Fitting in: Student Experiences of Belonging

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University of Westminster: Student Sense of Belonging
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Background to the project

- **Student engagement, effort and success**
  Is influenced by many situational and contextual factors.

- **Sense of belonging**
  The extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the social environment. (Goodenow, 1993)

- **Previous work indicates that developing a sense of belonging:**
  - is a key issue in successful transition (Cashmore *et al*, 2012; Kember *et al*, 2010; Hand and Bryson, 2008).
  - is a particular challenge for inner city universities (Stuart *et al*, 2009).
  - brings positive benefits especially for ‘disadvantaged’ students (Anderman & Freeman, 2004; Mounts, 2004).
Research Methodology – Mixed Methods

Quantitative Survey
- Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSSM) instrument (Goodenow, 1993)

Qualitative Tools
- Biographic Narrative’ interviews using a qualitative tradition of ‘cultural stories’ (c.f. Miller and Glassner, 1997)
- Focus Groups – mixed and by level

Scope
The study is across two Schools – Westminster Business School and the School of Life Sciences and includes undergraduate students at levels 4-6.
Preliminary analysis – Level 4 Business Students

- Based on a sample survey of about 1000 students on level 4 Business School degree programmes
- Survey carried out in Week 7 (of 12) in Semester 1, 2012.
- 446 completed questionnaires received.

Does the survey help us to address the following questions?

1. Who are our students?
2. Have they developed a sense of belonging?
3. Does this impact upon their academic engagement?
4. Is there a ‘London’ effect?
5. What can we do to better support this early stage of their studies?

– average of responses to 18 Likert-scale (1 to 5) statements eg

– ‘I feel I am part of the Business School’

– ‘Other students on my course take my opinions seriously’

– ‘Most lecturers/tutors on my course are interested in me’
A measure of ‘Engagement’ derived from the Australasian Student Survey

Average of responses to 9 Likert-scale (1 to 5) statements eg

- ‘I ask questions or contribute to in-class discussions’
- ‘I seek advice from academic staff’
- ‘I come to class having completed readings or activities set’
Additional questions and demographic information

- Hours of paid work
- Participation in clubs and societies
- University of first choice/ application through clearing/ qualifications
- Attendance at induction activities
- Nature of accommodation / journey time
- Sources of support for settling in
- Social networking
- Branded goods
- Family experience of attending university
- Social Class
- Ethnicity/ Age /Gender/ Disability
- Two open questions – most and least enjoyed so far
## 1. Who are our students?

### Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male/Female:</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age: 18-20/Over 20:</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode: Full/Part-time:</td>
<td>99.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability:None/Disability</td>
<td>95.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Who are our students?

- BanglIndPak: 26.0%
- Black: 12.3%
- Mixed: 5.3%
- Other: 9.8%
- Other Asian: 10.7%
- White: 35.8%
1. Who are our students?

![Bar chart showing the ethnicity of students]

Summary Ethnicity:
- Arab: 5.7%
- Bangladeshi: 8.7%
- Black African: 3.7%
- Black Caribbean: 9.8%
- East European: 9.8%
- Indian: 4.6%
- Mixed: 0.5%
- Other: 4.6%
- Other Asian: 10.7%
- Other White: 8.7%
- Pakistani: 1.8%
- South American: 2.3%
- Turkish: 10.5%
- West European: 11.0%
- White British: 11.0%
1. Who are our students?

Entry Qualifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary Entry Qualification</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Level/BTEC</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Level or Equiv</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baccalaureate</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTEC</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Who are our students?

Any Family Member been to University

- No: 56.6%
- Yes: 43.4%
1. Who are our students?

Accommodation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Halls</td>
<td></td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental/family home</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private rental/owned</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Who are our students?

Journey Time to University

- 15 mins or less: 11.6%
- 15 to 30 mins: 29.7%
- 30 to 60 mins: 44.4%
- Over 60 mins: 14.3%
1. Who are our students?

![Bar chart showing paid employment hours per week]

- None: 62.7%
- 1-5 hours: 4.5%
- 6-10 hours: 7.3%
- 11-15 hours: 9.8%
- 16-20 hours: 8.9%
- 21-25 hours: 2.3%
- Over 25 hours: 4.5%
1. Who are our students?

Participation in Extra-Curricular Activities at University

- None: 67.4%
- 1-5 hours: 23.7%
- 6-10 hours: 5.5%
- 11-15 hours: 1.8%
- 16-20 hours: 1.1%
- 21-25 hours: 0.2%
- Over 25 hours: 0.2%
1. Who are our students?

Participation in Extra-Curricular Activities outside University

- None: 38.5%
- 1-5 hours: 32.6%
- 6-10 hours: 18.6%
- 11-15 hours: 4.8%
- 16-20 hours: 2.3%
- 21-25 hours: 1.8%
- Over 25 hours: 1.4%
2. Have they developed a sense of belonging?
3. Does this impact on their engagement?
2. Have they developed a sense of belonging?
3. Does this impact on their engagement?

Summary statistics for ‘Belonging’ and ‘Engagement’

Belonging:      Mean = 3.66,  SD = 0.54
Engagement:     Mean = 3.60,  SD = 0.53

Corr(Belong, Engage) = 0.503
Generalised Regression Results

- Starting point is to assume that Belonging and Engagement are inter-related – Belonging is influenced by Engagement, and Engagement is influenced by Belonging

- Thus 2 regressions run, one for Belonging and one for Engagement
Conclusions from Regressions

- Belonging Regression:
  - Belonging positively influenced by Westminster being first choice university and Eastern European ethnicity (and Engagement)
  - Belonging negatively influenced by working between 6 and 10 hours per week, if journey time more than an hour, if international (fee) student, and if Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani (weakly).
Engagement Regression

- Engagement positively influenced if parents from Social Class A, if student lives in parental or other family home, and if student works between 6 and 10 hours per week (and belonging).

- Engagement negatively influenced by Westminster being first choice university.
What about our questions?

– A range of factors influence both Belonging and Engagement, with Belonging and Engagement themselves being inter-related.

– There are some factors which have opposite effects on Belonging and Engagement – working 6 to 10 hours per week and Westminster being first choice university.

– What can we do to better support our students?
Does the survey help with the following questions?

1. Who are our students?
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4. Is there a ‘London’ effect?
5. What can we do to better support this early stage of their studies?

Next Steps:
Further analysis of the data we have and also:
A comparison by level of study and by School
A longitudinal analysis and
Level 4 analysis across 3 intakes
References


Cashmore, A, Scott, J, Cane C (2012) “Belonging” and “intimacy” factors in the retention of students – an investigation into the student perceptions of effective practice and how that practice can be replicated. University of Leicester.


Does the survey help with the following questions?

- What are the factors that influence student ‘Belonging’ and ‘Engagement’, and to what extent are these concepts related?
- What assumptions have we made that are not confirmed by this sample?
- What are we learning about our students?
- What should we be doing next?

Next Steps:
Further analysis of the data we have and also:
A comparison by level of study and by School
A longitudinal analysis and
Level 4 analysis across 3 intakes