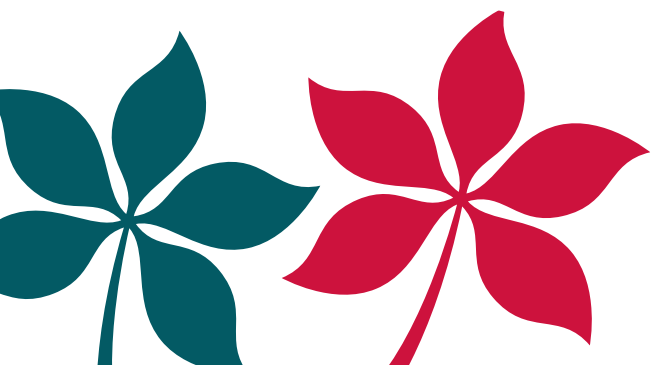




The Ohio State University

STEP

Second-year Transformational
Experience Program



Executive Summary

The Second-year Transformational Experience Program (STEP) was established as part of The Ohio State University's 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 the 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 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 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.

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' 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 high-impact STEP Signature Project they might otherwise not be able to do.

Each year, over 2,800 students on all of Ohio State's campuses participate in STEP with 185-200 Faculty Mentors. STEP is a nationally recognized second-year program, winning prestigious awards from higher education and student affairs national associations (NASPA and ACPA), with several peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on the success of the program and serving as a benchmark to other institutions seeking to create second-year programming.



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 virtually about personal development, career exploration and community building.

Professional Development Co-Curriculars:

Students complete two Professional Development Co-Curricular (PDC) sessions throughout the year. Over 600 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:

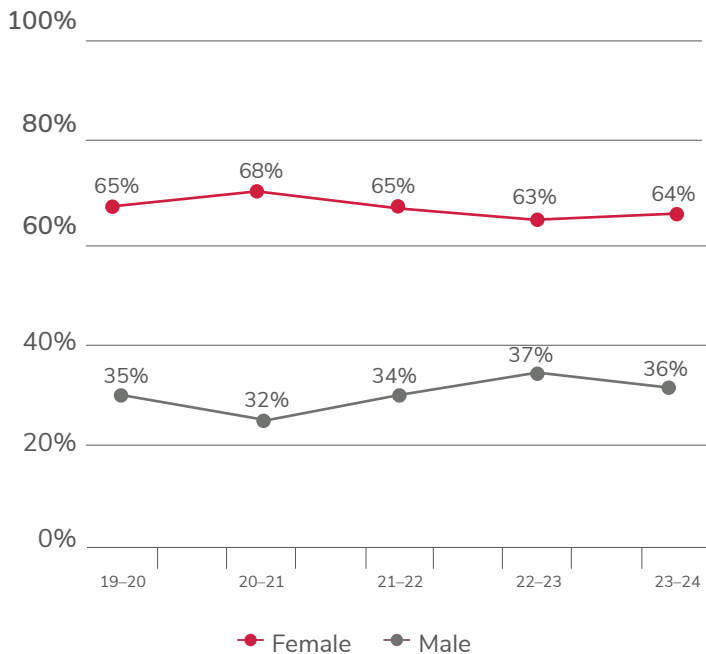
- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Creative and Artistic Endeavors | 4. Leadership |
| 2. Education Abroad | 5. Service-Learning |
| 3. Internship | 6. Undergraduate Research |



Student Demographics

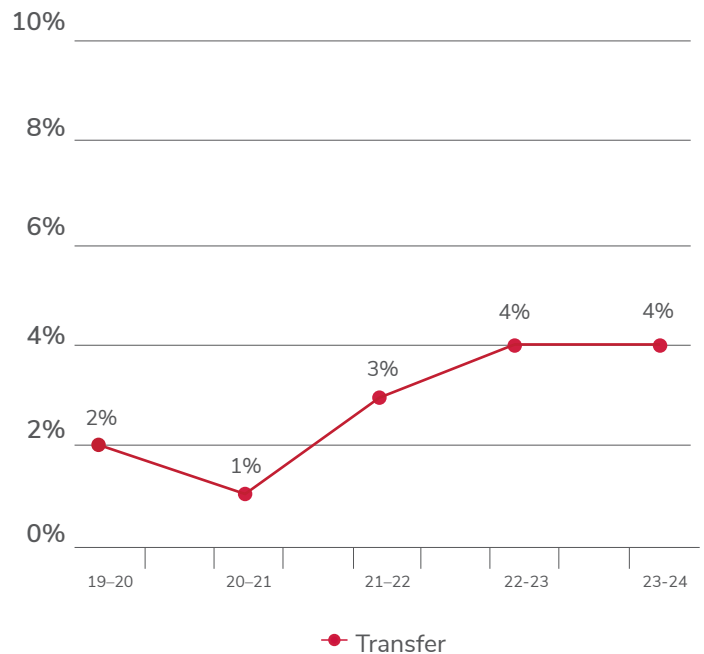
There were 2,740 second-year students participating in STEP on Ohio State's Columbus campus during the 2023–2024 academic year. The following presents the trends in participation.

Gender



*Autumn 2023 Columbus undergraduate population:
48.5% Male; 50.5% Female*

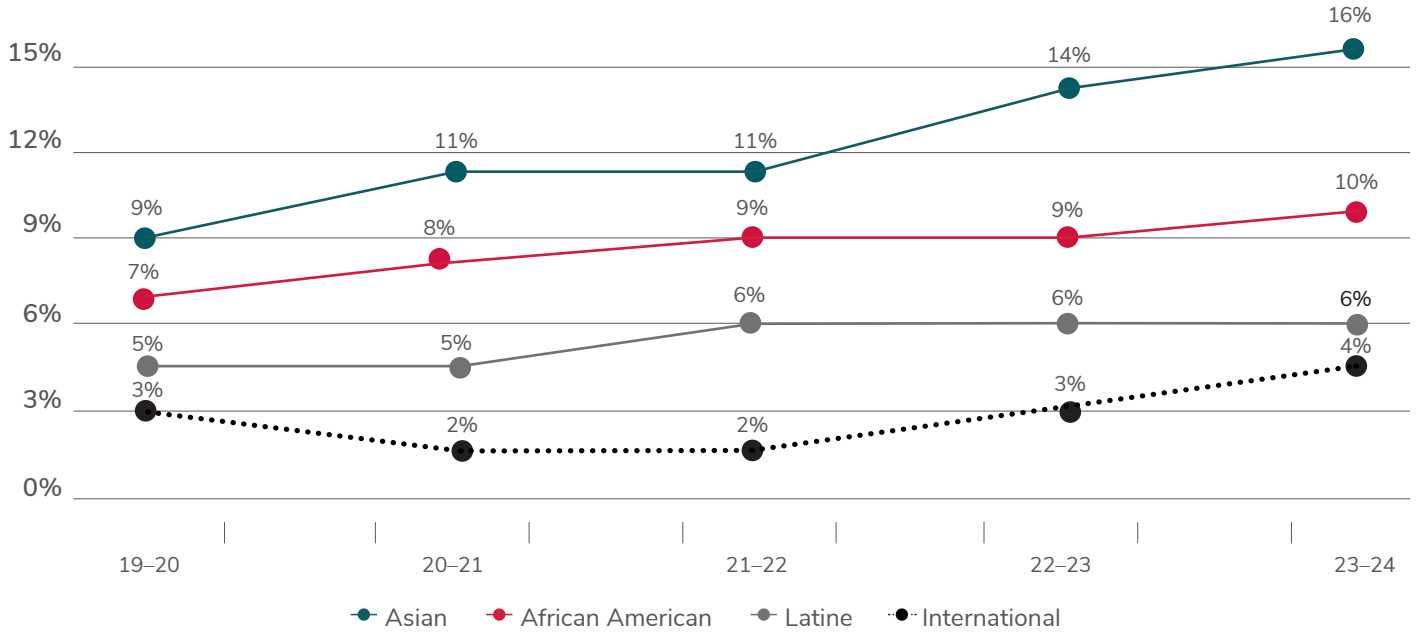
Transfer Students



*Autumn 2023 Columbus undergraduate population:
17.3% transfer students*

Demographics Continued

International Students and Students of Color



Autumn 2023 Columbus undergraduate population:
10.0% Asian; 8.0% African American; 5.6% Latine; 7.1% International

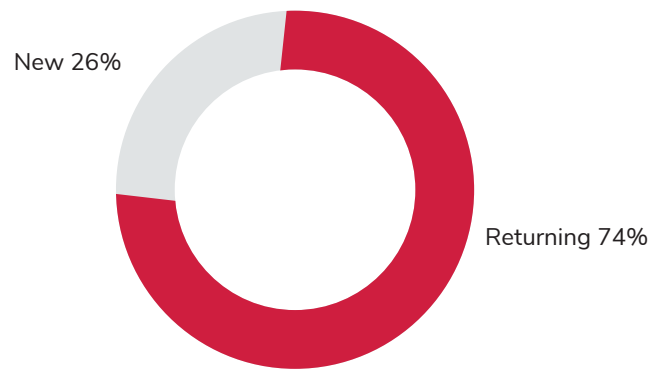
Faculty Mentor Demographics

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 185 STEP Faculty Mentors participating during the 2023–2024 academic year. Among tenured and tenure-track faculty, 23% are assistant professors, 44% are associate professors and 33% are full professors.

	%	n
Faculty		
Tenure/tenure-track	35%	64
Lecturer	26%	48
Clinical/Practice	4%	8
Emeritus	1%	2
Visiting	1%	2
Non-Faculty		
Post-doctoral scholars	1%	2
Higher Level Administration (Deans, Provosts, AVPs, Directors, ADs)	21%	39
Other positions	11%	20
Total	100%	185

Returning v. New Mentors



In 2022-2023, there were 162 mentors. An automatic increase in mentors to 185 due to student numbers was needed, opening 23 new mentor positions.

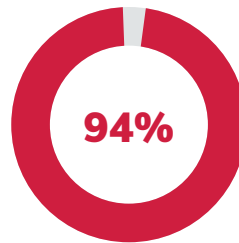
¹Chapter 3335-5-19, Faculty, Governance, and Committees.

Retention Rates

The following summarizes retention rates of students who participated in STEP during the 2022–2023 academic year compared to students who did not participate in STEP.² Further analyses using propensity score matching on previous cohorts demonstrated statistically significant differences in retention (McDaniel, Halper, Van Jura, Fines, & Whittington, 2022).



of students who participated in STEP persisted to their third year.



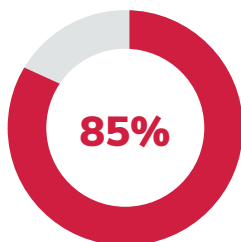
of students who did not participate in STEP persisted to their third year.



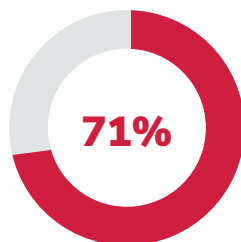
Graduation Rates

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 2020–2021 academic year, and the most recent six-year graduation rates were calculated for students who were in their second year during the 2018–2019 academic year.

4 Year Graduation Rates



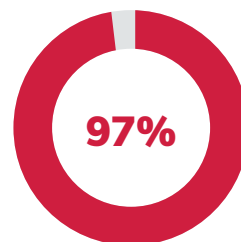
STEP students



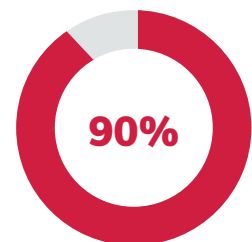
students not in STEP

85% of students who participated in STEP graduated in 4 years, compared to 71% of students who did not participate in STEP.

6 Year Graduation Rates



STEP students



students not in STEP

97% of students who participated in STEP graduated in 6 years, compared to 90% of students who did not participate in STEP.

²Retention rates are calculated by examining the cohort of new first-year students on Ohio State's Columbus campus during Autumn 2021 who persisted and were enrolled on the Columbus campus in their second year (Autumn 2022), and therefore eligible to participate in STEP ($N = 7,847$). Among students who started their second year on the Columbus campus, we calculated the percentage that returned for their third year in Autumn 2023.

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.

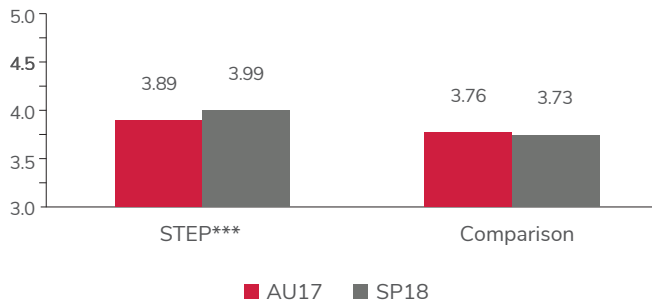
STEP students experienced statistically significant increases over the second year in:

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

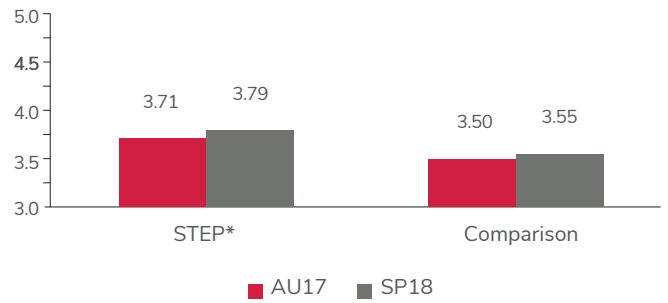
Non-STEP students experienced statistically significant declines in:

- Sense of belonging

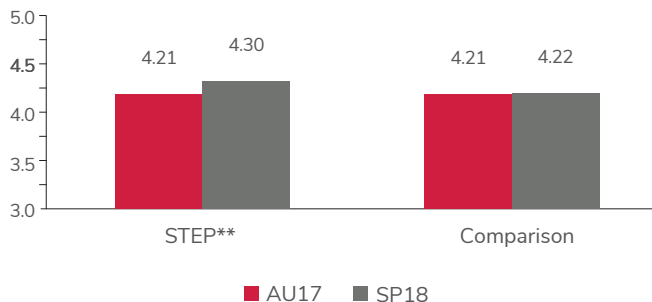
Access to Resources



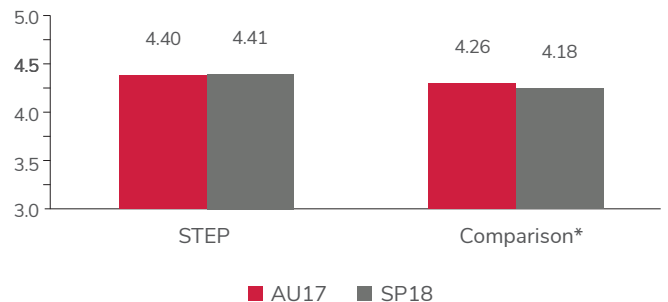
Faculty Interactions



Interpersonal Communication



Sense of Belonging



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

Percent Change Over Second Year in Confidence Levels in the Following



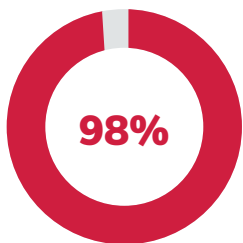
STEP	Non-STEP
Academic 1.5% ↑ **	Academic 1.5% ↓
Career 4.6% ↑ ***	Career 1.6% ↑
Leadership 1.9% ↑ ***	Leadership 2.0% ↑

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

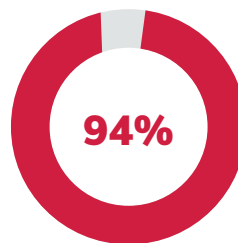


Alumni Survey Results

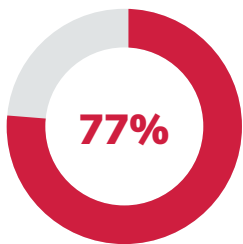
STEP alumni from the 2013 through 2019 STEP cohorts were surveyed post-graduation about their experiences in STEP. The following highlights are from the alumni survey and includes reflections on their experiences.



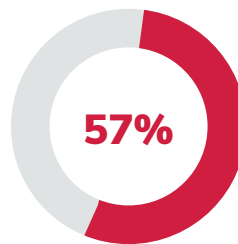
98% of STEP alumni would recommend STEP to current Ohio State students.



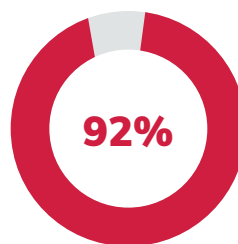
94% of STEP alumni found the STEP Signature Project to be moderately or extremely valuable.



77% of STEP alumni were better able to translate their college experiences as relevant skills to employers as a result of participating in STEP.



57% of STEP alumni reported highlighting their STEP Signature Projects in a job interview.



92% of STEP alumni increased their confidence in talking to a supervisor or mentor.



Key Quotes from STEP Alumni



“My relationship with my STEP mentor was very supportive and encouraging in my second year at school when I otherwise wouldn’t have gone out of my way to get to know my professors on a personal level. The opportunity I gained from the program felt like a once in a lifetime experience.”

[The STEP Signature Project]... “allowed me to work in a field I would have never been able to and exposed me to marine biological research and field work, which has influenced the entire direction of my career.”

“STEP is a great opportunity that allows you to explore your passions and potentially turn them into a career. Going into STEP I had a general idea of what I wanted to do, but that changed over the course of the year. The internship I ended up completing transformed me. I built so many great relationships, honed my skills, and learned more about my industry.”

“College is more than just taking courses on campus. Through the STEP program, not only will you learn about the many opportunities offered by OSU, but you may be able to fulfill a lifelong goal or dream, like I did when I studied abroad.”



References

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

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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.





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