

# Certain personality traits linked to college students' sense of belonging

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Students at a university. Credit: Keira Burton, Pexels, CC0  
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In a study of nearly 5,000 North American first-year college students, those who were more extroverted, more agreeable, or less neurotic were

more likely to feel a greater sense of belonging at school. Alexandria Stubblebine, an independent researcher in Ocala, Florida, U.S., and colleagues present these findings in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE*.

Prior research has suggested that one's [personality traits](#) are associated with one's general [sense](#) of belonging. Within a [college](#)-specific context, other research has linked a secure sense of belonging to many positives, such as better academic performance and better mental health.

Some studies have investigated relationships between students' sense of belonging at [school](#) and their demographic traits, such as gender and race. However, very few studies have explored links between students' personalities and sense of belonging at school.

To address that gap, Stubblebine and colleagues analyzed [survey data](#) from 4,753 first-year college students attending 12 different colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada. The surveys evaluated each [student's](#) sense of belonging at school and their levels of extraversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism—a collection of widely studied [personality](#) traits called "the Big Five."

Statistical analysis of the survey responses showed that students with higher levels of extroversion or agreeableness tended to feel a greater sense of belonging after their first year at school. Those with greater neuroticism tended to feel a lower sense of belonging.

Additionally, students who were less neurotic, less open, and more extroverted had a higher likelihood of being enrolled in a large college. For students at large colleges, the statistical link between extroversion and belonging was stronger than for students at small schools.

These findings provide new insights into the links between personality and belonging at school, while also highlighting a potentially key role for

school size. The authors call for more research to further deepen understanding, such as investigation of the potential influence of students' race and ethnicity on these relationships, or the influence of other school characteristics beyond size. Such work could inform schools' efforts to help students with different personalities and backgrounds build their sense of belonging and thrive at college.

The authors add, "Students who were more agreeable and more extroverted tended to have higher belonging in college, especially in big schools, and students who were more neurotic (that is, nervous and/or handle stress poorly) tended to have lower belonging in college. Additionally, and contrary to what many people might think, openness to new ideas and conscientiousness were unrelated to students' feelings of belonging."

**More information:** Who feels like they belong? Personality and belonging in college, *PLoS ONE* (2024). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0295436](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0295436)

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