

Fall 2025
Elevating Student Voices: Sense of Belonging Focus Group
Thematic Coding Analysis & Summary Report

Methodology

Approach: Qualitative thematic analysis

Data Source: Two student focus groups (in-person and online learners; traditional, first-generation, and returning adult students)

Number of Student Voices Elevated: 16

Analytic Process: Open coding, axial coding, theme development, and cross-group comparison.

Theme 1: Welcoming Environment with High Academic Expectations

Students described CSN as respectful, open, and academically rigorous. Faculty with industry experience strongly shaped campus atmosphere, and campus spaces challenged the commuter-school stereotype.

Theme 2: Student Services Strengths and Gaps

Transactional efficiency was praised, while personalized advising depended heavily on specific staff members. Inconsistencies in Health Sciences advising and bookstore services created challenges.

Theme 3: Sense of Belonging

Belonging was driven largely by human connection—faculty mentorship, in-person engagement, and cultural inclusion—rather than student demographics.

Theme 4: High-Impact Programs

First-Year Experience, tutoring centers, libraries, work-study positions, and career pathway events significantly strengthened engagement and confidence.

Theme 5: Exclusion and Structural Barriers

Isolated but serious incidents involving staff behavior, religious expression, disability accommodation, and bookstore logistics undermined trust and belonging.

Theme 6: Belonging and Student Success

Students linked academic confidence and persistence to their sense of connection with people, spaces, and support systems.

Recommendations

Create a Returning Student onboarding program; improve bookstore logistics; strengthen online student integration; enforce accommodation compliance; enhance wayfinding through video navigation tools.

Executive Summary

CSN is widely viewed as welcoming and academically strong. Strategic improvements to consistency, online integration, and adult learner support can significantly enhance belonging and retention.