Bridging Success: An evaluation of a program for foster care alumni

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Background

Some children and youth placed in foster care are separated from parents or their family of origin for only a short time, maybe a few days or weeks, before being reunified with their families. Some, however, are unfortunately never provided with a stable placement or adopted and turn 18 while still part of the child welfare system (age out of care). It is also not uncommon for children and youth in foster care to experience multiple placements and potentially transfers between schools and neighborhoods.[1] This lack of stability and disruption can lead to poor educational outcomes like lower academic grades and test scores, the need to repeat a grade, or potentially dropping out of school.[2] There is also evidence that youth who have experienced foster care have lower rates of obtaining a high school degree or GED.[3]

Despite all of these challenges, most children and youth who have been in foster care still want to go to college, with more than 80% reporting they want to complete a four-year degree or higher.[4] However, an Arizona-based analysis of outcomes for foster care youth (Barrat et al., 2015) found that only 33% of foster care youth graduated grade 12 in the 2012-2013 school year compared to 78% of the general student population. Another study (Courtney et al., 2011) found that by age 26, only 11% of women formerly in foster care and 5% of men formerly in foster care had graduated from a two- or four-year postsecondary school.[5,6]

Students who graduate from college are conferred with many benefits, including higher income potential, increased job satisfaction, and a lower likelihood of experiencing poverty or being unemployed.[7]

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[1] Barrat, V. X., Berliner, B., & Felida, N. J. (2015). Arizona's Invisible Achievement Gap: Education Outcomes of Students in Foster Care in the State's Public Schools. San Francisco: WestEd.
[2] Barrat, V. X., Berliner, B., & Felida, N. J. (2015). Arizona's Invisible Achievement Gap: Education Outcomes of Students in Foster Care in the State's Public Schools. San Francisco: WestEd.
[3] Barrat, V. X., Berliner, B., & Felida, N. J. (2015). Arizona's Invisible Achievement Gap: Education Outcomes of Students in Foster Care in the State's Public Schools. San Francisco: WestEd.
[4] Courtney, M. E., Okpych, N. J., Charles, P., Mikell, D., Stevenson, B., Park, K., Kindle, B., Harty, J., & Feng, H. (2016). Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH): Conditions of Youth at Age 19. www.chapinhall.org
[5] Barrat, V. X., Berliner, B., & Felida, N. J. (2015). Arizona's Invisible Achievement Gap: Education Outcomes of Students in Foster Care in the State's Public Schools. San Francisco: WestEd.
[6] Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Brown, A., Cary, C., Love, K., & Vorhies, V. (2011). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 26*. www.chapinhall.org
[7] Trostel, P., & Chase, M. (n.d.). It's not just the Money the Benefits of College Education to Individuals and to Society.

Upon passage of Arizona Senate Bill 1208 in 2013, it became a requirement for all state universities and community colleges to provide a tuition waiver for young people who experienced foster care after age 16 (amended to age 14 in 2018). In response to this bill, Arizona State University's Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions and ASU School of Social Work created the Bridging Success program to help foster care alumni (youth formerly in foster care) to overcome barriers to college enrollment, persistence, and graduation. The faculty and staff involved in the program work to identify and build upon a student's internal and external strengths and resources, create a sense of hope about what is possible, and collaborate with students to accomplish their goals. The primary goal of Bridging Success is to expand access to postsecondary education for foster care alumni. The program seeks to accomplish this through many activities, including community presentations, supporting foster care alumni in applying for postsecondary education and financial aid, one-on-one coaching, and a week-long residential transition to college program for entering students

As of 2021, the Bridging Success program has served seven cohorts representing more than 500 students. At this point in the program, an evaluation of the program's initial efforts and outcomes can provide useful feedback on how the program is working and areas of potential opportunities. Using the logic model as a guide, qualitative and quantitative data were considered to provide information on the impacts and outcomes of the program across the first three cohorts over the first six years of the program (2015-2021). This initial assessment provides baseline programmatic data for continued tracking over time and qualitative feedback from students who have been involved with the program as to the usefulness of different program components.

Methods

Analysis of ASU institutional data

Definitions and inclusion criteria for analysis:

- Program participants: Involvement in the Bridging Success program was defined as any participation, including communicating with program staff, attending events, or receiving mentorship.
- Eligible but did not participate: Non-participation in the program was defined as foster care alumni who were eligible for the Bridging Success program but did not participate in the program.
- The ASU general student population: Defined as all other students during the cohort study periods.
- When conducting the analysis, only students who were residents of Arizona were considered.

Graduation rates of students involved in the Bridging Success program were compared to graduation rates of students who were eligible but did not participate in the program and to the general ASU student population. Graduation was considered over six years (18 terms; fall, spring, and summer for each of the six years).

One-year retention of students involved in the Bridging Success program was compared to one-year retention rates of students who were eligible but did not participate in the program and to the general ASU student population.

Recruitment of students was considered during the first three cohorts of Bridging Success. Recruitment analysis included the first-time and transfer students who applied, were admitted, and enrolled at ASU.

Other metrics assessed using institutional data include the number of terms to degree attainment, the number of terms the student enrolled, the number of terms in student housing, and differences in cost of attendance versus gift aid and loans. All these items were analyzed for each group of interest (program participants, eligible but did not participate, and ASU general population).

Analysis of survey data

Eligibility for survey participation:

For students (and former students) to have been eligible to take the survey, the student must have demonstrated involvement with the Bridging Success program in some way, such as communicating with program staff via phone or email, participating in events, or receiving mentorship through the program. The survey was meant to provide feedback to the program staff about students' experiences. It was not intended to represent specific demographics, so a convenience sample was used.

Survey topics included questions regarding student experiences with peer mentoring, Likert scale self-assessment of knowledge following engagement with Bridging Success, and perception of the value of program elements, among other topics. For the complete survey questionnaire, please see the Appendix.

Results

Analysis of institutional data
General information

In our data, we had 79 students who participated in Bridging Success in some way across the first three cohorts. In addition, 88 students were eligible but chose not to participate in the

Bridging Success program. Finally, the general student population at ASU across the three cohorts was quite large: 31,423 students.

We looked at some high-level demographic and descriptive data for these three groups, including the proportion of full-time and part-time students, the share of first-time students and students who transferred to ASU, race and ethnicity, the average number of terms needed to complete a degree at ASU, the average age at entry to ASU, and information about financial aid and financial burden.

Average age upon entering ASU

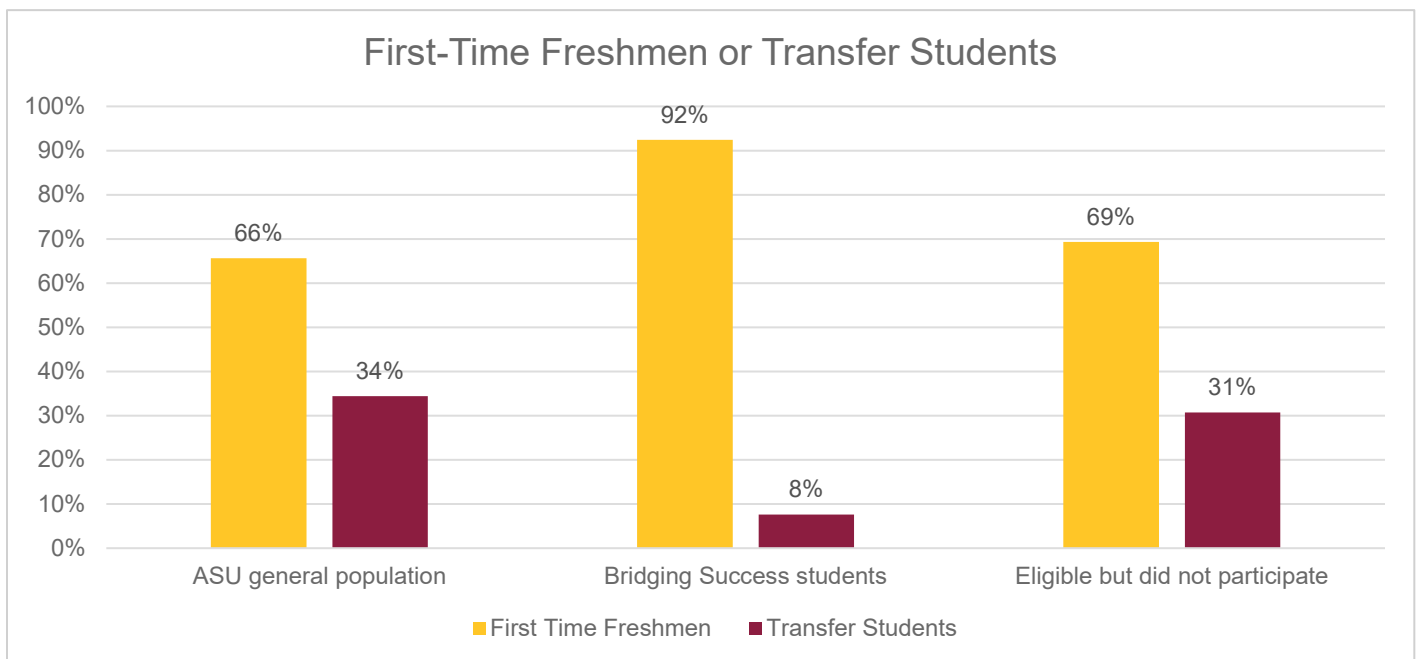| Student group	Average Age
Bridging Success participants	18.5
Eligible but did not participate	20.7
ASU general population	20.1

Race/Ethnicity

In the Bridging Success student group, there is a great deal of diversity, and the portion of this group that is Hispanic/Latino almost matches the portion of students who are white. Although the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) tracks race and ethnicity
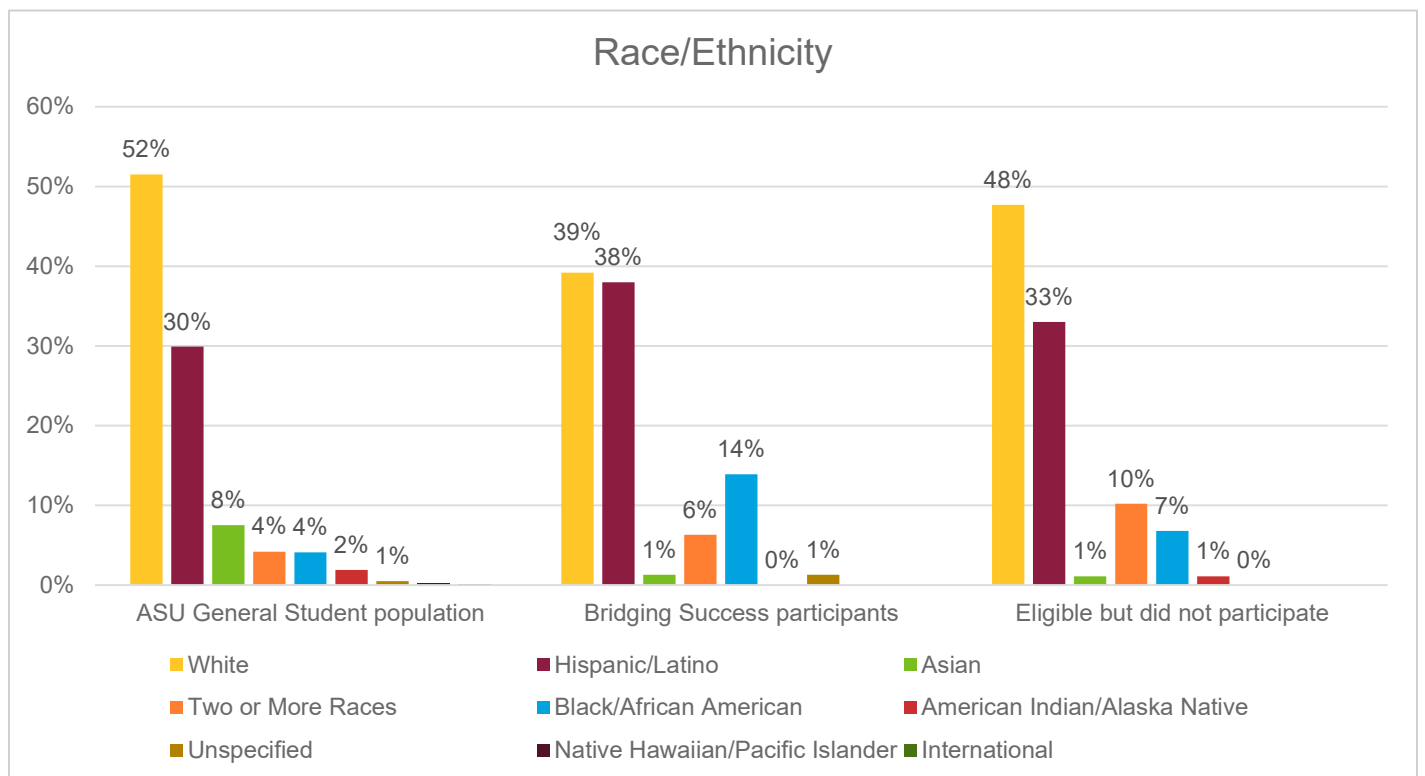
using slightly different categories from those presented here, the proportion of white, Hispanic, and Black/African American children involved in the foster care system track reasonably closely with the demographics presented here for Bridging Success participants. For example, in the fiscal year 2020, DCS reported that 33.3% of children in foster care were white, 33.4% in foster care were Hispanic, and 16.5% were African American.[8]

First-Time Freshman or Transfer Students
The proportion of Bridging Success students who are first-time freshmen starting their college career at ASU is much higher than the ASU general student population and the group of students who were eligible to participate in Bridging Success but did not.

Terms in residence halls
Bridging Success students, on average, stay in the residence halls longer than the other student group. There are three terms in each school year: Fall, Spring, and Summer.

Student group	Average terms in residence hall
Bridging Success participants	3.06
Eligible but did not participate	1.09
ASU general population	1.35

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[8] Arizona Department of Child Safety. (2022). Monthly Operational, Workforce, and Financial Report. https://dcs.az.gov/news-reports/performance-measures

One-year retention of students involved in the Bridging Success program was compared to graduation rates of students who were eligible but did not participate in the program and to the general ASU student population. It is interesting to note that those who were eligible but did not participate had significantly lower one-year retention rates when compared to both the general ASU population and the Bridging Success student groups. However, there was no statistical significance between the one-year retention rates for Bridging Success students and the ASU general student population.[9]
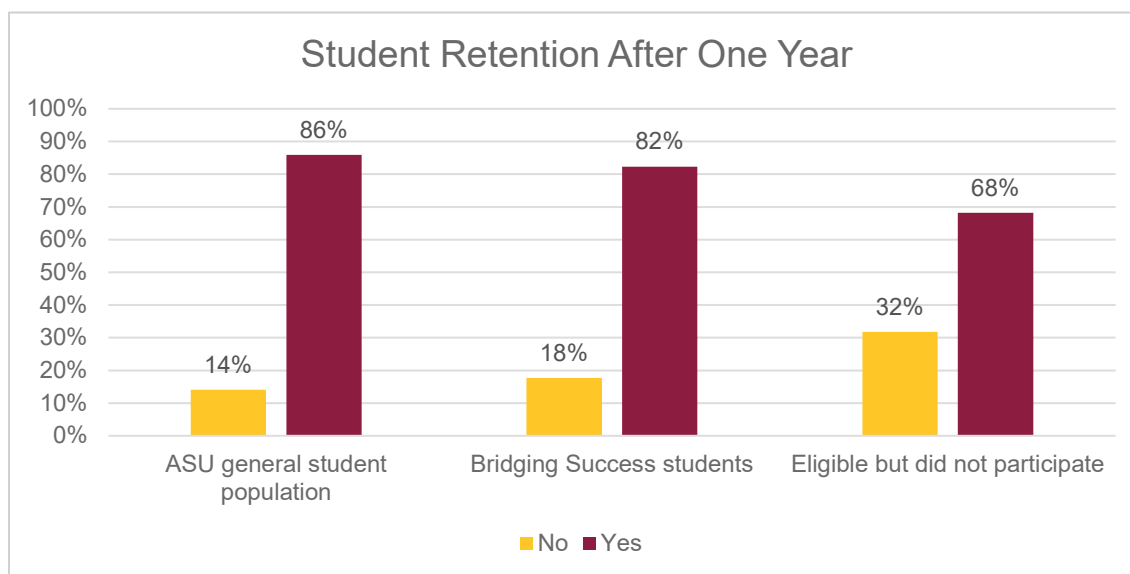
Student Retention After One Year

A bar chart showing student retention after one year for three groups. ASU general student population: No 14%, Yes 86%. Bridging Success students: No 18%, Yes 82%. Eligible but did not participate: No 32%, Yes 68%.

Graduation rates of students involved in the Bridging Success program were compared to graduation rates of students who were eligible but did not participate in the program and to the general ASU student population. Graduation was considered over six years, including 18 terms (fall, spring, and summer). There was no significant difference in Bridging Success students' graduation rates compared to students who were eligible but did not participate in the program. However, the ASU general student population's graduation rates were significantly higher than the other groups.[10]

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[9] Chi-square tests for association were conducted between student groups and retention after one year using IBM SPSS. All expected cell frequencies were greater than five. There was not a statistically significant difference between the ASU general student population student group and retention after one year when compared to the Bridging Success student group, $\chi 2(1) = 0.872$, $p = .350$. There was a statistically significant difference between the ASU general student population student group and retention after one year when compared to the eligible but did not participate in Bridging Success group, $\chi 2(1) = 22.824$, $p = .000$. Similarly, there was a statistically significant difference between Bridging Success students and retention after one year when compared to students who were eligible but did not participate in Bridging Success, $\chi 2(1) = 4.394$, $p = .036$.

[10] Chi-square tests for association were conducted between student groups and graduation in six years using IBM SPSS. All expected cell frequencies were greater than five. Graduation completion within six
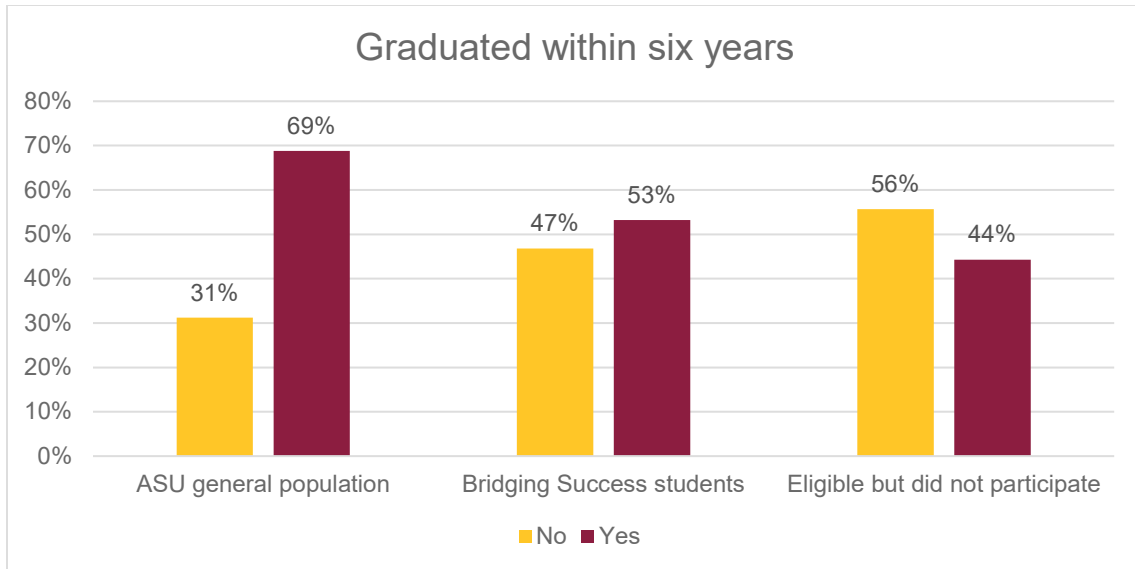
Terms to degree

On average, the Bridging Success students who graduate take 8.05 terms to complete a degree.[11]

Student group	Average terms to degree
Bridging Success participants	8.05
Eligible but did not participate	6.87
ASU general population	7.13

Recruitment of foster care alumni analysis includes the first three Bridging Success cohorts. The numbers of first-time and transfer students who have applied, been admitted, and enrolled at ASU were analyzed.

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years was significantly higher for the ASU general population compared to the Bridging Success student group, $\chi2(1) = 9.022$, $p = .003$, and compared to the eligible but did not participate in Bridging Success group, $\chi2(1) = 24.574$, $p = .000$. However, there was no statistically significant difference for graduation rates between Bridging Success students and students who were eligible but did not participate in Bridging Success, $\chi2(1) = 1.304$, $p = .253$.

[11] These data reflect only students who obtained a degree and excludes students who did not (for example, those who dropped out prior to obtaining a degree).

Admissions increase goal

15%
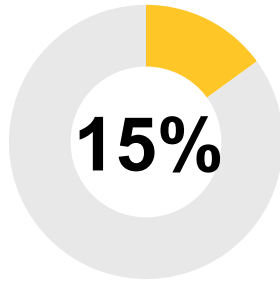
Admissions increase acheived

47%
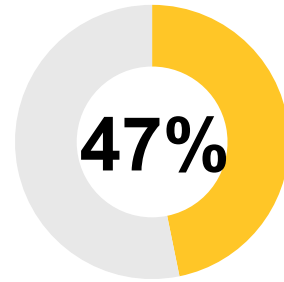
Enrollment increase goal

15%
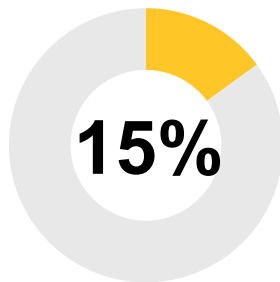
Enrollment increase achieved

31%
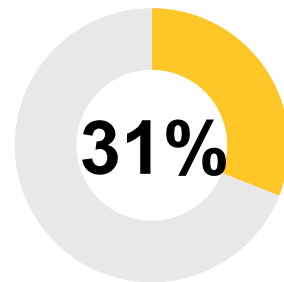
Transfer student increase goal

10%
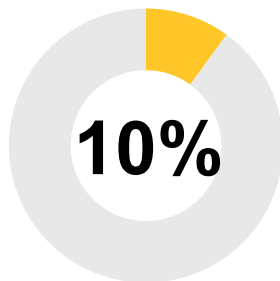
Transfer student increase achieved

25%
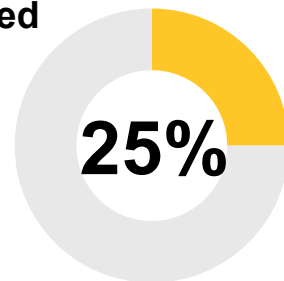
According to the logic model for the Bridging Success program, it has exceeded the goal of a 15% increase in the rate of admission and enrollment for first-time freshmen. Specifically, between the 2015 ASU school year and the 2021 ASU school year, the Bridging Success program has increased admission rates by 46.8% and has increased enrollment rates by 31%.

Additionally, a goal was established to increase transfer student attendance by 10%. Specifically, between the 2015 ASU school year and the 2021 ASU school year, the Bridging Success program increased the enrollment of transfer students by 25%.

Cost of Attendance was assessed using institutional data, including differences in cost of attendance and student loan indebtedness at graduation. All these items were analyzed for each group of interest (program participants, eligible but did not participate, and ASU general population).

Average Cost of Attendance
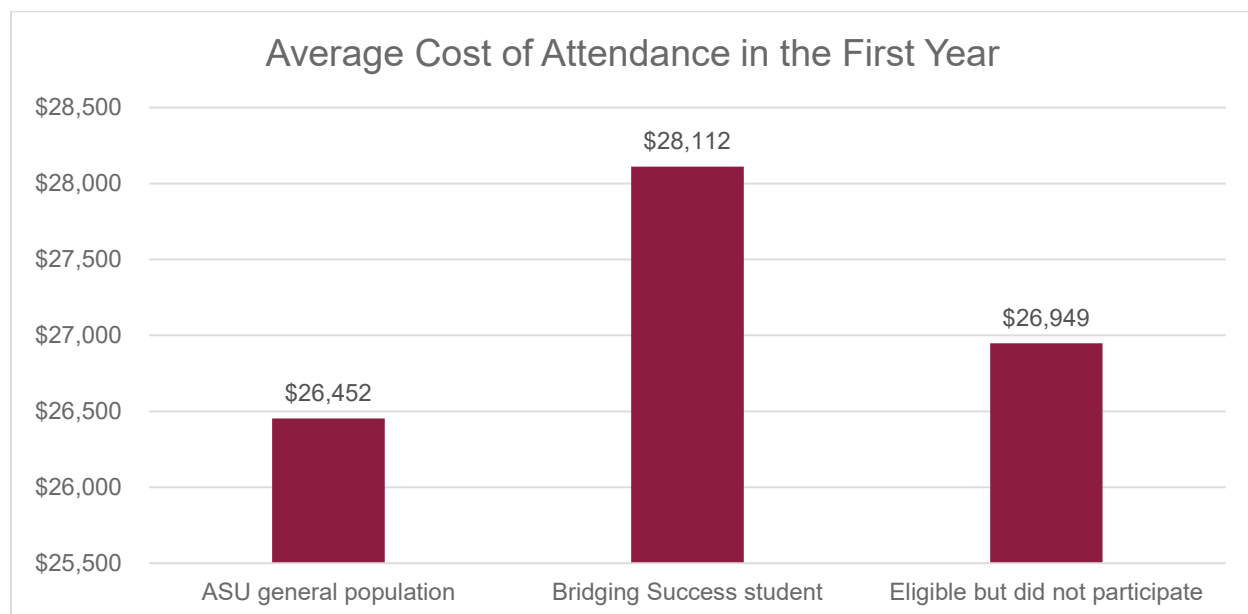
There were statistically significant differences in the cost of attendance between the Bridging Success students compared to students who were eligible but did not participate in the program and the ASU general student population. The ASU Office of Institutional Analysis calculated the cost of attendance, which reflects the cost the first year the student attended ASU. The ASU Office of Institutional Analysis calculates this for each student based on information provided in the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). It is based on tuition and fees, room and board, transportation, childcare costs, computer costs, loan fees, dental, medical, optical, books and supplies, and other miscellaneous costs a student might have during the school year. The cost of attendance group distribution for the Bridging Success students was higher than the group distribution for the ASU general student population or the eligible but did not participate in Bridging Success student population.[12]

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[12] Test of significance was performed using Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis test in IBM SPSS. The significance level was established at .05. A Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were differences in the distributions of cost of attendance in the first year between groups: the "Eligible but did not participate" (n = 83), "Bridging Success students" (n = 79), and "ASU general student population" (n = 29,358) student groups. Distributions of cost of attendance in the first year were not similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. The mean ranks of cost of

Average Student Loan Indebtedness at Graduation
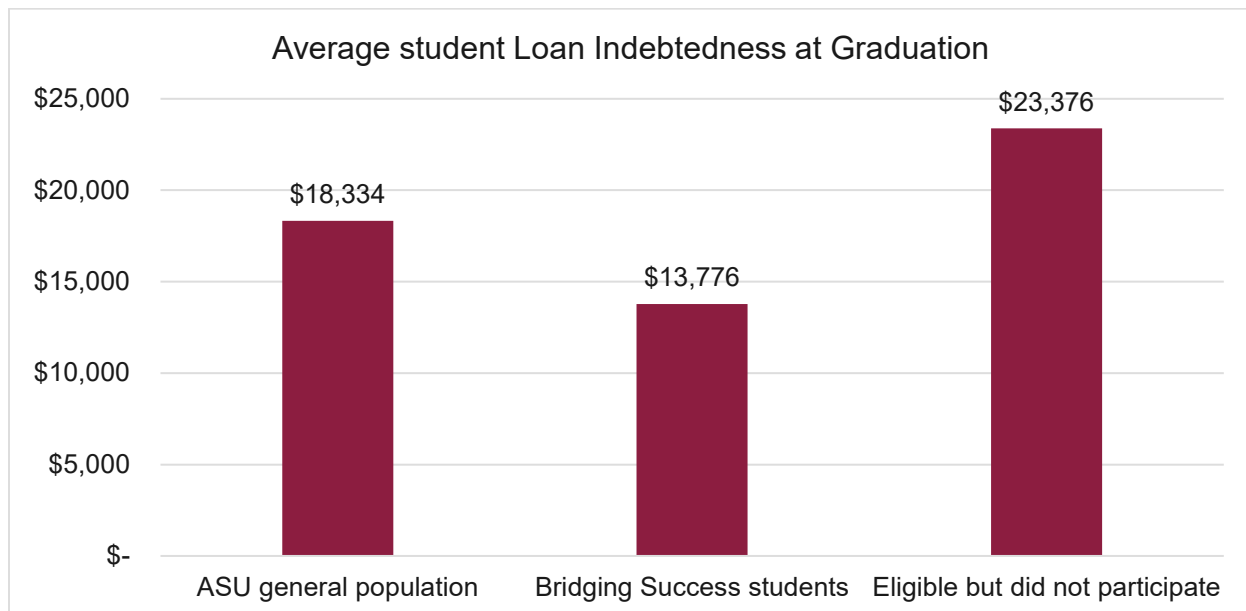
One noteworthy finding regarding this metric was that there was a statistically significant difference between the Bridging Success students' loan indebtedness at graduation when compared to the group that was eligible but did not participate in the program.[13] In general, the group distribution of student loan indebtedness at graduation was lower for the Bridging Success students as compared to the eligible but did not participate in

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attendance in the first year were statistically significantly different between groups, χ2(2) = 14.722, *p* = .001. Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted *p*-values are presented. Values are mean ranks unless otherwise stated. This post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in the distributions of cost of attendance in the first year between the "Eligible but did not participate" (13,988.31) and "Bridging Success students" (18,349.59) (*p* = .003) groups, and between the "ASU general student population" group (14,753.03) "Bridging Success students" (18,349.59) (*p* = .001), but not between the "ASU general student population" group (5,854.04) and the "Eligible but did not participate" (13,988.31) (*p* = 1.000).

[13] Test of significance was performed using Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis test in IBM SPSS. The significance level was established at .05. A Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if there were differences in the distributions of total student indebtedness at graduation between groups: the "Eligible but did not participate" (n = 28), "Bridging Success students" (n = 19), and "ASU general student population" (n = 11,660) student groups. Distributions of student loan indebtedness were not similar for all groups, as assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot. The mean ranks of student loan indebtedness were statistically significantly different between groups, χ2(2) = 7.968, *p* = .019. Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted *p*-values are presented. Values are mean ranks unless otherwise stated. This post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in the distributions of student indebtedness between the "Bridging Success students" (4,155.32) and "Eligible but did not participate" (6,990.57) (*p* = .014) groups, but not between the "ASU general student population" group (5,854.04) (*p* = .086) or any other group combination.

Bridging Success student group, but not when compared to the ASU general population student group.

Analysis of survey data

The survey was sent to 80 potential responders who had participated in the Bridging Success program. Out of these 80, 26 people completed the survey. The survey was put into the field in November 2021 and remained there for two months.

Demographics of survey respondents

The ages of survey respondents ranged from 20 to 27, with the average respondent age being 23. Most (74%) survey respondents identified as women. The ethnic/racial distribution of survey respondents is shown in the chart below. Respondents were able to identify with more than one ethnicity. However, no respondents identified themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.
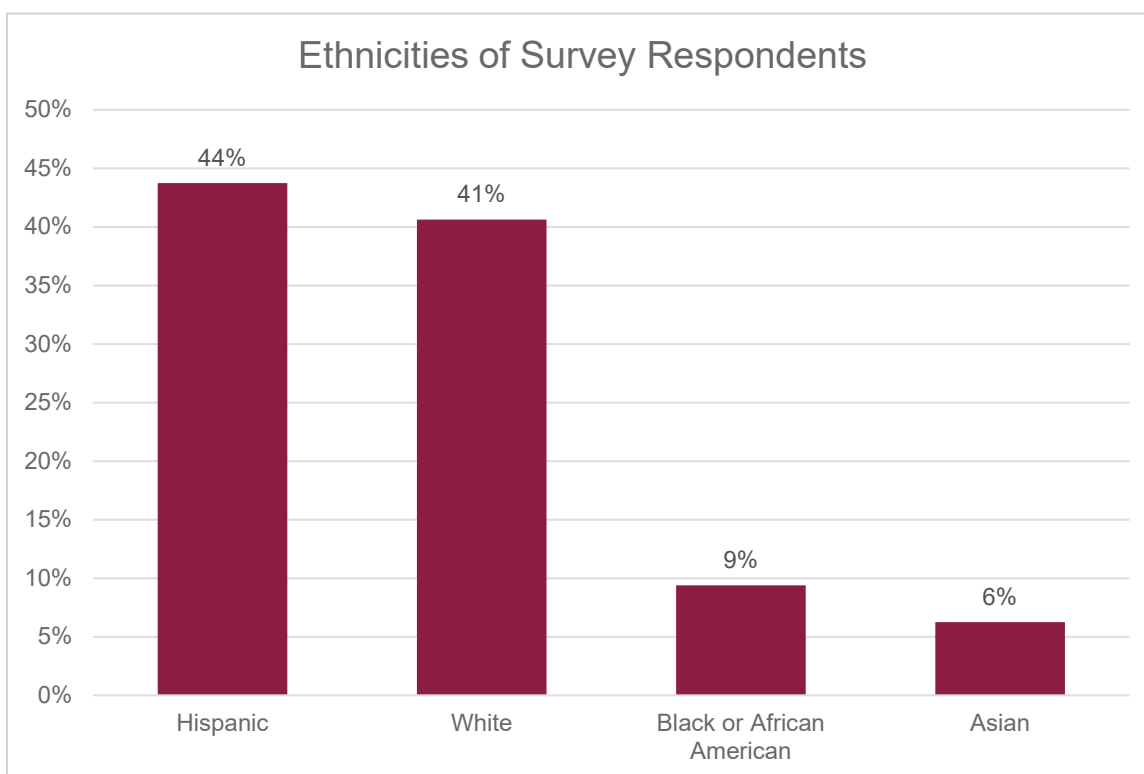
Only two of the 26 survey respondents transferred to ASU from a community college, and both transferred from the Maricopa Community College District.

When asked how survey respondents learned about the Bridging Success Program, responses indicated that the most common way students learned about the program was

by being contacted by a Bridging Success program representative. The respondents who indicated 'Not listed' (three of 26) said they learned about the program from ASU, Casey Family Programs, or a specific person. Respondents were allowed to select multiple ways they learned about the Bridging Success Program.

Ways Respondents Learned about Bridging Success

Category	Percent
Received an email, text, or phone call from Bridging Success	33%
Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS)	19%
ASU staff member	14%
Community organization (e.g. FosterEd, Keys to Success)	11%
Not listed	8%
A friend	6%
ASU website	6%
High School Counselor/Teacher	3%
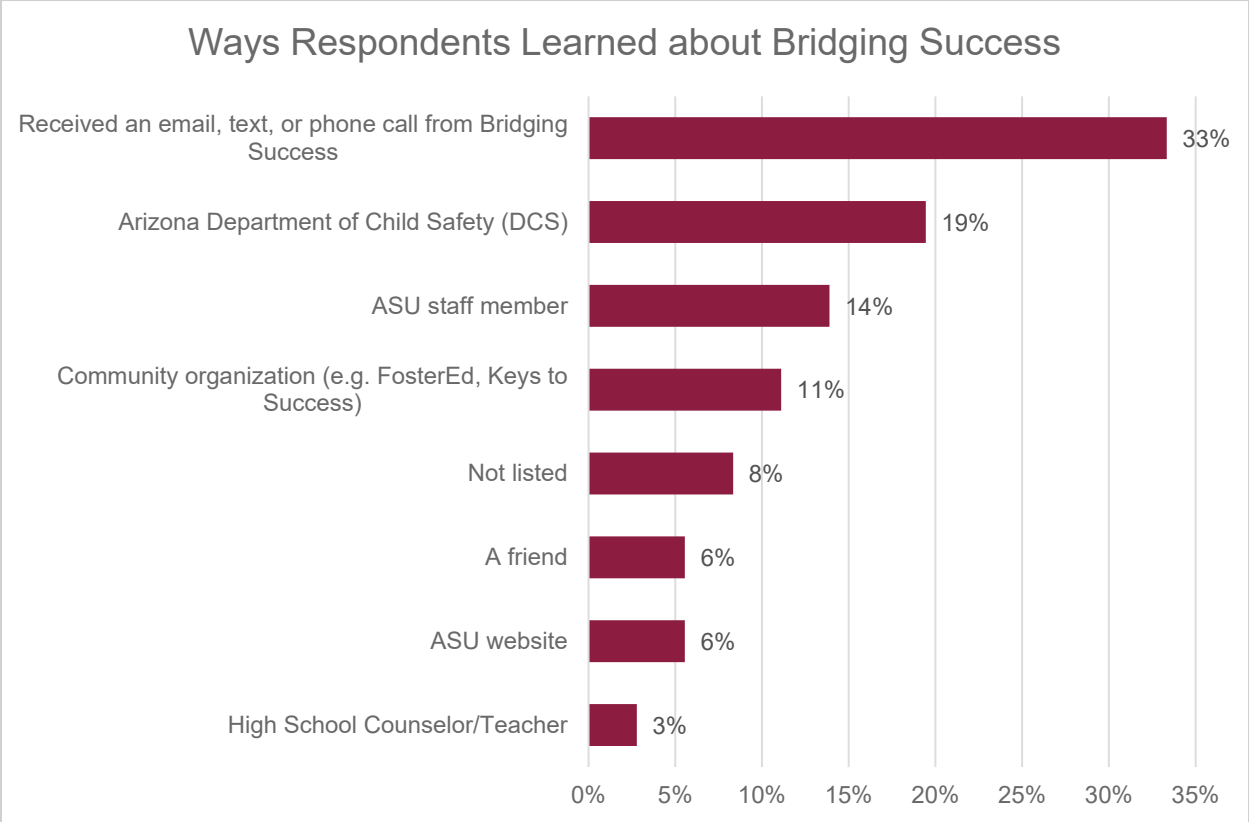
Engagement prior to starting ASU

When students engaged with the Bridging Success program before starting at ASU, it was most often through the Bridging Success Early Start program. Students also reported reaching out to staff members with questions, meeting with staff members, and touring the ASU campus. Survey respondents were allowed to indicate multiple ways of engaging with the Bridging Success program prior to starting ASU.

Engagement prior to starting ASU

Engagement	Percentage
I participated in Bridging Success Early Start	35%
I reached out to a Bridging Success staff member one or more times by email, text, or phone call with a question	18%
I received an email, text, or phone call from Bridging Success about ASU	16%
I met with a Bridging Success staff member	13%
I attended an on-campus tour hosted by Bridging Success	12%
I talked to a Bridging Success staff member at a community event	4%
Not listed	1%

Bridging Success Early Start (BSES)

BSES is a one-week program that brings entering students to the ASU campus one week before classes start to provide an immersive program to help give foster care alumni a head start with their transition to college.

This six-day, 40-hour program provides information to the students about available support at ASU. The BSES programming works to increase student awareness of services, provide guidance on how to access services, and combat the stigma that can be associated with accessing services. In addition, the BSES also provides information on how students can become more involved with student organizations, how to get a job on campus, and how to develop time management skills, among many other topics. BSES also provides a "starter community" for students where they can form relationships with other students who have similar backgrounds.

Out of 22 respondents, 17 agreed or strongly agreed that, as a result of BSES, they felt that support was available to help them through the admissions process.

I felt support was available to help me through the admissions process.

5% Strongly disagree	5% Disagree	14% Neutral	23% Agree	55% Strongly agree

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree
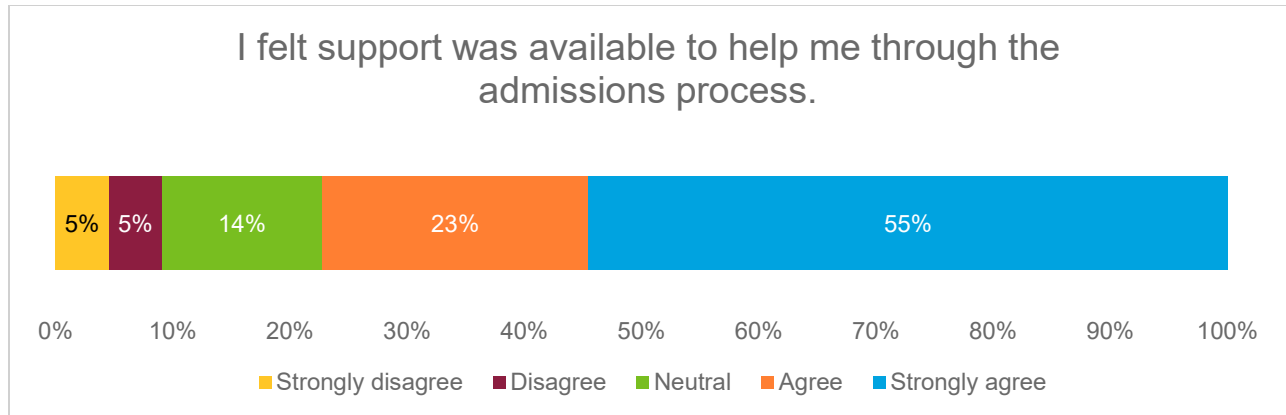
Financial aid

The BSES program has a specific workshop on financial aid. When asked how valuable this component was, 17 of 21 respondents (about 75%) indicated that they felt this workshop component was either moderately or very valuable.

The BSES program also offers students an individual appointment with an ASU financial aid representative. When asked how valuable this component was, 14 of 21 respondents (about 67%) indicated that this component of the program was either moderately or very valuable.

When asked about the impacts of the financial aid components, 18 out of 22 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that, as a result of BSES, they felt that their understanding of financial aid increased.

My understanding of financial aid increased.

5% Strongly disagree	5% Disagree	9% Neutral	18% Agree	64% Strongly agree

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

Out of 22 respondents, 19 agreed or strongly agreed that, as a result of BSES, they felt that support was available to help them through the financial aid process.

I felt support was available to help me through the financial aid process.

5%	Strongly disagree
9%	Neutral
18%	Agree
68%	Strongly agree

Strongly disagree ▪ Disagree ▪ Neutral ▪ Agree ▪ Strongly agree

Enrollment process

Out of 21 respondents, 15 agreed or strongly agreed that, as a result of BSES, they felt that their understanding of the process of enrolling at ASU increased.

My understanding of the process of enrolling at ASU increased.

5% | 5% | 19% | 24% | 48%

Strongly disagree ▪ Disagree ▪ Neutral ▪ Agree ▪ Strongly agree

Out of 22 respondents, 16 agreed or strongly agreed that, as a result of BSES, they felt that support was available to help them through the enrollment process at ASU.
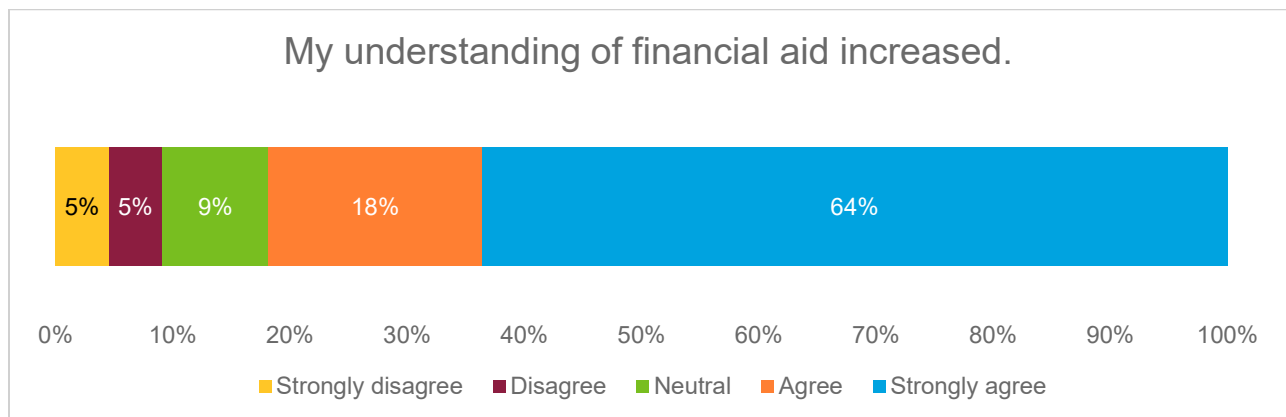
I felt support was available to help me through the enrollment process.

5% | 5% | 18% | 27% | 45%

Strongly disagree ▪ Disagree ▪ Neutral ▪ Agree ▪ Strongly agree

ASU resources

The BSES program has a specific workshop on resources at ASU. When asked how valuable this component was, 20 of 21 respondents (about 95%) indicated that they felt this workshop component was either moderately or very valuable.
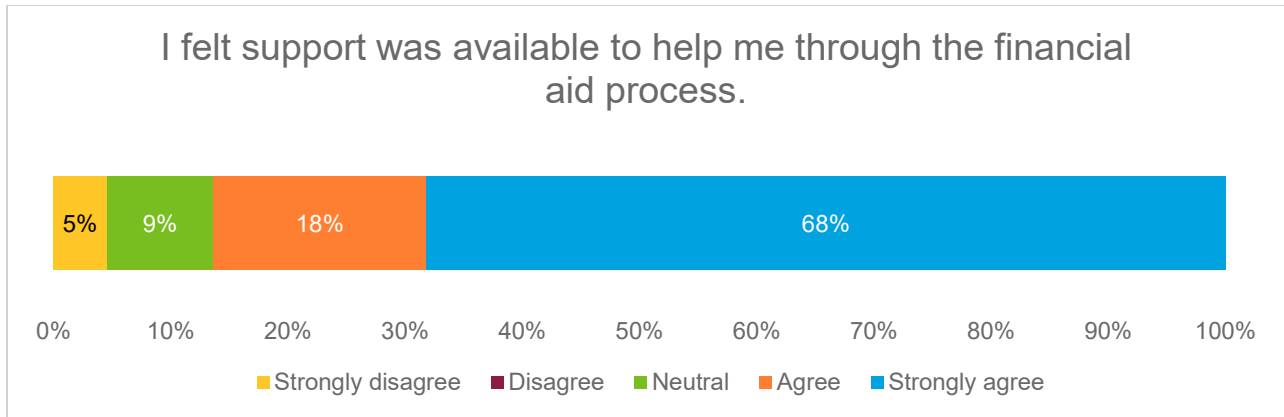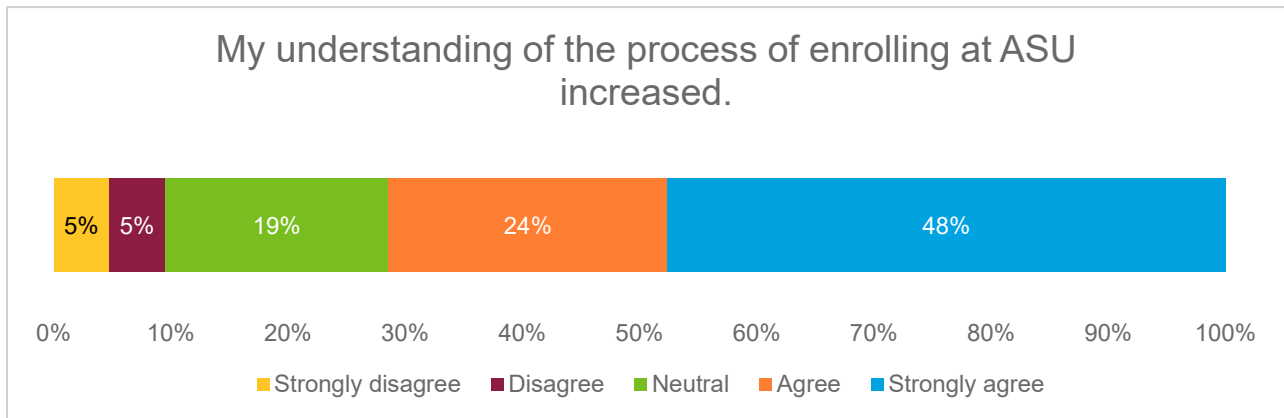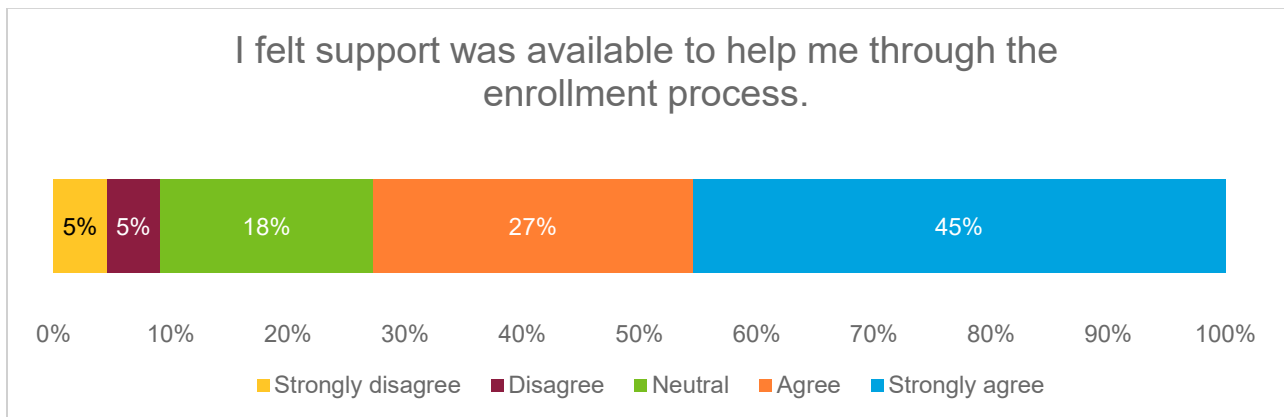
Additionally, the BSES program has a specific workshop on ASU tutoring and writing centers. When asked how valuable this component was, 17 of 21 respondents (81%) indicated that they felt this component was either moderately or very valuable.

Out of 22 respondents, 20 agreed or strongly agreed that, as a result of BSES, they felt that their understanding of academic support resources at ASU increased.

My understanding of available academic support resources increased.

Disagree 5%	Neutral 5%	Agree 18%	Strongly agree 73%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree
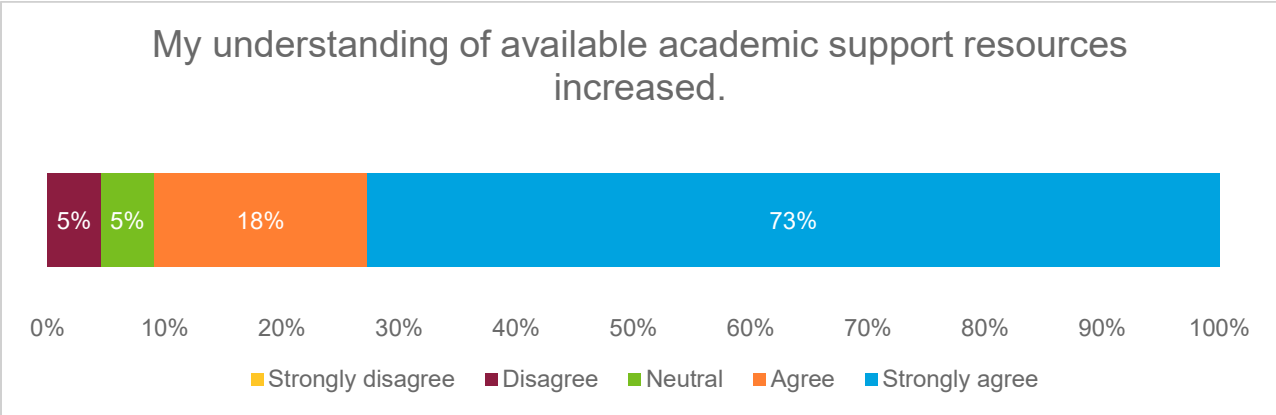
Out of 21 respondents, 18 agreed or strongly agreed that, as a result of BSES, they felt that their understanding of mental health resources available at ASU increased.

My understanding of resources available to support my mental health needs increased.

Strongly disagree 5%	Neutral 10%	Agree 14%	Strongly agree 71%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree
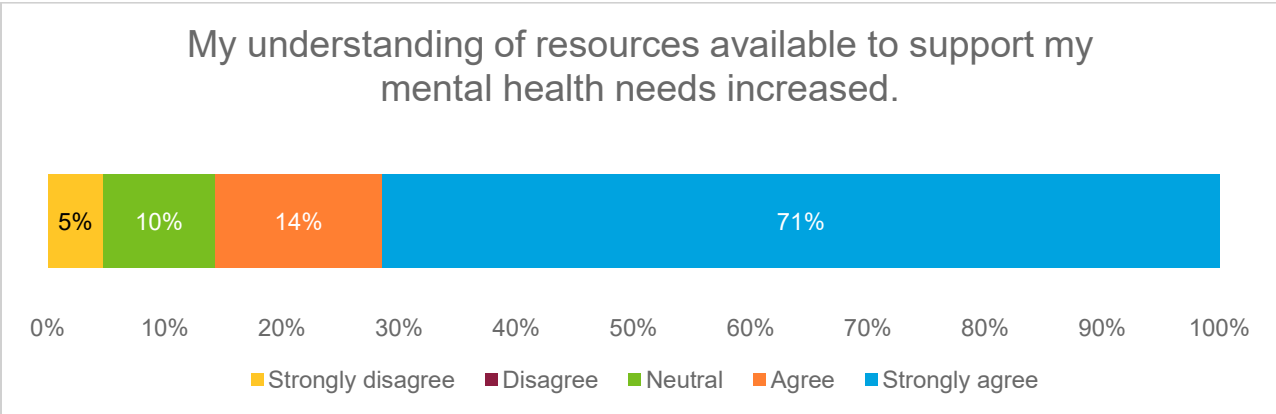
Understanding of ASU social opportunities

Out of 22 respondents, 18 agreed or strongly agreed that, as a result of BSES, they felt that their understanding of ways to become more involved with ASU's social opportunities increased.

My understanding of ways to become more involved with ASU's social opportunities increased.

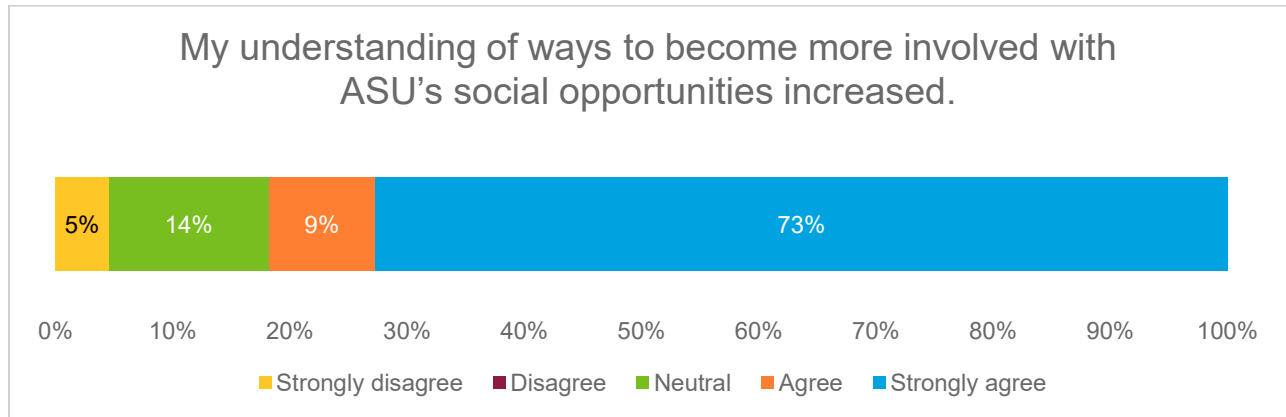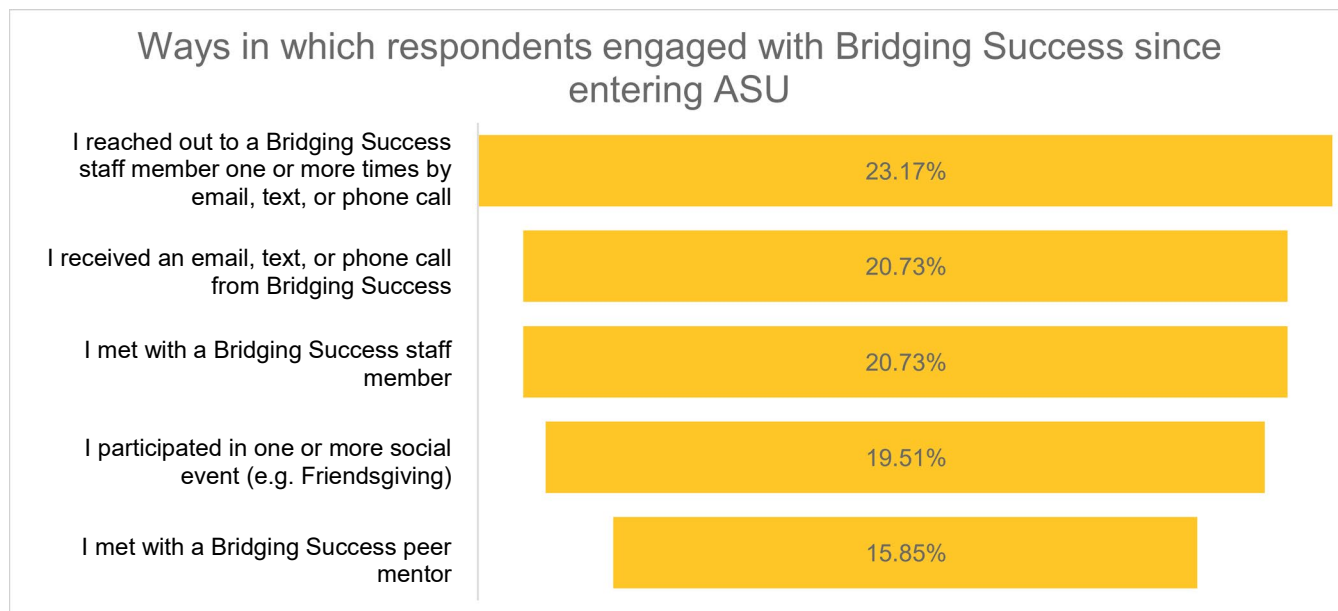|			
5%	14%	9%	73%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

Perceptions of the value of other BSES components

- *Being connected before ASU*: When asked how valuable this component was, 20 of 21 (95%) responded that this component was either moderately or very valuable.
- *Being connected to students with foster care background*: When asked how valuable it was to be connected to a community of students with a foster care background (similar to respondent), 19 of 21 (90%) responded that this component was either moderately or very valuable.
- *Workshop on MyASU*: MyASU is a personal homepage for students where they can see class schedules and grades, find financial information, and more. When asked how valuable this component was, 18 of 21 (85%) responded that this component was either moderately or very valuable.
- *Workshops on academic success*: When asked how valuable this component was, 15 of 20 (75%) responded that this component was either moderately or very valuable.

Engagement after starting ASU

The survey also asked respondents how they engaged with the Bridging Success program after starting at ASU. Respondents were allowed to select multiple items, and as seen in the chart below, there was fairly equal participation in several activities.

Ways in which respondents engaged with Bridging Success since entering ASU

Category	Percentage
I reached out to a Bridging Success staff member one or more times by email, text, or phone call	23.17%
I received an email, text, or phone call from Bridging Success	20.73%
I met with a Bridging Success staff member	20.73%
I participated in one or more social event (e.g. Friendsgiving)	19.51%
I met with a Bridging Success peer mentor	15.85%

Peer mentor component

Although only a subset of Bridging Success students participated in the peer mentor component of the program, we received valuable feedback about those experiences. Thirteen survey respondents met with a peer mentor during their time at ASU, and nine out of 13 (about 70%) reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that meeting with a peer mentor was helpful. However, two students reported they felt "neutral" about meeting with a peer mentor, and two students strongly disagreed with the idea that meeting with a peer mentor was helpful.

As part of the survey, respondents were asked an open response question to elicit more details about their experiences meeting with peer mentors. Two trends emerged from the qualitative responses. Four of the six survey respondents provided feedback that meeting with a peer mentor helped with the mental and emotional aspects of college. For example, when asked about experiences meeting with a peer mentor, one respondent responded, "…I personally felt that they made my stress and anxiety much easier to cope with. I am grateful for them and will always be."

Three of the six survey respondents mentioned that it was helpful to have a connection with someone who shared the same background and college experiences but was a little further along at college and could provide some guidance or tips.

We also asked former peer mentors about their experiences. While only six survey respondents had this experience, five out of six reported that they agreed or strongly

agreed with the statement, "As a peer mentor, I felt like I had an impact on Bridging Success Students." One survey respondent strongly disagreed with that statement.

Bridging Success staff

The survey included a section asking students about their experiences with Bridging Success staff members. When respondents indicated they had met with a Bridging Success staff member, they were prompted with a follow-up question to ask how helpful that meeting was. Out of the 17 students who responded to this question, 15 respondents (88%) indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that meeting with a Bridging Success staff member was helpful.
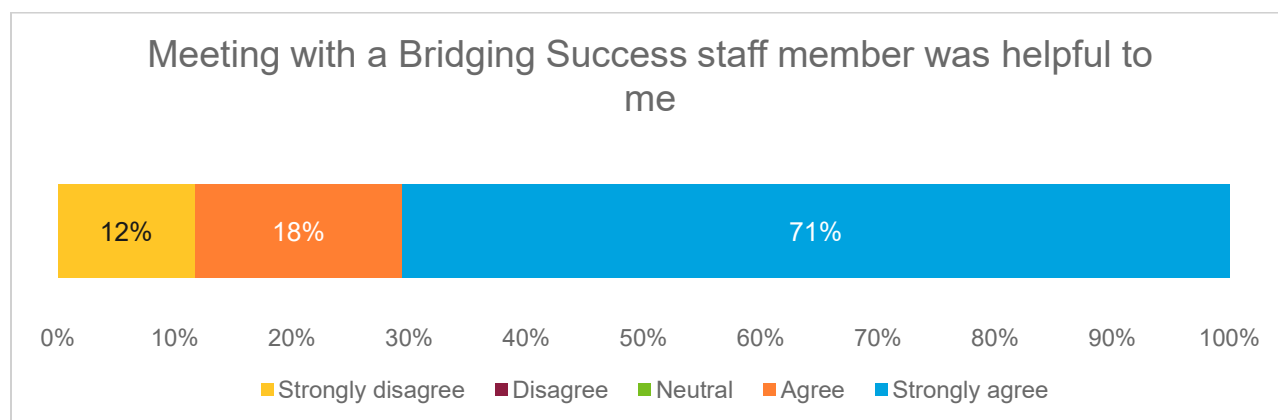
The survey respondents were prompted to provide more details about their experiences meeting with staff, and two trends emerged from the qualitative responses. The most prevalent trend, eight of 12 students, indicated that Bridging Success staff members helped them with emotional support and motivation by making the student 'feel heard' and 'cared for and supported.'

One student's response provided an excellent example of the lengths to which Bridging Success staff members went to help the students by saying:

> "Throughout my undergraduate and graduate career, I went to [staff member] for everything. When I had questions about school, or was dealing with something in my personal life. She was always a great listener and understood that my personal life impacted my academic life. If I was having a financial aid issue, she would connect me with that office, or if I was dealing with a situation in class, she would help me brainstorm how to talk to my professor or how to handle the situation. She always checked in on me (and still does), and always lent a hand. When I moved into my first apartment, she helped me find ways to furnish it, and even
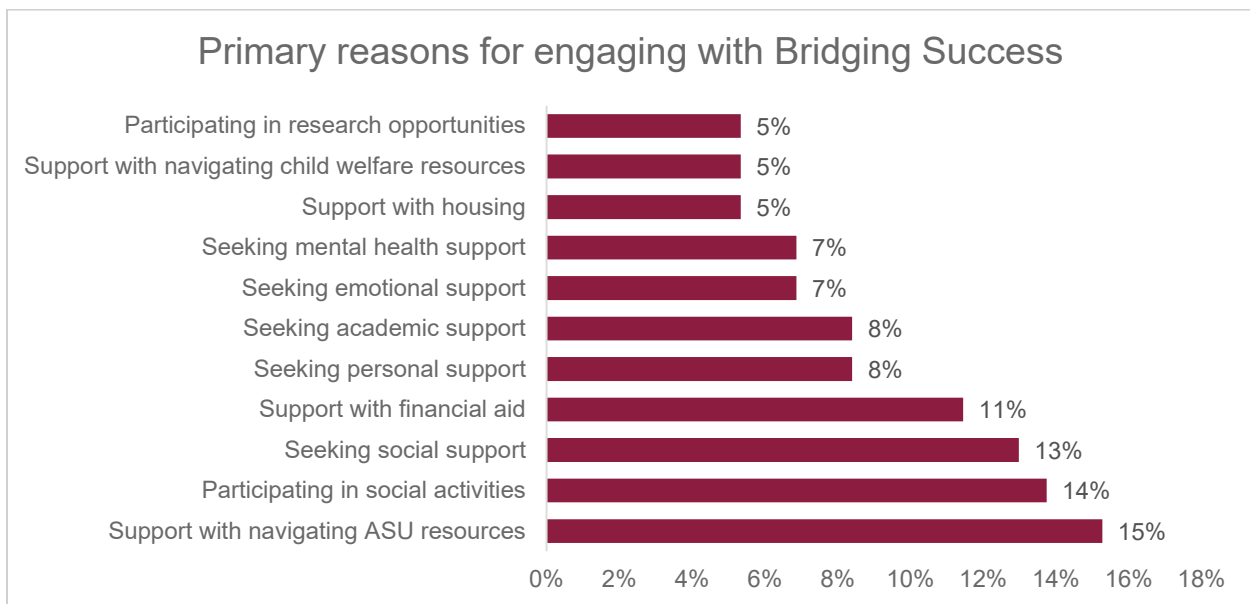
helped me move, having her support and guidance made me feel like I had what other youth had - a supportive adult there for me throughout all life's transitions."

The second trend that emerged from the qualitative responses was that the Bridging Success staff members helped the students solve problems and access resources they needed.

Overall sentiments about Bridging Success and reasons for engaging

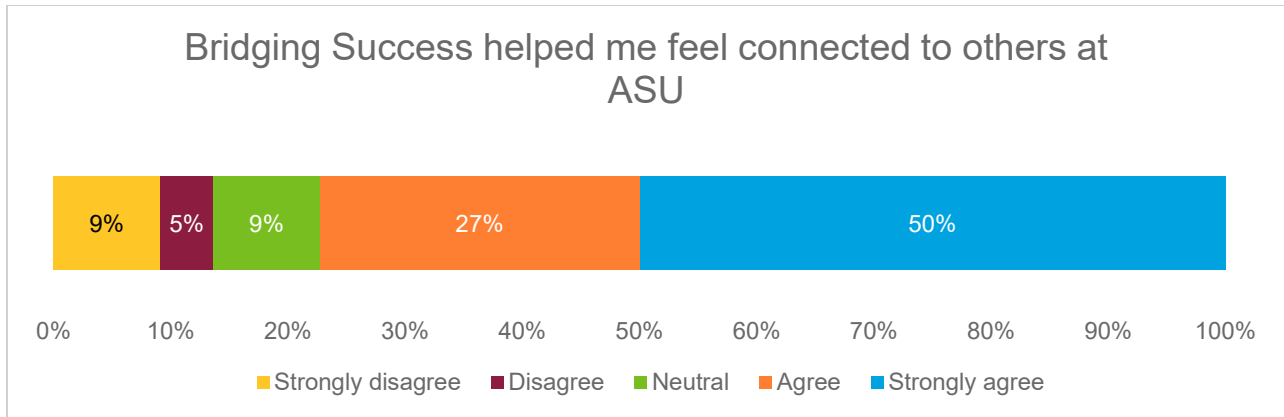### *Reasons for engaging with Bridging Success*
Survey respondents were asked their primary reasons for engaging with the Bridging Success program and were allowed to select multiple reasons. The most-selected reason was support with navigating ASU resources, followed by participating in social activities.

Primary reasons for engaging with Bridging Success

Reason	Percentage
Participating in research opportunities	5%
Support with navigating child welfare resources	5%
Support with housing	5%
Seeking mental health support	7%
Seeking emotional support	7%
Seeking academic support	8%
Seeking personal support	8%
Support with financial aid	11%
Seeking social support	13%
Participating in social activities	14%
Support with navigating ASU resources	15%

Feeling supported and connected
The overwhelming majority (82%) of students indicated that they had developed a personalized support system (18 of 22 respondents). Three respondents said they were unsure if they had developed personalized support systems, and one student responded that they had not developed a personalized support system.

Similarly, 77% of survey respondents (18 of 22) indicated that Bridging Success helped them feel connected to others at ASU.

Bridging Success helped me feel connected to others at ASU

9%	Strongly disagree
5%	Disagree
9%	Neutral
27%	Agree
50%	Strongly agree

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

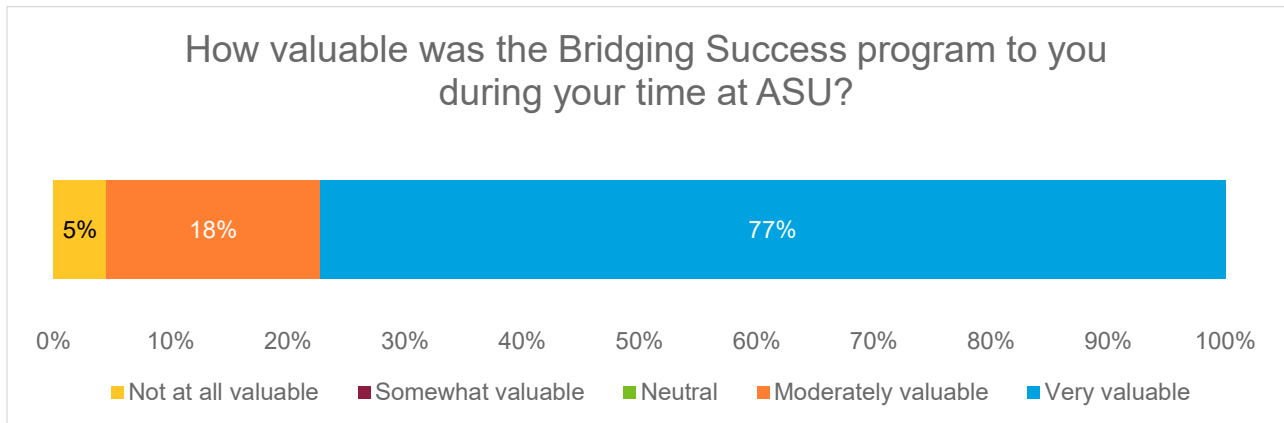An even greater percentage, 95% of survey respondents, indicated that they felt supported or very supported by the Bridging Success program during their time at ASU (21 of 22 respondents).

How supported did you feel by the Bridging Success program during your time at ASU?

5%	Supported very little
23%	Supported
73%	Very supported

■ Not supported at all ■ Supported very little ■ Neutral ■ Supported ■ Very supported
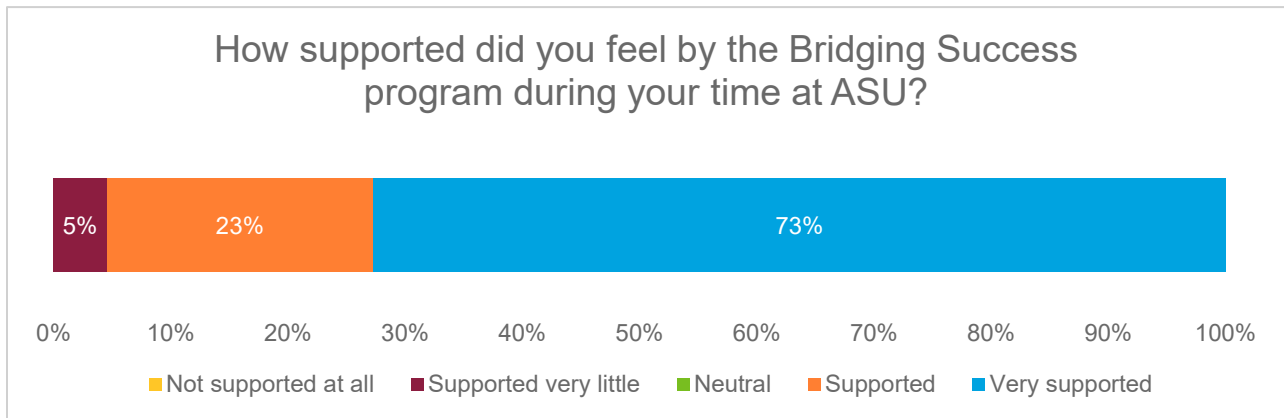
In general, survey respondents found the Bridging Success program to be valuable. Specifically, 95% of survey respondents (21 of 22) indicated that the Bridging Success program was either moderately or very valuable to them during their time at ASU.

How valuable was the Bridging Success program to you during your time at ASU?

5%	Not at all valuable
18%	Moderately valuable
77%	Very valuable

■ Not at all valuable ■ Somewhat valuable ■ Neutral ■ Moderately valuable ■ Very valuable

Continuous Improvement

In reviewing open-ended feedback from survey respondents, three trends emerged: students indicated they would like to have some sort of support as alumni of the Bridging Success program (three of 17 respondents who provided feedback), more check-ins were desired during the program (two of 17 respondents who provided feedback), and an option to obtain therapy separate from ASU services was suggested (two of 17 respondents who provided feedback). The most prominent trend was the desire to have an ongoing connection to the Bridging Success program after it ends.

Overall, the open-ended feedback provided glowing reviews about the Bridging Success program, even in the section that asked how the program could be improved. When asked about their favorite aspects of the program, two prominent trends emerged: the ability to connect with others who had a similar background and experiences (seven of 22 respondents mentioned this), and that the students felt supported in the Bridging Success program (six of 22 respondents mentioned this).

Discussion

Generally, students who engaged with the Bridging Success program reported increased understanding of the topics covered. They felt supported by the Bridging Success program and thought it was valuable. Additionally, Bridging Success students had better one-year retention rates and graduated with less student loan debt than students who were eligible but did not participate.

At the same time, Bridging Success students had a significantly higher cost of attendance in the first year compared to both the ASU general student population and the students who were eligible but chose not to participate in the program. However, there was lower student loan indebtedness at graduation for Bridging Success students than for the students who were eligible but did not participate. Additionally, there was no significant difference between the graduation rates of the Bridging Success students compared to the students who were eligible but did not participate in the program. Although the differences in graduation rates in this sample were not significant, it is worth noting that the graduation rates of foster care alumni at ASU are higher than what has been observed nationally. According to a 2016 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, only 31% of former foster youth who started college in 2003-2004 obtained a degree by June 2009, compared to 51% of all other students.[14]

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[14] U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2016). Higher education: Actions needed to improve access to federal financial assistance for homeless and foster youth. www.gao.gov/assets/680/677325.pdf

Recommendations

Track retention between years. Although not conducted as part of this analysis and therefore a limitation of this evaluation, it would be helpful to see the retention rates between the different student groups across the six years to potential graduation. This data could help the Bridging Success program determine if there are any specific years during which student retention drops and could inform programming and outreach to retain students.

Conduct interviews with individuals who drop out prior to graduating. Interviews of this kind could help provide insights into the circumstances that prevented students from graduating and allow Bridging Success to identify areas where support could be increased.

Therapy separate from ASU counseling services. Some qualitative feedback received from the survey indicated that students would like to receive therapy separate from ASU counseling. Feedback indicated that counselors who had specific training in working with former foster youth would have been helpful.

Continue to provide ongoing outreach and support to Bridging Success alumni. Based on qualitative feedback from the surveys, Bridging Success alumni would like a way to continue receiving support after graduation. Although this results in increased staff member activities when staff is already limited, providing ongoing outreach and support to Bridging Success alumni may help students transition out of college and into the workforce.

Appendix A: Bridging Success Survey

What is your race/ethnicity? Select all that apply.

☐   White (1)

☐   Black or African American (2)

☐   American Indian or Alaska Native (3)

☐   Asian (4)

☐   Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)

☐   Hispanic (6)

What is your age?

▼ 18 (103) ... 35+ (120)

What is your gender?

○ Man (1)

○ Woman (2)

○ Non-binary (3)

○ Not listed (4)

Have you been a peer mentor in Bridging Success?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement:
As a peer mentor, I felt like I had an impact on Bridging Success students.

- ○ Strongly disagree (1)

- ○ Disagree (2)

- ○ Neutral (3)

- ○ Agree (4)

- ○ Strongly agree (5)

Did you transfer to ASU from another college?

- ○ Yes (1)

- ○ No (2)

Which community college district or college did you transfer to ASU from?

- ○ Maricopa Community College District (1)

- ○ Pima Community College District (2)

- ○ Coconino Community College (3)

- ○ University of Arizona (4)

- ○ Northern Arizona University (5)

- ○ Out-of-state community college (6)

- ○ Not listed, please specify: (7)
  _____

How did you find out about the Bridging Success program? Select all that apply.

☐ Received an email, text, or phone call from Bridging Success (1)

☐ Community event (2)

☐ High School Counselor/Teacher (3)

☐ ASU website (4)

☐ Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) (5)

☐ Community organization (e.g. FosterEd, Keys to Success) (6)

☐ ASU staff member (7)

☐ A friend (8)

☐ Not listed, please specify: (9)

_____

Please select the ways that you engaged with Bridging Success **prior to entering ASU.** Select all that apply

☐ I participated in Bridging Success Early Start (10)

☐ I reached out to a Bridging Success staff member one or more times by email, text, or phone call with a question (1)

☐ I met with a Bridging Success staff member (2)

☐ I attended an on-campus tour hosted by Bridging Success (3)

☐ I received an email, text, or phone call from Bridging Success about ASU (4)

☐ I talked to a Bridging Success staff member at a community event (5)

☐ First Star ASU Academy (6)

- ☐ ⊗ I did not engage with Bridging Success prior to entering ASU (8)

- ☐ ⊗ Don't know/unsure (9)

- ☐ Not listed, please specify: (7)

Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: As a result of engaging with Bridging Success prior to entering ASU...	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
My understanding of the requirements for admission to ASU increased. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I felt support was available to help me through the admissions process. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
My understanding of financial aid increased. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I felt support was available to help me through the financial aid process. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
My understanding of the process of enrolling at ASU increased. (5)	○	○	○	○	○

I felt support was available to help me through the enrollment process. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
My understanding of available academic support resources increased. (7)	○	○	○	○	○
My understanding of resources available to support my mental health needs increased. (8)	○	○	○	○	○
My understanding of ways to become more involved with ASU's social opportunities increased. (9)	○	○	○	○	○

Did any adult in your life (e.g. foster parent, independent living specialist, case manager, etc.) have contact with Bridging Success staff **prior to you entering ASU?**

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Don't know/unsure (3)

During Bridging Success Early Start, how valuable did you find each of the following?

	Not at all valuable (1)	Somewhat valuable (2)	Neutral (3)	Moderately valuable (4)	Very valuable (5)
Individual appointment with ASU Financial Aid representative (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Workshops on academic success (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Workshop on financial aid (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Workshop on MyASU (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Workshop on ASU Tutoring and Writing Centers (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Workshops on resources at ASU (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Being connected to a community before starting at ASU (7)	○	○	○	○	○
Being connected to a community of students with a foster care background (8)	○	○	○	○	○

Please select the ways that you have engaged with Bridging Success **since entering ASU**. Select all that apply:

☐   I reached out to a Bridging Success staff member one or more times by email, text, or phone call (1)

☐   I received an email, text, or phone call from Bridging Success (2)

☐   I met with a Bridging Success staff member (3)

☐   I met with a Bridging Success peer mentor (4)

☐   I participated in one or more social event (e.g. Friendsgiving) (5)

☐   ⊗I have not engaged with Bridging Success since entering ASU (7)

☐   ⊗Don't know/unsure (8)

☐   Not listed, please specify: (6)

_____

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement: Meeting with a peer mentor was helpful to me.

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Neutral (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

Please provide more details about your experience(s) with a peer mentor:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement:
Meeting with a Bridging Success staff member was helpful to me.

○ Strongly disagree (1)

○ Disagree (2)

○ Neutral (3)

○ Agree (4)

○ Strongly agree (5)

Please provide more details about your experience(s) with a Bridging Success staff member:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What were your primary reasons for engaging with Bridging Success? Select all that apply:

- [ ] Support with housing (1)

- [ ] Support with financial aid (2)

- [ ] Support with navigating ASU resources (3)

- [ ] Support with navigating child welfare resources (4)

- [ ] Seeking emotional support (5)

- [ ] Seeking mental health support (6)

- [ ] Seeking social support (7)

- [ ] Seeking personal support (8)

- [ ] Seeking academic support (9)

- [ ] Participating in social activities (10)

- [ ] Participating in research opportunities (11)

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the statement:
Bridging Success helped me feel connected to others at ASU.

- ○ Strongly disagree (1)

- ○ Disagree (2)

- ○ Neutral (3)

- ○ Agree (4)

- ○ Strongly agree (5)

How supported did you feel by the Bridging Success program during your time at ASU?

- ○ Not supported at all (1)

○ Supported very little (2)

○ Neutral (3)

○ Supported (4)

○ Very supported (5)

Have you developed a personalized support system?

○ Yes, I have (1)

○ No, I have not (2)

○ Unsure (3)

How valuable was the Bridging Success program to you during your time at ASU?

○ Not at all valuable (1)

○ Somewhat valuable (2)

○ Neutral (3)

○ Moderately valuable (4)

○ Very valuable (5)

What was your favorite aspect of the Bridging Success program? Please briefly explain your answer

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

In what way could the Bridging Success program better support you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____