



The Ohio State University

STEP

Second-year Transformational
Experience Program

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Executive Summary

The Second-year Transformational Experience Program (STEP) was established as part of the university goal to redefine the second-year student experience. Specifically, STEP aims to improve students' transition to their second year by bolstering their engagement on campus, with an end goal of fostering student success both during college and following graduation. STEP is a partnership between the Office of Student Life and Office of Academic Affairs. STEP was piloted for three academic years before being fully implemented during the 2016-2017 academic year.

This report provides a brief overview of STEP and highlights the results of recent assessments conducted by the Center for the Study of Student Life, including demographic trends in student and faculty participation, student retention numbers and results from quantitative and qualitative assessments of the program.



Overview of Program

As part of Ohio State's ongoing commitment to redefining the student experience, the university created a transformational second-year residential initiative designed to lead to higher graduation and retention rates, improved student engagement and satisfaction and post-graduation success. STEP focuses on student success and development and allows students the opportunity to engage in activities that cater to their individual interests and needs. Through interaction with faculty, students develop skills for life and build essential network connections.

experiences, retention and graduation. Before STEP was implemented, The Ohio State University commissioned a study to identify the predictors of second-year student success and they were found to be participation in campus events, living on campus, peer interaction, interaction with faculty and institutional commitment.

By fulfilling the program requirements, students are eligible to receive a fellowship of up to \$2,000 to use towards a STEP Signature Project they might otherwise not be able to do.

The second year is a crucial time for student success and a time when students can experience a "sophomore slump," but it has not often been a point of focus for campuses (Hunter, 2010; Schreiner & Pattengale, 2000). Students in their second year can feel disengaged, uncertain, confused and frustrated (Lemons & Richmond, 1987; Hunter, 2010). The Ohio State University designed STEP to support second-year students' success after carefully reviewing the research literature on student development in the second year and local data on Ohio State students'



Major Components of STEP

Cohort Meetings with Faculty Mentor:

During autumn semester, cohorts of 15 students meet weekly with their Faculty Mentor in residence halls or via zoom on personal development, career exploration and community building.

Professional Development Co-Curriculars:

Students complete three Professional Development Co-Curricular (PDC) sessions throughout the year. Over 550 PDC sessions are offered. These sessions are designed to encourage personal and professional growth and development appropriate for students in their second year.

Scarlet and Gray Financial Coaching:

Students complete a two-part financial wellness program that includes a group session with a peer financial coach.

Signature Project:

Students can apply for up to \$2,000 to complete a Signature Project in one of 6 unique, education-enriching experiences:

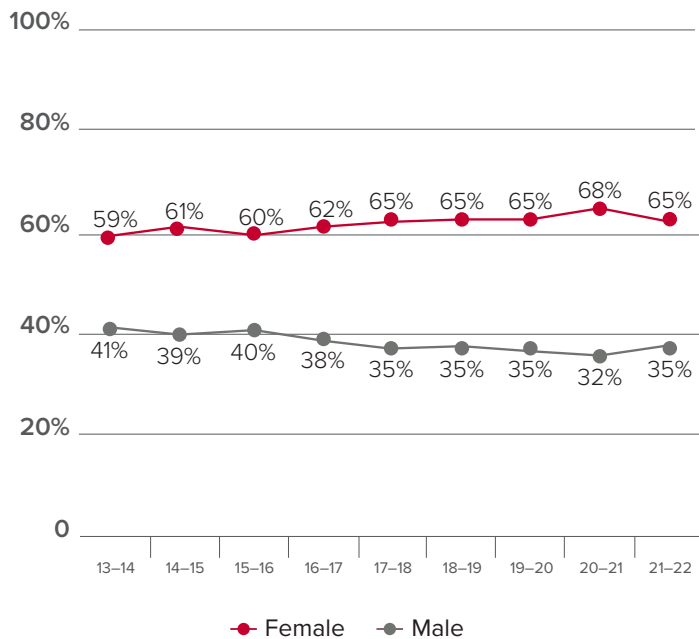
- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Creative and Artistic Endeavors | 4. Leadership |
| 2. Education Abroad | 5. Service-Learning |
| 3. Internship | 6. Undergraduate Research |



Student Demographics

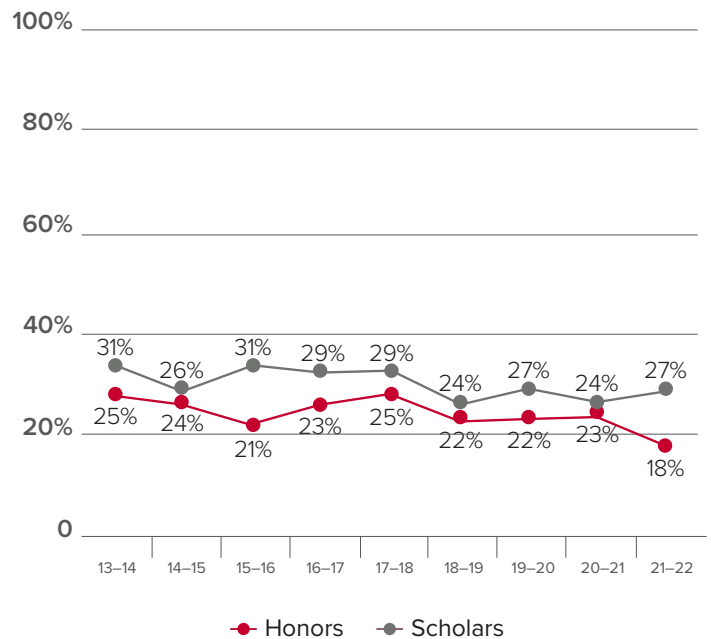
There were 2,345 second-year students participating in STEP on all of Ohio State’s campuses during the 2021–2022 academic year. The following presents the trends in participation by demographic background.

Gender



*Autumn 2021 Columbus undergraduate population:
49.0% Male; 49.7% Female*

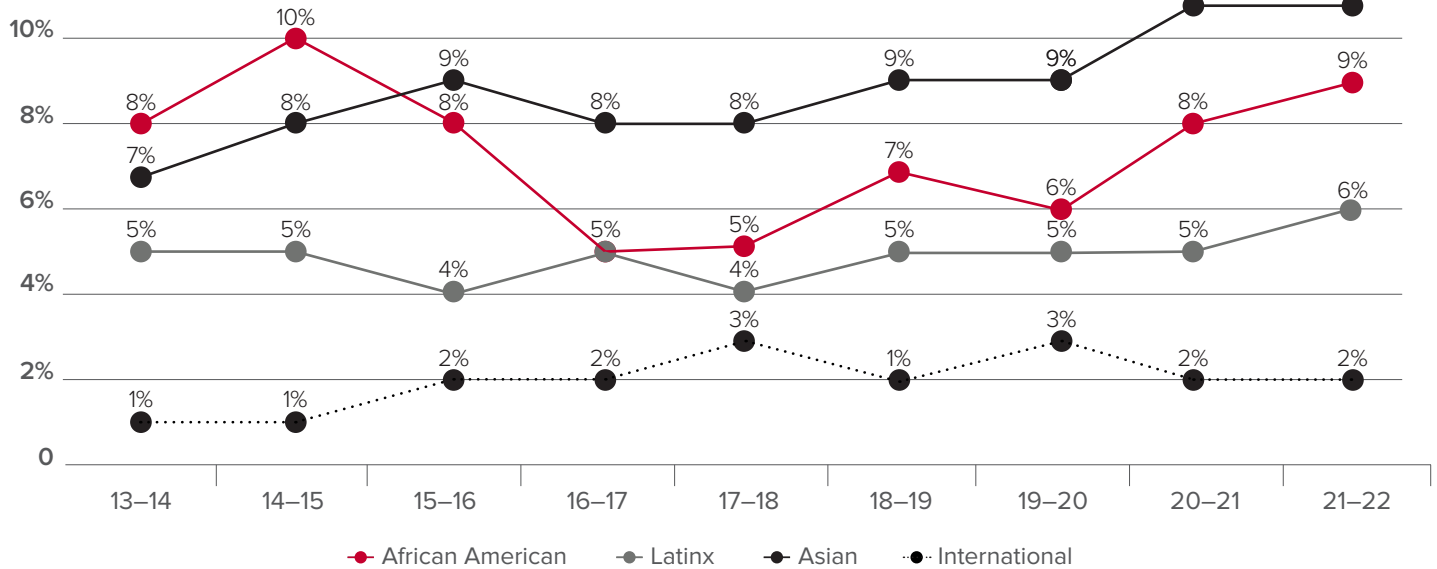
Honors/Scholars Status



*Autumn 2021 Columbus undergraduate:
9.0% Honors; 8.7% Scholars*

Demographics Continued

International Students and Students of Color



*Autumn 2021 Columbus undergraduate population:
7.6% African American; 5.2% Latinx; 8.6% Asian; 6.7% International*

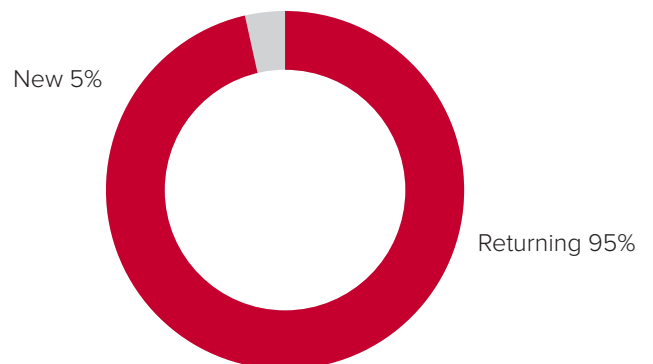
Faculty Mentors Demographics

STEP Faculty Mentors are comprised of individuals who are on the faculty of The Ohio State University according to University Faculty Rules.¹ On a case-by-case basis, non-faculty candidates can apply to serve as STEP Faculty Mentors if they either hold a terminal degree in their field, are active in the teaching mission of the university or bring a unique perspective or skill to the mentoring role.

The following is a profile of the 150 STEP Faculty Mentors participating during the 2021–2022 academic year. Among tenured and tenure-track faculty, 14% are assistant professors, 35% are associate professors and 49% are professors.

	%	n
Faculty		
Tenure/tenure-track	32%	48
Lecturer	22%	33
Clinical/Practice	7%	11
Emeritus	1%	2
Visiting	1%	1
Non-Faculty		
Post-doctoral scholars	0%	0
Other positions	37%	55
Total	100%	150

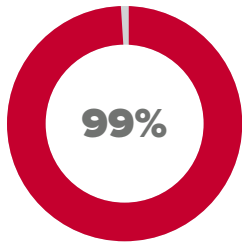
Returning v. New Mentors



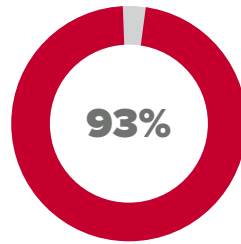
¹Chapter 3335-5-19, Faculty, Governance, and Committees.

Retention Rates

The following summarizes retention rates of students who participated in STEP during the 2021–2022 academic year compared to students who did not participate in STEP.²



99% of students who participated in STEP persisted to their third year, compared to

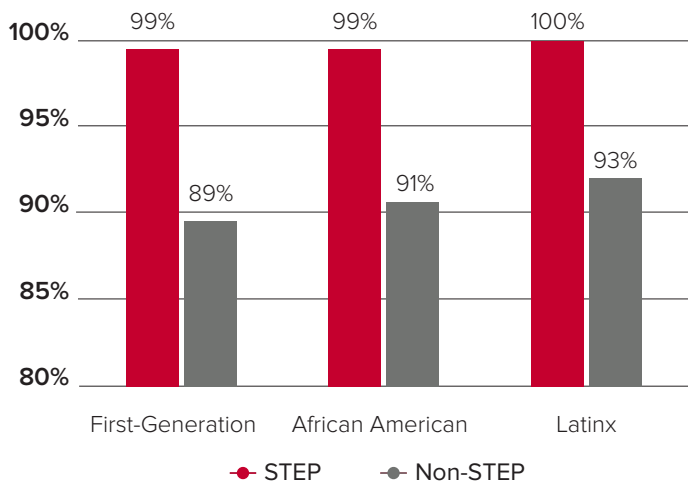


93% of students who did not participate in STEP; this is a statistically significant difference.

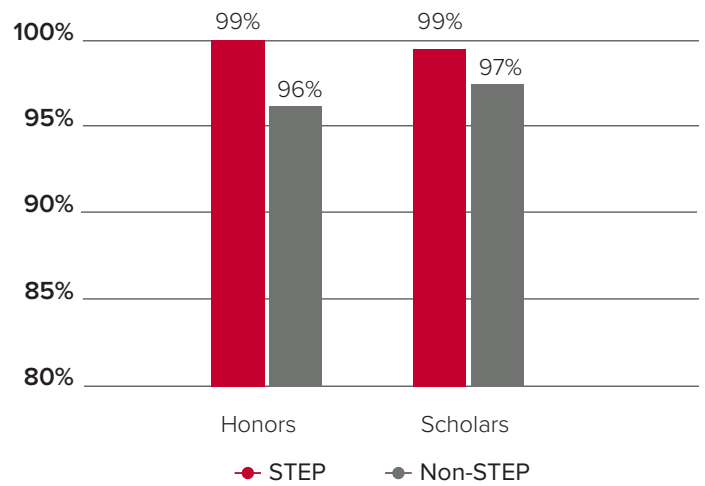
First generation, African American and Latinx students who participated in STEP had statistically significantly higher retention rates than their peers who were not in STEP.

Among students who participated in STEP, students who were not in Honors or Scholars had similar retention rates to Honors or Scholars students.

Second to Third Year Retention Rates



Second to Third Year Retention Rates



²Retention rates are calculated by examining the cohort of new first-year students on Ohio State's Columbus campus during Autumn 2019 who persisted and were enrolled on the Columbus campus in their second year (Autumn 2020), and therefore eligible to participate in STEP (N = 7,445). Among students who started their second year on the Columbus campus, we calculated the percentage that returned for their third year in Autumn 2021.

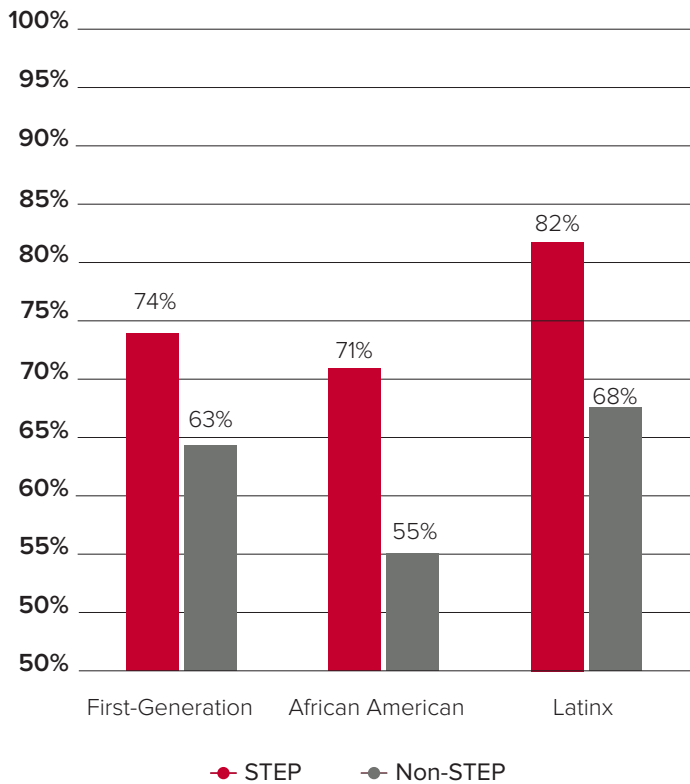
Graduation Rates

The following summarizes graduation rates of students who participated in STEP compared to students who did not participate in STEP.³ The most recent four-year graduation rates were calculated for students who were in their second year during the 2018–2019 academic year, and the most recent six-year graduation rates were calculated for students who were in their second year during the 2016–2017 academic year.

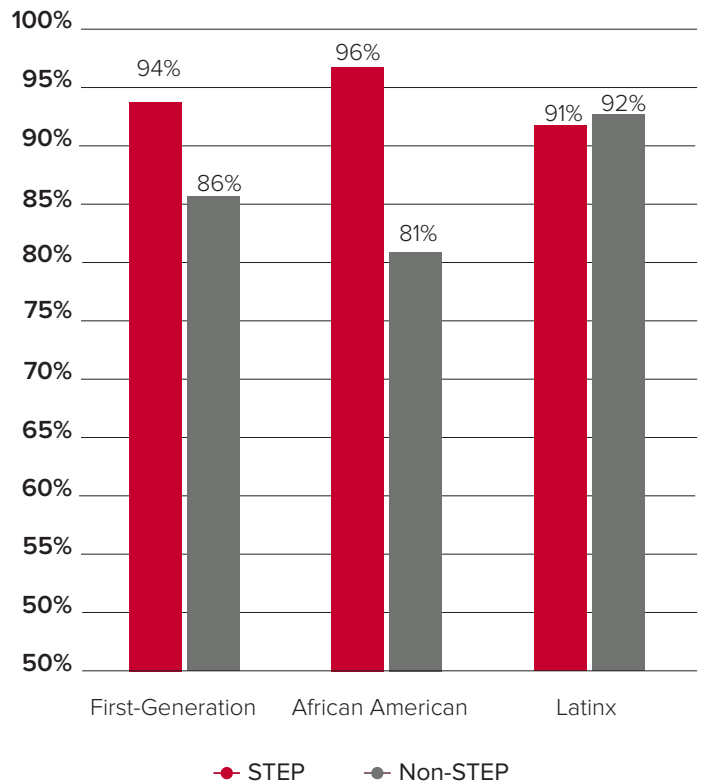
Four-year graduation rates for first-generation, African American and Latinx students who participated in STEP were significantly higher compared to those of their peers who were not in STEP.

First-generation and African American students who participated in STEP had statistically significantly higher six-year graduation rates than their peers who were not in STEP. Six-year graduation rates were similar for Latinx students who participated in STEP and those who did not; there were no significant differences for this group at the six-year mark.

Four-Year Graduation Rates



Six-Year Graduation Rates



³Graduation rates are calculated by examining the cohort of new first-year students on any of Ohio State’s campuses who persisted and were enrolled on the Columbus campus in their second year, and therefore eligible to participate in STEP.

Survey Results

During the 2017-2018 academic year, all students participating in STEP were surveyed about their experience in the program, as well as about their growth and development over the course of their second year. A randomly selected comparison group of non-STEP second-year students were sent an identical survey about their second year. The goal of this study was to evaluate STEP students' level of growth and development in comparison to a similar group of students who did not participate in STEP.

The total number of students who responded to both the autumn and spring surveys was 731. Among those students, 533 (72.9%) were in STEP and 198 (27.1%) were in the comparison group. Dependent sample t-tests and repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to evaluate change over time in students' growth and development.

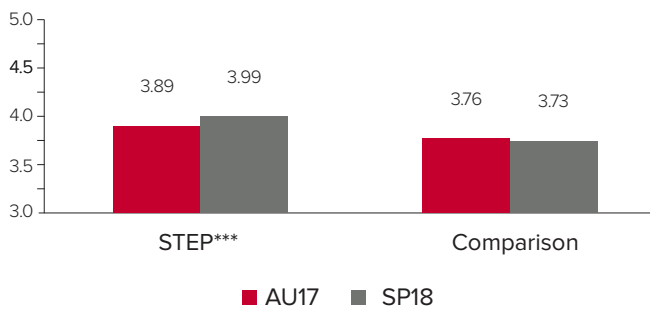
STEP students experienced statistically significant increases over the second year in:

- Perceived access to resources
- Faculty interactions
- Interpersonal communication
- Leadership confidence
- Career confidence
- Academic confidence

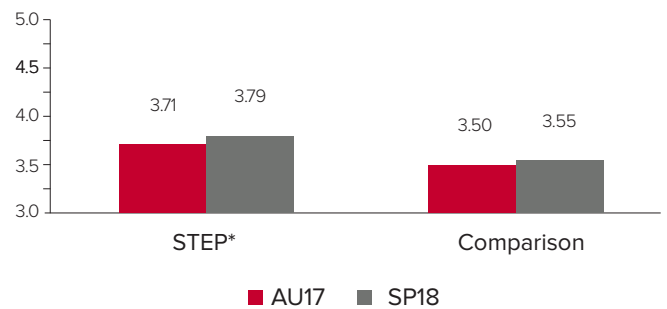
Non-STEP students experienced statistically significant declines in:

- Sense of belonging

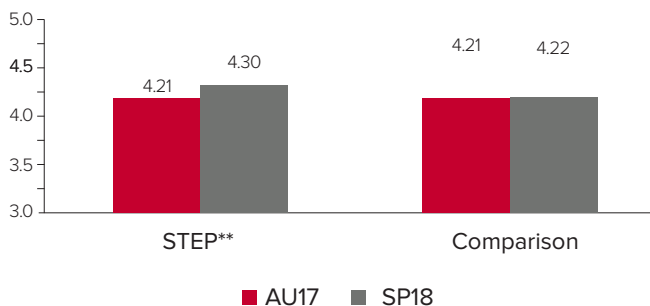
Access to Resources



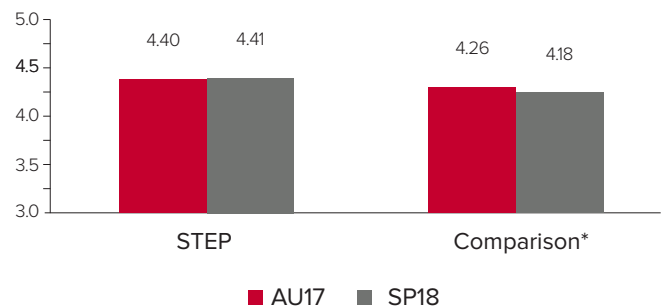
Faculty Interactions



Interpersonal Communication



Sense of Belonging



*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Percent Change Over Second Year in Confidence Levels in the Following

STEP	Non-STEP
Academic 1.5% ↑ **	Academic 1.5% ↓
Career 4.6% ↑ ***	Career 1.6% ↑
Leadership 1.9% ↑ ***	Leadership 2.0% ↑

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$



Interview Results

During the 2016-2017 academic year, in-depth interviews were conducted with a random sample of STEP students to better understand their experiences with the program. Twelve semi-structured, hour-long interviews were conducted examining how and why students found their STEP experiences valuable and transformative. The research was designed to provide rich, detailed descriptions of students' development. Data were transcribed then coded for themes.

Throughout the interviews, students reflected on their experiences in STEP and were prompted to describe their thoughts on the learning and transformations they experienced throughout the program. Learning outcomes were then coded based on sub-themes as well as how they aligned with the three pillars of STEP: access, community and self-awareness.

The goal of the interview was to allow STEP participants to reflect on the program, their personal and professional growth and what parts of the program they believed led to that growth. Student responses were coded to detect self-identified learning outcomes and catalysts for that learning.

The following graphics highlight 1) key catalysts for learning and 2) the most frequently reported learning outcomes, which were coded to match the themes of the three STEP pillars: access, community and self-awareness.

"It also helped me to make some tough decisions regarding my career, regarding my project, so I really enjoyed that....it helped me see that that was the right decision for me and reaffirmed my choice."
-STEP Student

Key Themes from Interviews

Figure 1

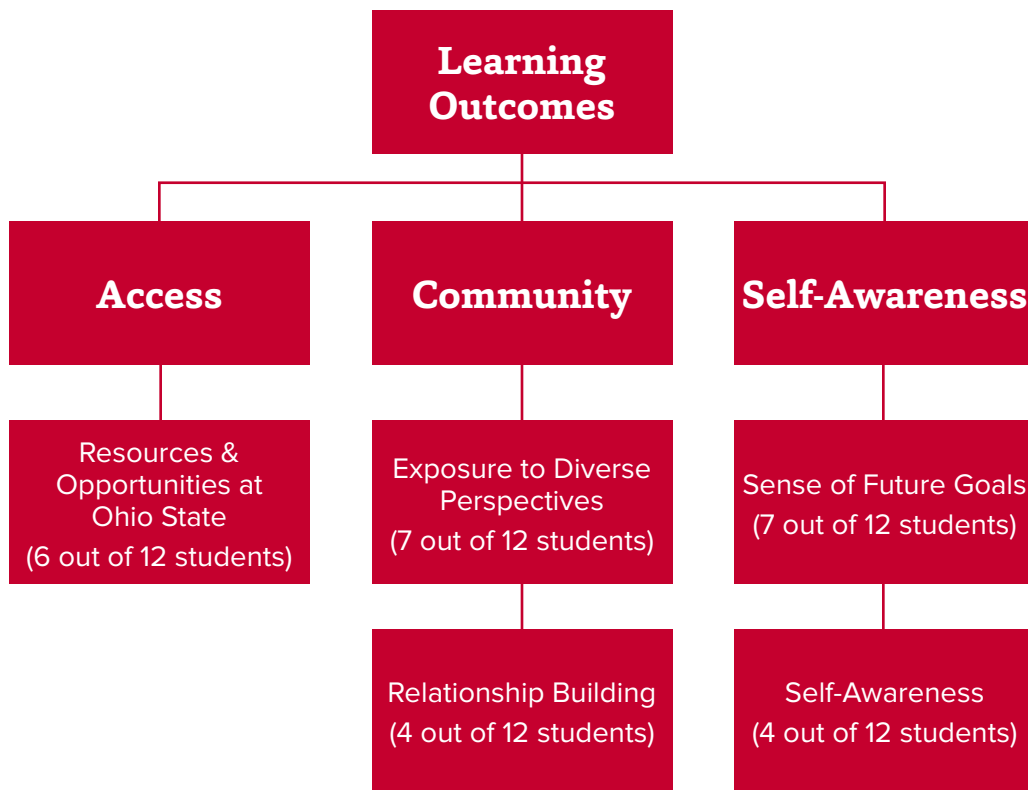
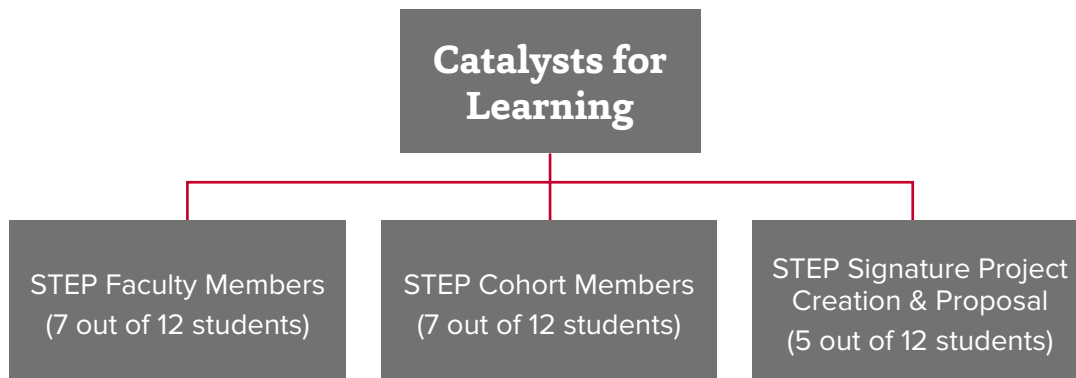


Figure 2



References

Hunter, M. S. (2010). *Helping sophomores succeed: Understanding and improving the second-year experience*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lemons, L.J., Douglas, R.R. (1987). A developmental perspective on the sophomore slump. *NAPSA Journal* 24(3), 15-19.

Schreiner, L.A., Pattengale, J. (2000). *Visible solutions for invisible students: Helping sophomores succeed*. (Monograph No. 31). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.



What is STEP?

Ohio State's Second-year Transformational Experience Program (STEP) was developed as a continuation of the university's effort to redefine the student experience. STEP is designed to focus on student success and development and allows students the opportunity to engage in activities that cater to their individual interests and needs. Through interaction with faculty, students are able to develop tools for life and build essential network connections.



6 Areas of Education-Enriching Signature Projects

By fulfilling the program requirements, students are eligible to receive a fellowship of up to \$2,000 to use towards a STEP Signature Project they might otherwise not be able to do. The project areas are:

- 1. Creative and Artistic Endeavors
- 2. Internships
- 3. Leadership
- 4. Service-Learning
- 5. Education Abroad
- 6. Undergraduate Research



150 FACULTY MENTORS



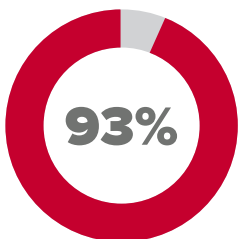
2,345 STEP STUDENTS



1:15 FACULTY MENTOR/STUDENT RATIO

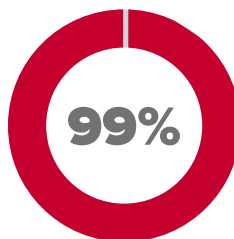
"{STEP}... encourages students to take advantage of opportunities and do things that they wouldn't have otherwise that really benefit the college experience, their education, their future careers."

-STEP Student



of Faculty Mentors agree that their role as a STEP mentor gave them a chance to make a difference in students' lives

(Average response, 2020-2021 STEP Faculty Mentor surveys)



of STEP students return for their third-year at Ohio State, compared to 93% of students not in STEP

(2020-2021 cohort)



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