two percent of those motivated by personal growth participate in service-learning, as do 45 percent of those motivated by learning, and 53 percent of those motivated by developing their identity, suggesting that internally driven motivations are tied to engagement across high-impact practices.

Career-oriented students show somewhat more moderate and uneven participation in HIPs. While many still engage in key practices like internships (39 percent), their participation rates tend to lag behind community- and growth-oriented students, particularly in mentorship (49 percent), learning communities (64 percent), and service-learning (43 percent).

Motivation for being in college is also associated with student wellbeing. Using the PERMA framework, students reported an overall average wellbeing score of 6.88, with meaningful variation across motivation types. Community-oriented students have the highest average wellbeing at 7.95, followed by those motivated to grow as a person (7.02) and to support their family (7.00). Students motivated by learning and gaining knowledge have an average wellbeing score of 6.93, while those focused on getting a good job reported 6.90.

Key considerations for Higher Education:

These findings point to a clear connection between motivation, engagement, and outcomes. High-impact practices are not just beneficial on their own; they are part of a broader pathway through which students translate their motivations into meaningful educational experiences and stronger wellbeing. For institutions, this highlights the value of expanding access to high-impact practices (especially those that are highly valued and positively impact student wellbeing).

About the survey:

Information regarding the survey methods and the LearningWell Coalition can be found in addition to both survey reports at www.learningwell.org

Jack Tucker
LearningWell Coalition
+ +1 423-802-0883

[email us here](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/915523420>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2026 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.