Community College Students'
Sense of Belonging in College – Keeping Students on the Path to Success

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February 24, 2023

Presentation Agenda

I. Why study sense of belonging?

II. Two sets of findings on CC students' sense of belonging in college
    National study within the first three weeks
    Ohio study – 8 community colleges during spring 22 semester

III. Shared findings

IV. Questions & discussion

Why Research Sense of Belonging?

CCs are an important segment in higher education

Success rate for CC students is limited

Sense of belonging is an emerging construct of interest

CC students are understudied with regard to sense of belonging

Why Is Sense of Belonging Important?

- Student sense of belonging has been shown to promote higher rates of retention and student success (Hausmann et al., 2007)
- A lack of belonging predicts less social and academic engagement, lower academic achievement, and departure from the institution (Strayhorn, 2019)
- Belonging is believed to increase resilience to stress and promote life satisfaction (Civitci, 2015)
- Belonging is a fundamental human motivation strong enough to shape people's emotional responses, cognition, and health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995)

Why Is Sense of Belonging Important?

Sense of belonging can either support or undermine academic goals.

What is Sense of Belonging?

In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers. (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 28-29)

The First Three Weeks: Community College Students' Initial Sense of Belonging

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The First Three Weeks: Study Design

- The purpose of the study was to determine what factors (if any) a student experiences during the first 3 weeks of their college career have an influence upon their perceived sense of belonging.
- Nonexperimental Quantitative Research Design
- Blocked Stepwise multiple regression analysis
- Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) data from the Center of Community College Student Engagement

Why The First Three Weeks?

- Initial encounters with the institution and its people can have profound effects on subsequent levels of involvement and aspirations for intellectual achievement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1992)
- The most critical time for students and their decisions to persist happen in the first semester of their college career, and most likely, in the first few weeks (Tinto, 1993)
- Sense of belonging is important and takes on heightened important in contexts where individuals are inclined to feel isolated, alienated, lonely, or invisible (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 19)

Major Themes

Four areas accounted for over 90% of student sense of belonging:

- Early Connection
- Academic and Social Support
- High Expectations
- Having a Clear Academic Plan

Early Connection

Described variance: 38.8%

- ○ At least one staff member learned my name

- ○ College provided me with adequate information on financial aid

- ○ I attended on-campus orientation prior to classes

Academic and Social Support

Described variance: 22.58%

- Instructor clearly explained syllabi

- I knew how to contact instructor outside class

- Instructor explained academic/student support

- Instructor had activities to introduce students to each other

- Instructor explained course grading policies

Academic and Social Support

○ I learned the name of at least one other student

○ Main source of academic advising –instructors

○ Did you know about student organizations?

○ Main source of academic advising – college staff

High Expectations

Described variance: 18%

- Positive Predictors

    - I have motivation to succeed in college

    - I am academically prepared to succeed in college
- Negative predictor

    - How often did you come to school without completing readings or assignments?

Having a Clear Academic Plan

Described variance 11%

- Courses were available at convenient times

- I was able to meet with an advisor at convenient times

- An advisor helped me identify courses I needed to take

Other Predictor Variables

Engaged Learning

- ○ Described variance: 4.52%

College Readiness

- ○ Described variance: 3%

Student Input Characteristics

- ○ Described Variance: 1.67%

Student Satisfaction

- ○ Described variance: 0.5%

College Characteristics

- ○ Described variance: 0.0%

Ohio Community College Students' Sense of Belonging in College: What Matters Most?

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Study Design & Procedures

Survey Research among 8 Ohio community colleges

Emailed live link and QR code; Recruitment video included (approx. 30% viewed)

Data collection period – 5 months in duration (January - May 2022)

Screening questions, Adapted Simple School Belonging Scale, & Environment questions

Multiple regression analysis

Instrumentation

41-item questionnaire in Qualitrics with 7 Sections

Section I Screening Questions
Section II Simple School Belonging Scale (SSBS) - Dependent Variable

Within College Variables
Section III Peer-to-Peer Interactions
Section IV Faculty-to-Student Interactions
Section V Course Modality Experiences
Section VI Identity Group / Cocurricular Involvement

Input Variables
Section VII Student Identity & Demographic Characteristics

SSBS

Simple School Belonging Scale (SSBS) (Whiting et al., 2018)

Unidimensional measure of student belonging

10 Items measured on 4-point Likert Scale (No!, no, yes, Yes!) (No! = 1, Yes! = 4)

Principal Axis Factoring: Confirmed that the scale functioned similarly

Adapted SSBS (Whiting, et al., 2018) - Items

1. People at this college notice when I am good at something.
2. Other students in this college take my opinions seriously.
3. People at this college are friendly to me.
4. I am included in lots of activities at this college.
5. Other students at this college like me the way I am.
6. I like to think of myself as similar to others at this college.
7. People at this college care if I am absent.
8. I feel like my ideas count at this college.
9. I feel like I matter to people at this college.
10. People really listen to me when I am at this college.

Select Student Characteristics

Select student characteristics	n	%
Demographics		
First-generation college student	505	37.6
Race, ethnicity, or cultural identity		
Asian or East Asian	29	1.8
Black	162	9.8
Hispanic	54	3.3
White	876	53
Two or More	533	32.2

9 Positive Predictor Variables – 42% of Variance

Community College Cultivated Mindset – 17% of variance

I look forward to being a graduate of my community college

I am loyal to my community college

I chose CC because the schedule fit

Relationship Driven Engagement: Peer-to-Peer 11.6% of variance

I discuss ideas / work on class materials outside of class w/classmates

I share my contact information with classmates for a study group

I have time available for social activities with people I met at this college

Predictor Variables

Relationship Driven Engagement: Faculty & Staff - 13.4% of variance

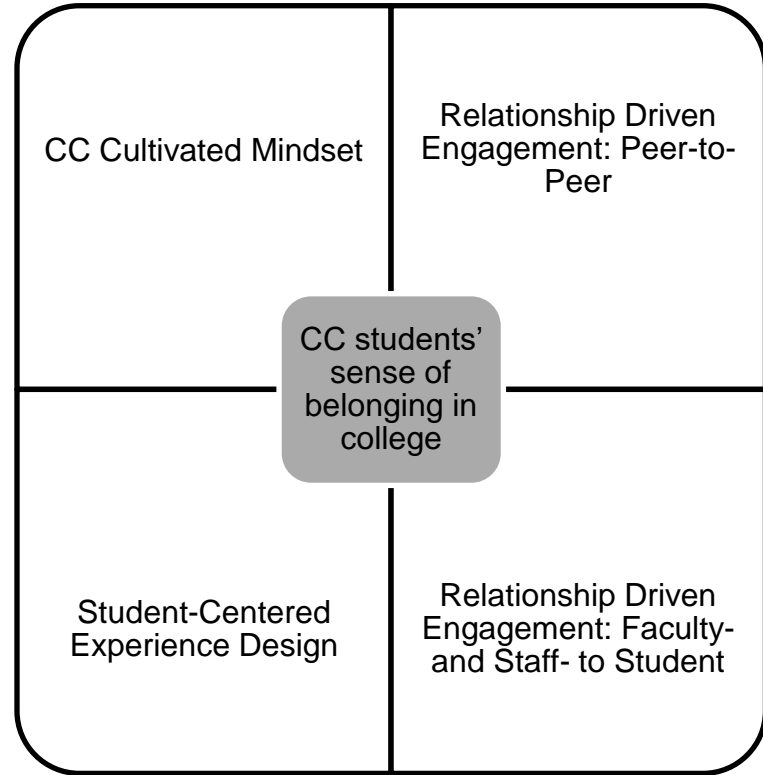My instructor encourages me to get involved with campus activities

Other employees talk with me when I am on campus

My instructor encourages me to discuss career interests with them

Evidence-based cc behaviors that increase students' sense of belonging in college:

1. Community college cultivated mindset;
2. Relationship-driven engagement among (a) students and (b) faculty & staff; and
3. Student-centered experience design

CC Cultivated Mindset	Relationship Driven Engagement: Peer-to-Peer
Student-Centered Experience Design	Relationship Driven Engagement: Faculty- and Staff- to Student

CC students' sense of belonging in college

Shared Findings: CC Cultivated Mindset

Predictors:

Cultivate early connection to the community college

Cultivate a sense of loyalty to the community college

On-campus orientation

Create a visual for the student as future graduate

Have the motivation to succeed in college

Belief in their academic preparedness

Serve the whole person and provide adequate financial aid information

Shared-Findings: Relationship Driven Engagement

Peer-to-Peer Interactions:

Create a classroom environment that strongly encourages peer relationships and demonstrates high expectations

Predictors:

Academic and Social Support

Share my contact information with classmates

Learn the name of at least one other student

Work with other students during class

Discuss ideas from readings/work on class materials outside of class with peers

I have time available for social activities with people I met at this college

Ask questions in class

Shared-Findings: Relationship Driven Engagement

Faculty- and Staff-to-Student Interactions:
Create an authentic college culture that demonstrates care for students and encourages relationships with faculty & staff

Predictors:
At least one staff member knew my name
Other employees talk with me when I am on campus
My instructor encourages me to get involved with campus activities
My instructor encourages me to discuss career interests with them
I knew how to contact my instructor outside of class
Provide prompt feedback on class assignments

Shared-Findings: Student Centered Design

Build and offer schedules, services, and experiences around the student

Predictors:

Having a clear academic plan

Courses were available at convenient times – the schedule fit my needs

I was able to meet with an advisor at convenient times

An advisor helped me identify courses I needed to take

Serve the whole person and provide adequate financial aid information

Summary

CC Cultivated Mindset, Relationship-Driven Engagement, and Student-Centered Design positively predict CC students' sense of belonging in college;

Keeping students on a path to completion requires that all students experience a sense of belonging

Discussion and Questions?

Thank you!