



Understanding the Emotional Journey of Starting College

The survey captured insights from more than 1,100 incoming college and university students (ages 18–29).

Are you the first in your family to attend college?

- 48%, Yes
- 52%, No

Do you identify as a non-traditional student?

- 32%, Yes
- 68%, No

What type of institution will you attend?

- 54%, 4-year public/state college or university
- 19%, 4-year private college or university
- 19%, 2-year community, technical or vocational college
- 7%, Fully online college or university
- 1%, Other

Will you be working while attending college?

- 73%, Yes, part-time
- 14%, Yes, full-time
- 13%, No

Which best describes your financial situation going into college?

- 28%, Independently supporting myself
- 25%, Fully supported by family
- 29%, Receiving financial aid/scholarships
- 16%, Partially supported by family
- 1%, Other

How will you measure your success in college? Please rank from most important to least important.

- 27%, Graduating/completing your course of study
- 20%, Getting a desired job
- 16%, GPA
- 12%, Greater knowledge/what you learned

- 10%, The ability to pay off your student loans
- 8%, The starting salary of your job
- 8%, Upskilling in your current career

On a scale of 1-5, how confident are you in your ability to achieve success in college?

- 5 - Extremely confident, 37%
- 4 - Very confident, 37%
- 3 - Somewhat confident, 22%
- 2 - Not so confident, 3%
- 1 - Not at all confident, 1%

How would you describe your overall emotional state as you begin college?

- 32%, Thrilled and optimistic
- 32%, Cautiously excited
- 28%, Mixed emotions
- 7%, Nervous or anxious
- 2%, Overwhelmed or uncertain

What are you most looking forward to about starting college?
(open-ended responses)

What are your top concerns right now? [Select all that apply]

- 55%, Keeping up with academic demands
- 51%, Financial pressures
- 40%, Navigating an unfamiliar environment
- 35%, Making meaningful friendships
- 29%, Being far from family or support systems
- 1%, Other

How often have you felt lonely in the past week?

- 15%, Never
- 29%, Rarely
- 38%, Occasionally
- 12%, Frequently
- 7%, Constantly

How confident are you in your ability to build new friendships in college?

- 28%, Extremely confident
- 42%, Somewhat confident
- 20%, Unsure
- 7%, Not very confident
- 3%, Not confident at all

If you were feeling down, how likely would you be to reach out to someone for support?

- 28%, Very likely
- 40%, Somewhat likely
- 17%, Unsure
- 11%, Not likely
- 4%, Not at all

Have you ever received counseling or therapy?

- 28%, Yes, currently
- 37%, Yes, in the past
- 36%, No

Are you hoping to access mental health support while in college?

- 39%, Yes
- 44%, Maybe/not sure yet
- 17%, No

What types of mental health support would you like to have available on campus? [Select all that apply]

- 58%, 1:1 counseling or therapy
- 39%, 24/7 text or chat-based mental health support
- 39%, Peer support or student-led groups
- 37%, Meditation or stress-management workshops
- 1%, Other

At this point, before starting classes, how strongly do you expect to feel a sense of belonging at your new college?

- 29%, I already feel like I'll belong here
- 41%, I'm starting to feel a sense of connection
- 21%, I'm not sure yet
- 8%, I'm not feeling a sense of belonging (yet)

What would make you feel more connected to your campus community?
(open-ended responses)

Which of the following do you plan to participate in this semester? [Select all that apply]

- 49%, Student clubs/organizations
- 44%, Campus events or traditions
- 37%, Volunteering or service projects
- 35%, Campus recreation/sports
- 28%, Residence hall activities

- 23%, Identity or support groups
- 10%, I'm not sure yet

In your own words, what does "belonging on campus" mean to you?
(open-ended responses)

How comfortable do you feel being your whole self on campus?

- 35%, Very comfortable
- 40%, Somewhat comfortable
- 17%, Unsure
- 5%, Not very comfortable
- 2%, Not at all comfortable

How concerned are you about the current political climate as a student?

- 31%, Very concerned
- 30%, Somewhat concerned
- 27%, Neutral
- 9%, Not very concerned
- 4%, Not at all concerned

How concerned are you about the current social climate as a student?

- 25%, Very concerned
- 33%, Somewhat concerned
- 28%, Neutral
- 10%, Not very concerned
- 3%, Not at all concerned

Have you felt pressure to act, speak, or present yourself in a certain way to fit in socially?

- 30%, Yes, often
- 41%, Occasionally
- 18%, Rarely
- 11%, No

How confident do you feel about using AI tools (like ChatGPT) in your academic work in an ethical and responsible way?

- 13%, I don't plan to use AI tools
- 30%, Very confident
- 33%, Somewhat confident
- 19%, Not sure yet
- 6%, Not very confident

Do you ever feel overwhelmed or drained by being digitally connected (text, social media, notifications, etc.) all the time?

- 34%, Yes, often
- 38%, Occasionally
- 19%, Rarely
- 8%, No

How does technology affect your sense of connection with others?

- 33%, It helps me feel more connected
- 49%, It sometimes helps, sometimes isolates me
- 11%, It mostly makes me feel more isolated
- 6%, I'm not sure yet

If you've used AI tools like ChatGPT or others, how would you describe your primary use?

- 45%, To support and enhance my learning
- 28%, To get quick answers or save time
- 11%, To avoid doing certain tasks
- 14%, I haven't used AI tools
- 1%, Other

Survey Demographics

Gender identity (How would you describe your gender identity?/How do you identify as?):

- 48%, Female
- 52%, Male
- 0%, Non-binary
- 0%, A gender not listed here
- 0%, Prefer not to answer

Major US Region

- 13%, East North Central
- 7%, East South Central
- 12%, Middle Atlantic
- 6%, Mountain
- 3%, New England
- 14%, Pacific
- 23%, South Atlantic
- 5%, West North Central

- 17%, West South Central
- <1%, US Territories

The TimelyCare nationwide online survey was conducted in June of 2025.