

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](https://perts.net/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 success for all students.



The Seven Learning Conditions



BELONGING CERTAINTY

Why it matters:

Belonging certainty refers to the extent to which people feel confident that they belong, or fit in, in different contexts or across time. Actively questioning belonging, or *belonging uncertainty*, is negatively associated with achievement, performance, and well-being.

The Ascend survey question:

- 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*



INSTITUTIONAL GROWTH MINDSET

Why it matters:

Growth mindset is the belief that people’s capabilities are malleable and can be increased by hard work and effort. When instructors, staff, and university leaders convey a growth mindset about intelligence (e.g., through course syllabi, feedback on assignments, grading policy, etc.), students feel less discouraged by challenges and perform better academically.

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*



SELF-EFFICACY

Why it matters:

Self-efficacy means having confidence in one’s abilities—which is important for persistence and success in academic fields.

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***

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SOCIAL BELONGING

Why it matters:

Feeling a sense of belonging in the college environment is key to students being able to engage with and complete challenging coursework. In the classroom, interpersonal and situational factors signal to students whether they belong. While almost everyone questions whether they belong in college, students may be particularly vulnerable if they worry about being judged based on their background and life circumstances.

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**

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SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Why it matters:

Social connectedness refers to the creation of bonding relationships among peers and instructors. Feelings of connectedness are essential to student satisfaction, academic success, and retention. They also contribute to better social and academic experiences during college, including a greater sense of belonging, 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**

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TRUST & FAIRNESS

Why it matters:

Students sometimes worry that they will be treated unfairly by instructors in interactions, grading, or other forms of evaluation—especially when they worry about being judged based on their background or life circumstances. Instructors that communicate and behave in ways that engender trust and a perception of caring can mitigate these concerns.

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**



WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT [†]

Why it matters:

Students feel empowered to engage and succeed in school when the learning environment encourages a sense of community, fosters mutual support among classmates, and affirms their lived experiences.

The Ascend survey questions:

- In this class, I worry about being judged negatively based on my background or life circumstances.
- In this class, I worry that people's evaluations of me will be affected by my background or life circumstances.
- 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*

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 and improved well-being for all students. [Read the supporting research from the Student Experience Project.](#)

[†] Identity Safety can be used as an alternative to Welcoming Environment if desired. Welcoming Environment is generally recommended because it uses broader and more accessible language, giving students the opportunity to report worries related to any of their lived experiences or background attributes. To access the practice guide for Identity safety, visit perts.net/ascend/identity-safety.

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*

Understanding the Ascend Survey

The Ascend survey helps college instructors and administrators collect students' feedback to create more engaging learning environments.

- 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](#)



[Institutional Growth Mindset](#)



[Self-Efficacy](#)



[Social Belonging](#)



[Social Connectedness](#)



[Trust & Fairness](#)



[Welcoming Environment](#)



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 success for all students. [Learn more about](#) how to leverage student feedback from the Ascend survey into actionable recommendations personalized for each instructor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Ascend measures and guides were developed by 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 experience for all students.

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.