

Campus Climate Items on the 2021 Senior Survey

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Executive Summary

Nine items from the 2019 Enrolled Student Survey that showed significant gaps across student groups were included in the 2021 Senior Survey. The items measured feeling out of place, overwhelmed, depressed, safe, insulted or threatened, part of the community, stressed about finances or future plans, and beliefs about whether Carleton students treated one another with respect. Overall, the average senior in 2021 feels safe on campus, often feels concerned about their future and overwhelmed by all they have to do, but feels like part of the community at Carleton and that Carleton students treat one another with respect. They occasionally feel out of place or so depressed that it is difficult to function, and their concerns about finances are less severe than their concerns about future plans. Experiences of feeling insulted or threatened due to social identity happen rarely. However, not all groups of students conform to this average.

1. The student variable showing the largest number and usually the largest magnitude of gaps was First Generation status. First Gen students felt more depressed and out of place, felt less safe on campus (which got worse since 2019), reported more incidents of being insulted or threatened due to their social identity (which also got worse since 2019), saw less mutual respect among Carleton students, felt more stress about their future plans, and knew fewer faculty members whom they could ask for recommendations. Given the high degree of overlap between First Generation status and other historically underrepresented identities (e.g., 53% of Black students, 39% of Low Income students, and 33% of Hispanic students were First Generation), interventions designed to close the gap for First Generation students may close the gaps for those groups as well.
2. The group showing the second largest gaps was LGBTQ+ students, who reported more frequent episodes of depression and feeling overwhelmed, and these problems were especially acute among students who were both LGBTQ+ and international. LGBTQ+ students also reported feeling threatened more frequently and felt less safe on campus.
3. Low Income students, like First Gen students, felt more depressed and more out of place than other students, but also felt less like they were a part of the Carleton community. These effects are additive with First Generation status, so that students who are both Low Income and First Generation would be expected to show deficits due to each one.
4. Four groups reported higher levels of stress about finances: Low-Income students (as expected), but also LGBTQ+, female, and Black students. These elevated levels were found even after controlling for Low-Income status, suggesting that the College's

calculation of financial need may not fully capture students' lived experience of financial need.

Finally, a comparison of 2021 responses to 2019 found higher rates of depression and feeling overwhelmed and lower rates of mutual respect and community.

Campus Climate items

The wording of the Campus Climate items is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Campus Climate Items

Stem	Question
(1. 0 (none); 6. 5 or more)	How many faculty members know you well enough to provide a professional recommendation concerning your qualifications for a job or advanced degree work?
During the current academic year, how often, if ever, have you... (1. Rarely or never; 4. Very often)	Felt out of place or that you just didn't fit it on campus
	Felt overwhelmed by all you had to do
	Felt so depressed it was difficult to function
Below are potential sources of stress that you may experience as a student. Please indicate how each has affected you during the current academic year. (1. Not a source of stress; 4. Very stressful)	Concerns about your finances
	Concerns about your future plans
Tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements. (1. Disagree strongly; 5. Agree strongly)	I feel safe on this campus.
	I feel like part of the community at Carleton.
	Students at Carleton treat one another with respect.
During this academic year, how often have you had the following interactions with students differing from you (e.g., in race, national origin, sexual orientation, political views) at Carleton? (1. Never; 5. Very often)	Felt insulted or threatened based on your social identity (e.g., sex, race, national origin,

Demographics of Seniors Who Completed Surveys in 2019 and 2021

A total of 163 Carleton seniors completed these questions in 2019 and 248 completed them in 2021. Table 2 shows the distribution of those students across several demographic categories for each year. FG = First Generation, LI = Low Income (financial need greater than 80% of the cost of attendance), NAPI = Native American or Pacific Islander, LGBQ = having a sexual orientation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, unsure, or something else other than heterosexual or straight.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents to These Questions in 2019 and 2021

Group	2019	2021
Asian	11%	13%
Black	4%	5%
Female	57%	60%
FG	11%	6%
Hispanic	9%	6%
Intl	9%	9%
LGBQ	35%	37%
LI	23%	15%
NAPI	3%	0%

First, this report examines the pattern of results just for Seniors in 2021. Afterward, it compares the 2021 results to those from 2019.

Seniors in 2021

To provide an overview of the average response to these items, Figure 1 below shows the mean and 95% confidence interval for each of the nine campus climate items. Although most items were on a 1-5 scale, all have been converted to a 1-4 scale to permit comparisons on a common standard. One variable not depicted below is the item asking how many faculty the student knows well enough to ask for a professional recommendation, either for a job or graduate school. This variable is considered separately after the plot below.

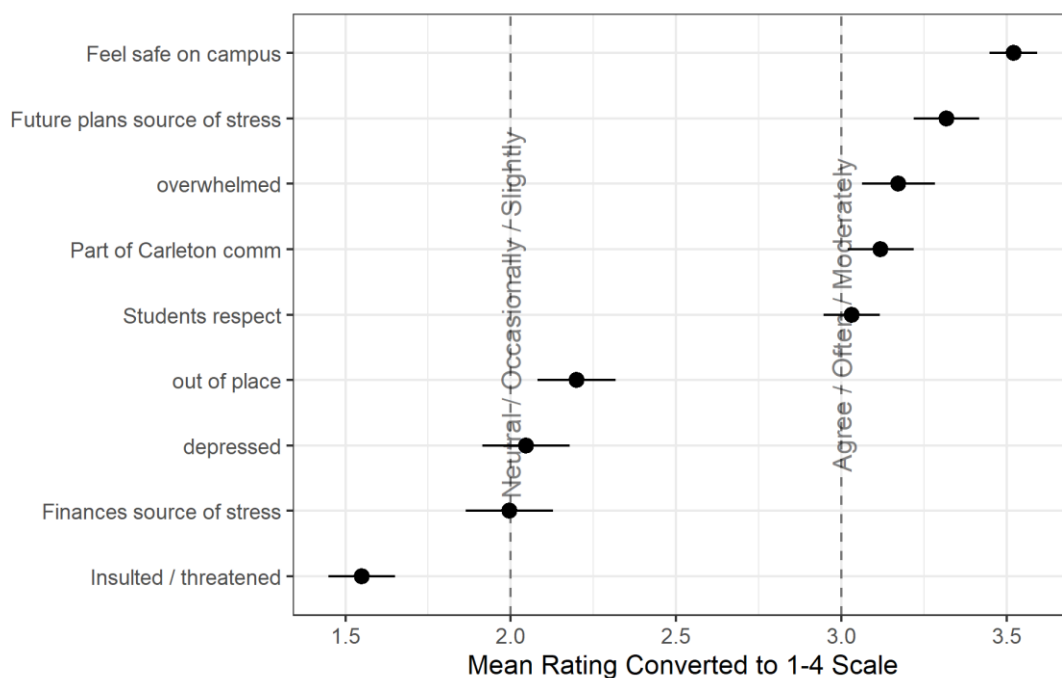


Figure 1: Mean Ratings on Campus Climate Items Converted to 1-4 Scale for Seniors in 2021

Figure 1 above shows that the average senior feels safe on campus, often feels concerned about their future and overwhelmed by all they have to do, but feels like part of the community at Carleton and that Carleton students treat one another with respect. They occasionally feel out of place or so depressed that it is difficult to function, and their concerns about finances are less severe than their concerns about future plans. Experiences of feeling insulted or threatened due to social identity happen rarely.

Figure 2 below shows the percent of respondents who reported that they knew 1, 2, 3, etc. faculty well enough for that faculty member to provide a professional recommendation.

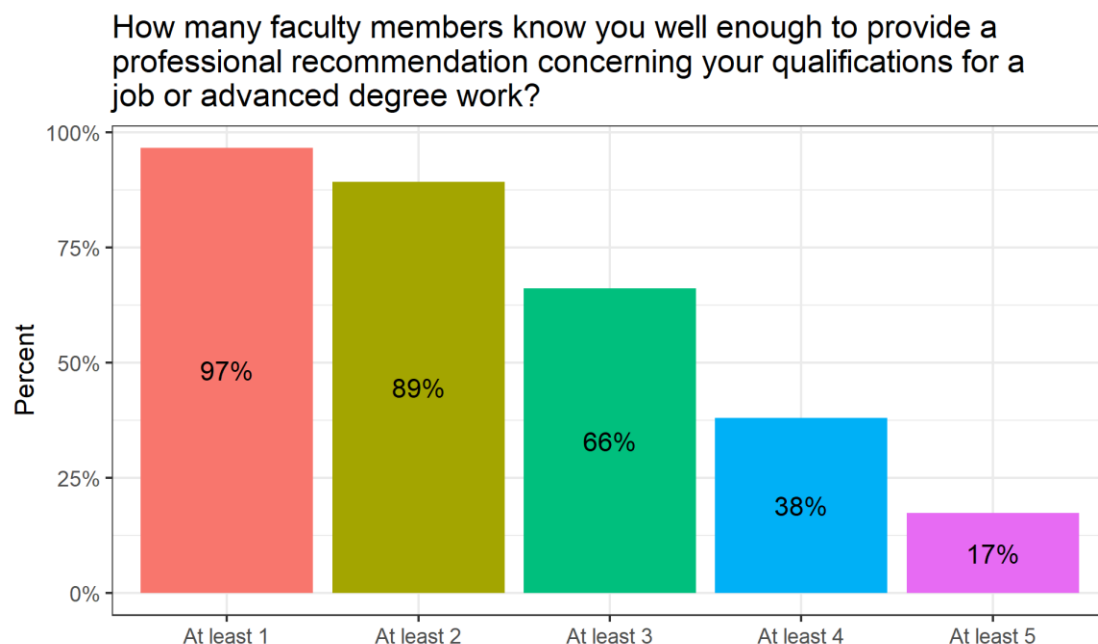


Figure 2: Percent of Seniors who Know at Least X Faculty Well Enough for Recommendation (2021 Only)

Figure 2 shows that 97% of respondents knew at least one faculty member, but only 66% knew at least three, which is the standard number of references requested on graduate school applications.

Differences among Student Groups

Figure 3 shows the differences between the means of members and non-members of the groups listed along the horizontal axis for each of the campus climate variables shown along the vertical axis. When the numbers are red, it indicates that members are experiencing worse outcomes than non-members. When the space for a number is blank, it means that the difference between members and non-members was not statistically significant at $p < .05$. To permit comparison among outcomes in terms of relative magnitude, the outcomes have all been converted to a 4-point scale.

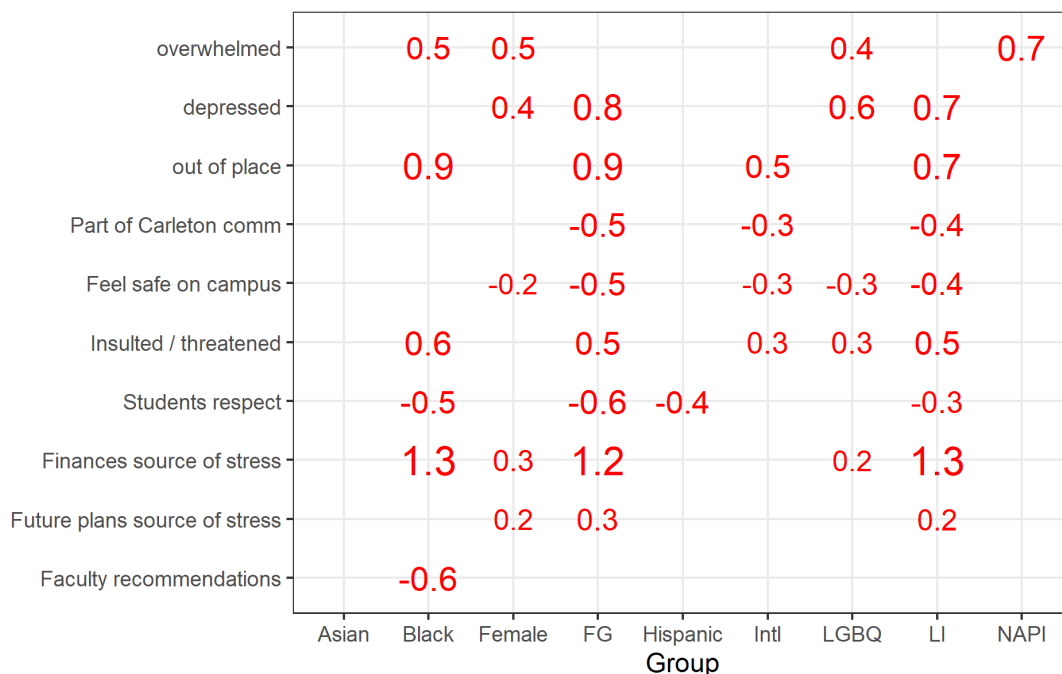


Figure 3: Raw Differences between Members and Non-Members on 4-point Scale

The absence of numbers in the left-most column in Figure 3 indicates that there were no significant differences between students who identified in part as Asian and students who did not. The “0.5” at the intersection of “overwhelmed” and “Black” indicates that Black students had a mean response to the item about how often they felt overwhelmed that was 0.5 points higher than the mean of non-Black students. Going down the column for Black students, we see that, compared to students who are not Black, Black students reported feeling overwhelmed, out of place, and insulted or threatened more often, agreed less that students at Carleton treated one another with respect, felt more stress about finances, and knew fewer faculty well enough to ask for a recommendation.

One problem with Figure 3 is that there is a great deal of overlap among groups. For example, of the seniors who responded in 2019 and 2021, 53% of Black students were also First Generation and 79% were also Low Income. Given this overlap, it becomes difficult to distinguish between groups in their contribution to outcomes. How much of the gaps in Figure 3 are due to First Generation or Low Income, rather than ethnicity? One approach to disentangling these variables is multiple regression, which attempts to estimate the unique contribution of each of several variables. This approach is explored in the next section.

Unique Effects of Student Variables

Figure 4 below shows the differences between groups of students on all the campus climate items for seniors in 2021. The items are given along the left side and the groups of students are given along the horizontal axis. LI = Low Income, FG = First Generation. The values in the plot are the size of the gap between the group of students indicated on the horizontal axis and students not in that group. The gap is presented in units on a 4-point scale, such as the scale used for the out of place, overwhelmed, and depressed items: “rarely or never”,

“occasionally”, “often”, and “very often”¹. On a 4-point scale, a difference between groups of 0.2 points could be considered small, and a difference of 1 point could be considered large. Differences that are desirable (e.g., feeling *more* safe than other groups) are printed in green, and differences that are undesirable (feeling *less* safe) are printed in red. The figure can be read either by focusing on a particular group of students and seeing how that group is distinct across items, or by focusing on a particular item and seeing how that item was rated differently by different groups. The magnitude of the estimates in Figure 4 are estimates of the *unique* or independent effect of each group, after statistically controlling for other groups.

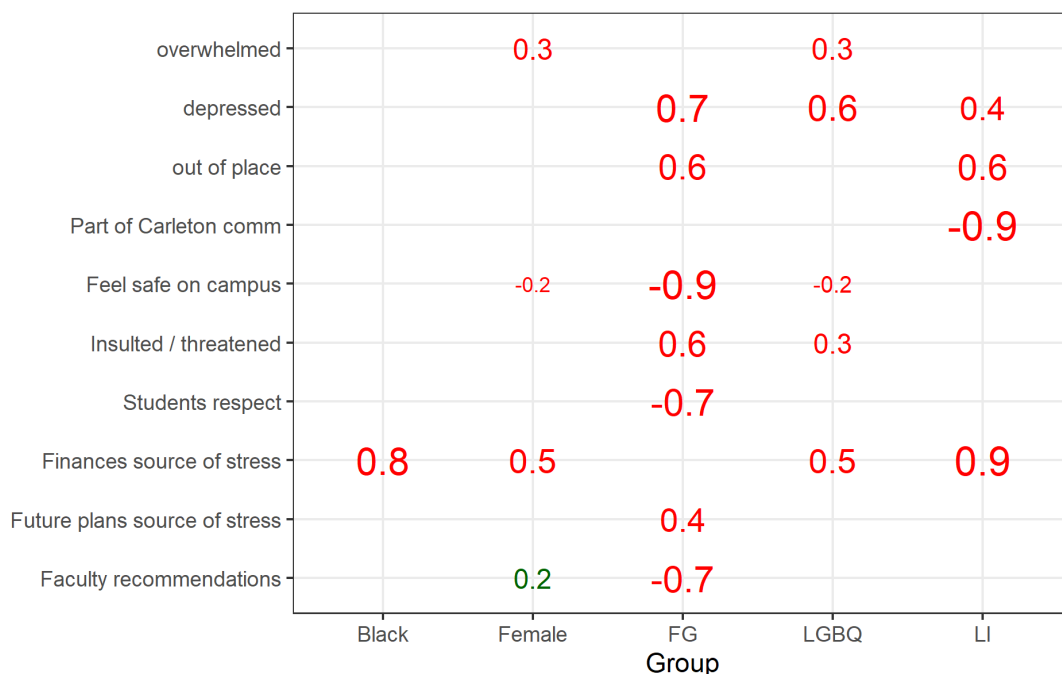


Figure 4: Significant Group Differences on Campus Climate Items, Seniors 2021

Comparing Figure 4 to Figure 3, we see that the gaps for Hispanic, International, and Native American or Pacific Islander students have been accounted for by other student variables such as First Generation and Low Income. For Black students, only a single gap remains: finances as a source of stress. Figure 3 is important for understanding the campus climate for different groups of students. That figure shows that students who are Black, for example, face many challenges relative to their non-Black peers. Figure 4 may be more useful in considering interventions. Where should the college deploy additional resources to reduce the gaps we see? Figure 4 suggests that the greatest return on investment may be to invest in programs targeting First Generation students, because that single variable accounts for the most unique contributions to student differences in campus climate.

¹ Items that were originally on a 5-point scale were converted to a 1-4 scale.

1. **First-Generation students.** Figure 4 indicates that the group with the most gaps was first-generation students. They felt more out of place, were insulted or threatened for their social identity more frequently (an increase from 2019; see Figure 9), knew fewer faculty who could write recommendation letters, saw less respect among Carleton students, felt more stress about future plans, felt less safe (a decline from 2019, see Figure 7), and felt depressed more often.
2. **LGBQ students.** This group showed moderately sized gaps (0.6 and 0.3) for mental health items concerned with depression and feeling overwhelmed. Somewhat surprisingly, this group was also distinct for feeling more stress concerning finances. There were small gaps for this group (magnitude 0.2) for feeling less safe. Students who were both LGBQ and International were especially vulnerable (see Intersectionality section, below).
3. **Female students.** Female students, compared to male students, showed moderately more stress over finances and, to a lesser degree, felt more overwhelmed and less safe. The only positive gap in Figure 4 was for female students, who knew a larger number of faculty members whom they could ask for recommendations.
4. **Low Income students.** Low-income students (defined as having financial need of 80% or more of the cost of attendance), not surprisingly, showed much more stress over finances but also reported a large gap in feeling like part of the community and were more likely to feel out of place. Low income male students showed even larger gaps (see Intersectionality section, below).
5. **Black students.** Students who identified at least in part as Black or African American showed a moderate gap with stress over finances, and this was after statistically controlling for low income. This suggests that there may be financial concerns for Black students that are not well captured by the College's financial need calculations.

Intersectionality

Analysis of the campus climate items included an analysis of whether combinations of two group identities produced different results than would be predicted from simply adding together the effects of each one. The combinations that were considered included all two-way combinations of First-Generation, Low Income, Sexual Orientation, and Gender, as well as all two-way combinations of each of those four groups with the ethnic groups Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native American or Pacific Islander, and International. Combinations of ethnic groups and of higher-order combinations (e.g., Gender x Low Income x Hispanic) were excluded because of the low cell sizes produced with most crossings.

The results of this analysis identified the following significant intersections:

Students who are both International and LGBQ. Students who were both LGBQ and international showed larger gaps (mean differences of 1 point or larger on a 5-point scale) with other groups on feeling more out of place, more stressed about finances, less safe on campus, less like they were a part of the community, and were less likely to agree that students at Carleton treated one another with respect.

Low-income male students. Students who were both low-income *and male* felt less like they were part of the community and were less likely to agree that students at Carleton treated one another with respect.

Changes from 2019 to 2021

Whereas the results above pertain only to seniors scheduled to graduate in 2021, the results below are focused on differences between seniors in 2019 and seniors in 2021.

Increases in Feeling Depressed and Overwhelmed

Figure 5 below shows the distribution of responses for two items related to mental health. Both show slight (but significant) increases from 2019 to 2021. These are consistent with the increases observed in the Enrolled Student Survey from 2015 to 2019 as well as national trends in rising mental health concerns.

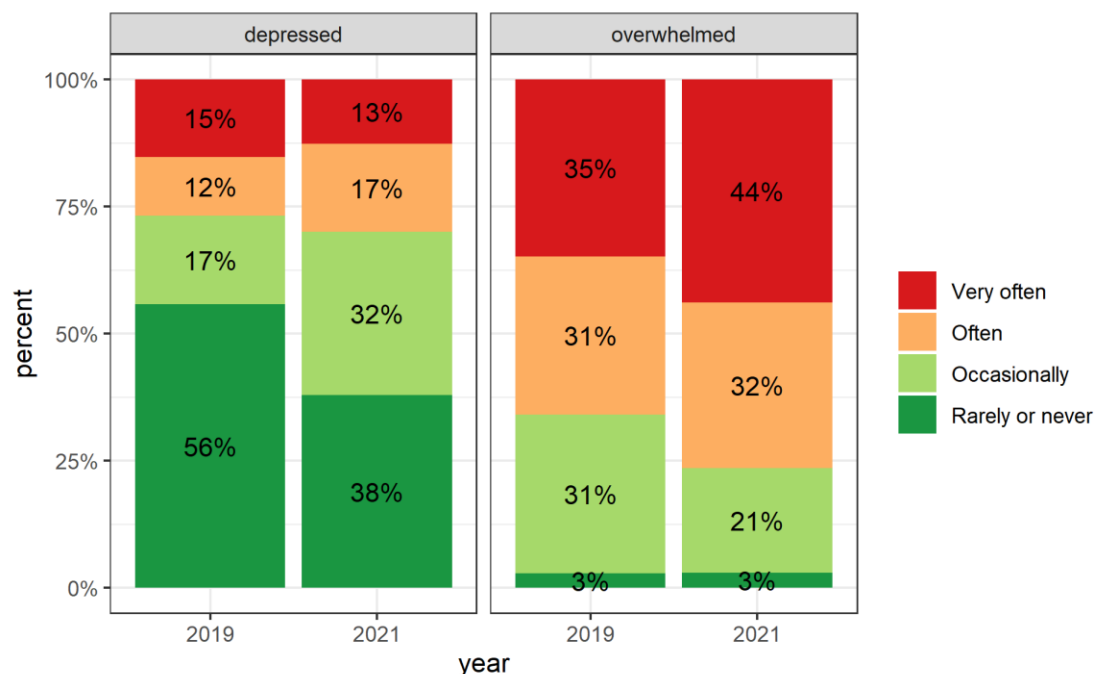


Figure 5: Changes in Feeling Overwhelmed or So Depressed that it was Difficult to Function

Slight Decreases in Community and Mutual Respect

Figure 6 below shows slight (but significant) declines in students' ratings of feeling like they are part of the community and that Carleton students treat one another with respect. The decline in perceptions of mutual respect is consistent with the decline observed from 2015 to 2019, but the decline in feeling like part of the community is a change. From 2015 to 2019, this improved slightly, but from 2019 to 2021, it declined.

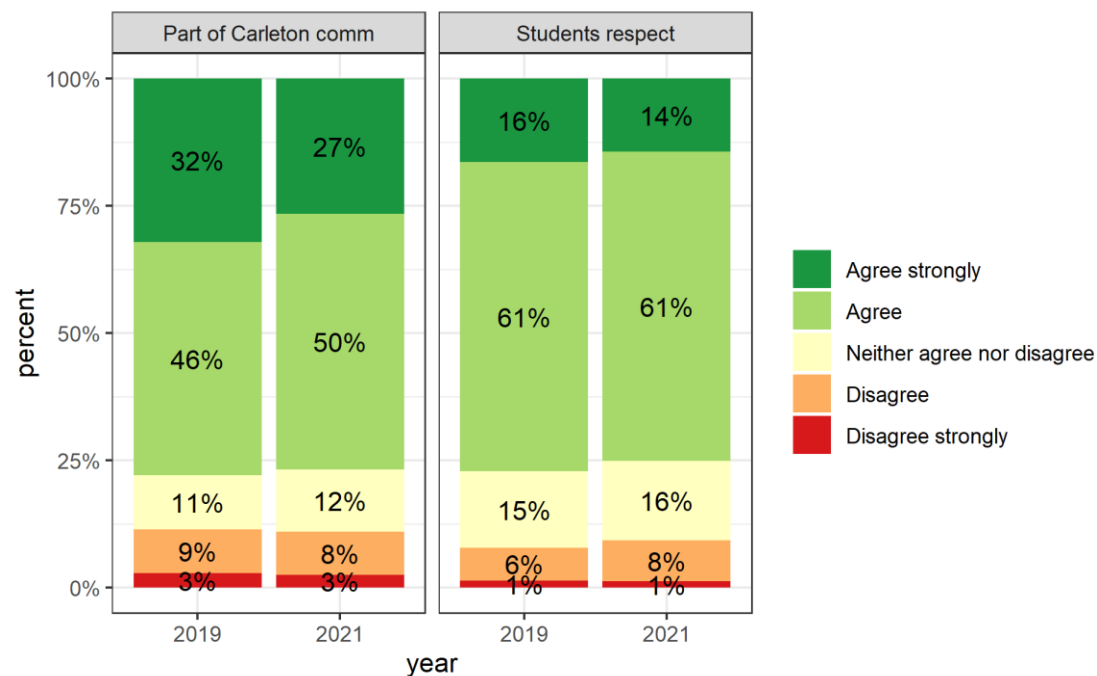


Figure 6: Change Over Time in Community and Mutual Respect

Decline in Feeling Safe for First-Generation Students Only

Figure 7 shows a decline in feeling safe on campus from 2019 to 2021 for First-Generation students but not for Continuing-Generation students. Controlling for other variables, the decline is approximately 0.3 points on a 5-point scale. Rather than presenting these as distributions as in Figure 6, they are presented as means because of the small number of first-generation students in each sample (18 in 2019, 16 in 2021).

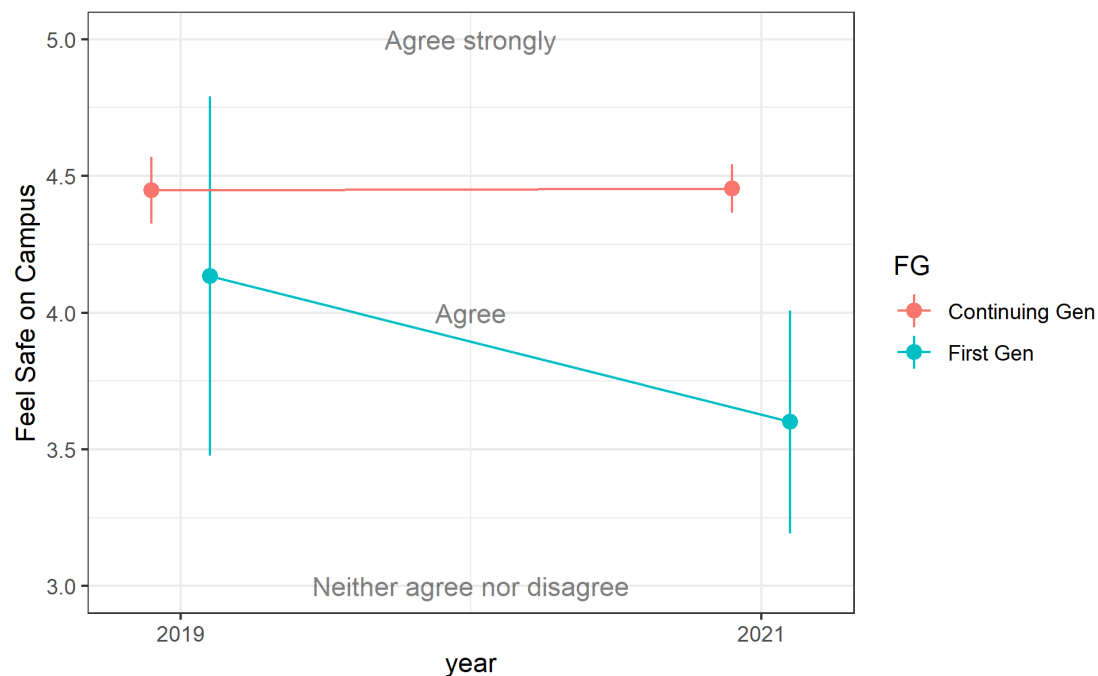


Figure 7: Change over Time in Feeling Safe for First-Generation and Continuing-Generation Students

Increase in Feeling like Part of the Community among Black / African American Students

Now for some good news. In 2019, there was a gap of about 0.7 points on a 5-point scale between Black or African-American seniors and non-Black seniors for feeling like part of the community. In 2021, that gap had closed, as Figure 8 shows.

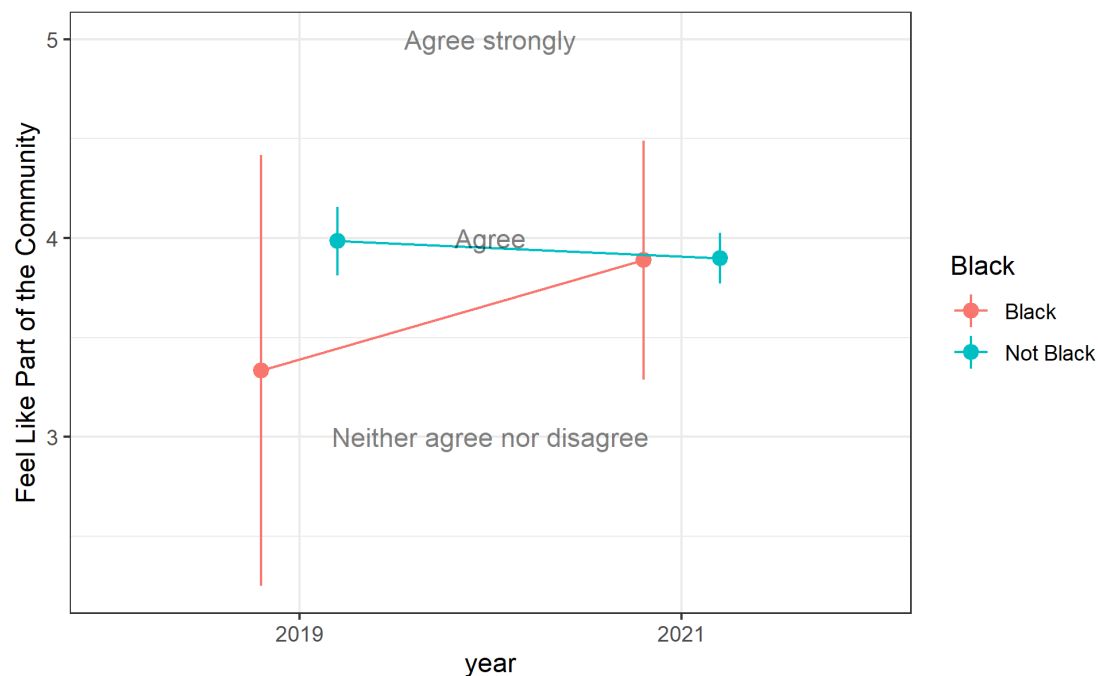


Figure 8: Gap Closes between Black and non-Black Seniors for Feeling Part of the Community

Mixed Results for Feeling Insulted or Threatened for Social Identity

Figure 9 shows the results for the item asking how often students felt insulted or threatened based on social identity (e.g., gender, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, etc.) in interactions with people different from themselves. In the case of First Gen students, the gap widened from 2019 to 2021 (left panel), but for Low Income students the gap narrowed (right panel).

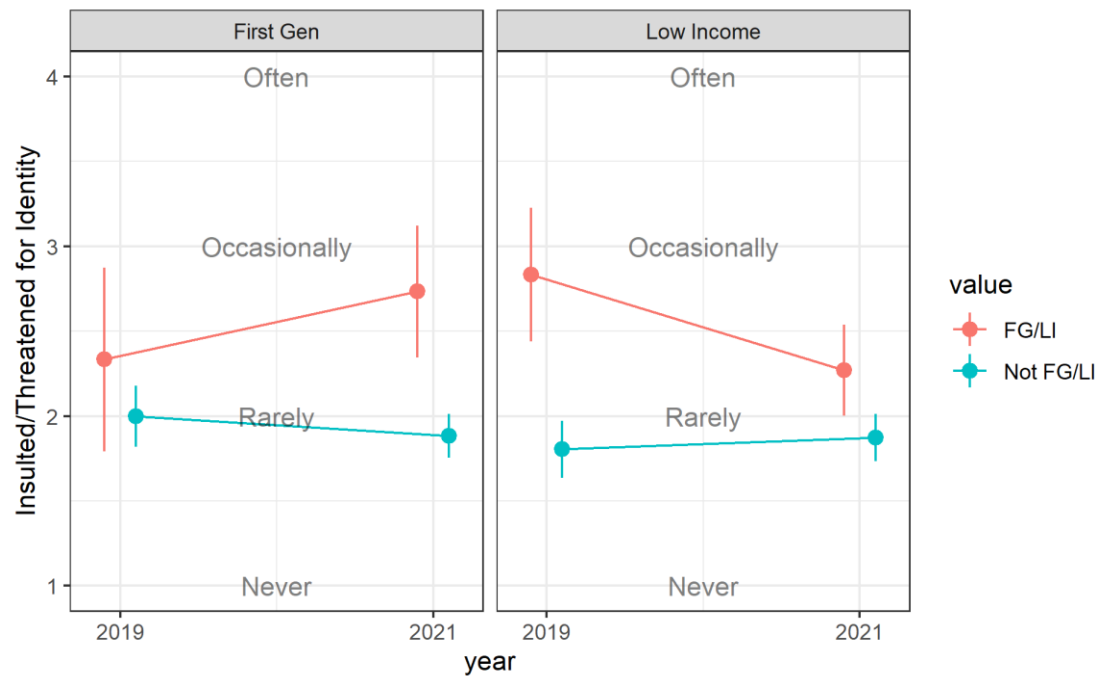


Figure 9: Mixed Results for Groups Feeling Insulted or Threatened because of Social Identity