# Seven Learning Conditions Measured by the Ascend Survey

Research is clear: When students' learning environments help them feel competent, valued, respected, connected to others, and supported in their learning, students are more likely to engage in behaviors that support academic achievement, and this in turn supports greater retention in college and degree attainment.

PERTS Ascend is a data-driven professional learning program that enables college instructors and administrators to measure how their students are experiencing courses and what they can do to make those experiences more engaging and supportive of student success.

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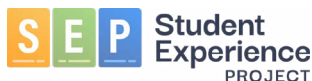
1

BELONGING CERTAINTY

Why it matters:

Belonging uncertainty is the concern people have about the extent to which they belong, or fit in, in different contexts or across time. Social isolation and belonging uncertainty are negatively associated with achievement, performance, and well-being. Belonging certainty is the absence of this concern.

The Ascend survey questions:

• When thinking about this class, how often, if ever, do you wonder "Maybe I don't belong here?"

Response options: **_Never*_**, **_Hardly Ever*_**, _Sometimes, Frequently, Always_

2

IDENTITY SAFETY

Why it matters:

Students feel safe to engage and succeed in school when the classroom environment encourages a sense of community, fosters mutual support among classmates, and affirms students' diverse identities.

The Ascend survey questions:

• In this class, I worry about being judged negatively based on my group membership(s) (e.g., race, gender, social class, etc.).

• In this class, I worry that people's evaluations of me will be affected by my group membership(s) (e.g., race, gender, social class, etc.).

• People here would be surprised if I, or someone like me, did well in this class.

Response options: **_Strongly Disagree*_**, **_Disagree*_**, _Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree_

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INSTITUTIONAL GROWTH MINDSET

Why it matters:

An organizations' philosophies of intelligence—whether organizations believe that intelligence is a fixed trait (institutional fixed mindset), or that it is malleable and expandable by hard work and effort (institutional growth mindset)—shape the organization's members. When instructors, staff, and university leaders convey a growth mindset about intelligence to students, students are found to experience less identity threat and perform better academically. Although students perceive these beliefs, research shows that these perceptions are quite accurate when compared to instructors' self-reported beliefs.

The Ascend survey questions:

• This instructor seems to believe that students have a certain amount of intelligence, and they really can't do much to change it.

• This instructor seems to believe that your intelligence is something that you can't change very much.

Response options: **_Strongly Disagree*_**, **_Disagree*_**, _Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree_

4 SELF-EFFICACY

Why it matters:

Feeling self-efficacy—which involves having confidence in and estimation of one's abilities—is important for persistence and success in academic fields. Research indicates that students from different groups can have different levels of self-efficacy when it comes to their abilities, and that the experience of identity threat can contribute to low-levels of self-efficacy among students.

The Ascend survey questions:

• I feel confident about my ability to do well in this class.

• I am confident that I can perform effectively in this class.

Response options: *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, **Agree*, Strongly Agree***

5 SOCIAL BELONGING

Why it matters:

Interpersonal and situational cues signal to students whether they belong (or not) in a particular context. These cues differ for students, depending on their group membership (e.g., gender, race, first-generation, low-income). While most students experience some uncertainty about whether they belong in college, students from groups that are underrepresented or negatively stereotyped tend to experience higher rates of belonging uncertainty than others.

The Ascend survey questions:

• I feel comfortable in this class.

• I feel accepted in this class.

• I feel like I can be myself in this class.

• I feel like I belong in this class.

Response options: *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, **Agree*, Strongly Agree***

6

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Why it matters:

Social connectedness refers to the creation of bonding relationships. Feelings of connectedness are a contributing factor to students' social belonging and are essential elements of student satisfaction, academic success, and retention in their own right. Students who feel a sense of social connectedness are more likely to have better social and academic experiences during college, including higher emotional well-being and better health.

The Ascend survey questions:

• In this class, I can rely on other students for academic support.

• I receive clear academic feedback from this instructor.

• I can communicate with this instructor about this class as needed.

Response options: *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, **Agree**, **Strongly Agree***

7

TRUST & FAIRNESS

Why it matters:

Students from negatively stereotyped or historically underserved groups can question whether faculty and staff may treat them fairly in interactions, grading, and other forms of evaluation. Faculty that communicate and behave in ways that engender trust and a perception of caring can mitigate social identity threat for students from these groups.

The Ascend survey questions:

• This instructor treats me with respect.

• I trust this instructor to treat me fairly.

Response options: *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Slightly Agree, **Agree**, **Strongly Agree***

Response options listed in **green with an asterisk* are considered positive endorsements of a learning condition. Ascend reports present the percent of students who are experiencing each learning condition positively.*

More than three decades of research demonstrates that learning environments designed with students' psychological experiences in mind can lead to increases in students' academic engagement, improved well-being and more positive outcomes for all students. Read the supporting research from the Student Experience Project.

Understanding the Ascend Survey

The Ascend survey helps college instructors collect students' feedback and partner with students to create engaging learning environments that support student success.

• The survey is designed for students of all ages enrolled in colleges and universities.

• Ascend reports show the percent of students who select the two most positive responses, as indicated with each condition on the previous pages.

• By default, Ascend measures the seven learning conditions on the previous pages. PERTS encourages instructors to measure the four to five learning conditions that best align with campus or personal goals.

• Reports are available for individual classes and groups, such as departments, schools, initiatives, and more. Explore the Ascend reports.

Practices to Improve Learning Conditions

The Ascend survey provides insights into how students perceive their learning conditions. The seven core Learning Conditions Practice Guides offer instructors recommendations for research-based instructional strategies to improve the learning conditions that the Ascend survey measures.

Explore the Practice Guides

Belonging Certainty	**Identify Safety**	**Institutional Growth Mindset**
Self-Efficacy	**Social Belonging**	**Social Connectedness**
Trust & Fairness		
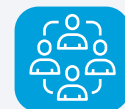
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Improve the Student Experience... and Student Outcomes

The Ascend student survey is part of the Ascend program that enables college instructors and administrators to learn how their students are experiencing courses and what they can do to make those experiences more engaging and supportive of student success. **Learn more about Ascend** and how the program leverages student feedback from the Ascend survey into actionable recommendations personalized for each instructor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Ascend measures and guides were co-developed by PERTS and the Student Experience Project.

ABOUT SEP

The Student Experience Project (SEP) is a collaborative of university leaders, faculty, researchers, and national education and improvement organizations who are committed to accelerating the adoption of innovative, evidence-based practices that improve student academic outcomes by transforming the college student experience.

ABOUT EQUITY ACCELERATOR

The Equity Accelerator (EA), formerly known as the College Transition Collaborative, is a focused research organization that harnesses social and behavioral science to help colleges and organizations build more equitable learning and working environments, where everyone has the support, opportunities, and resources they need to thrive. EA led the selection and curation of the Ascend measures and the development of their practice guides.

ABOUT PERTS

The Project for Educational Research That Scales (PERTS) is a nonprofit that equips educators to create learning conditions that boost engagement and accelerate learning. To do so, PERTS develops, tests, and scales the impact of evidence-based solutions in collaboration with hundreds of partner organizations. Learn more about our work, our team, and our partners at **www.perts.net/about**.