The Sense of Belonging on Campus: A Key to International Students' Academic Success

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Researchers examined the perspectives of 210 students from International Education College of China University of Geosciences（CUG）. Data from the survey indicated that they had a very high sense of belonging on CUG campus and it help them had a strong intention to develop their personal skills and expand their worldviews, get achievements in study.

METHOD

Sample

The sample for the study consisted of 215 students enrolled in International Education College from China University of Geosciences, however, 5 people had incomplete data and removed from the analysis, this resulted in a total of 210 participants who had complete data, which is 98% of the initial pool of 215 participants. Respondents included 43 females (20.5%) and 167 males (79.5%), nearly three fourths (75%) of the sample were between the ages of 20 to 29 ,with the average 25 ± 0.4 age and nearly one fifths(19.2%)of the samples were between the ages of 30 to 39. The nationality representation of the sample was:152（72%）Africa ,58(28%) Asia. A total of 75(35.5%) participants believe in Christianity, of all 90(42.7%) believe in Islam, 39（19%）without religion, the last 6(2.80%) believe in Buddhism. Nearly half of them comes here as an undergraduate and 42% of the participants studied as a graduate, the rest are visiting fellows(0.5%),senior visiting fellows(4.4%),language students(2.4%).

Instrument

The researchers designed a single survey with 18 items grouped into 2 sections. The first section (9) gathered the sense of belonging on campus, Response options for the gain items are scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 1(strong agree)to 5(strong disagree),Because of the differences in dormitory environment, two items about them allowed participants to skip that were not relevant to their experience. The second section measures student's perceptions of the importance for their goals on campus. Student responses are:1(very important),2(important),3(undecided),4(not too important),5(not at all important).

Procedure

All empirical data were collected by February and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).Analysis of the data included descriptive statistics on all items in the survey.

RESULT

Means and standard deviations were calculated for all Likert-type scale items.

Attitude about CUG

Participants were asked to respond to items that describe the attitude about CUG (i.e., what they think about the classmates, faculty, programs etc.). The results for these items are reported in Table 1, the scores reflected in the perspectives about the campus were: the attitude about the campus was 1.72(SD=0.83), the means scores in the attitude about creating a peer support were 1.84 (SD=0.79) and 1.91(SD=0.71), the need and use about the programs for their studies got the means score 1.96 (0.79) and 1.72(0.67).As a result, international students felt have close connection with the campus. Especially in the environments about CUG.

TABLE 1. Attitude about CUG

Items	Means	SD
1. I would be interested in living on-campus	1.72	0.83
2. I like to study with other students countries in some forms of study group	1.84	0.79
3. I would be interested in working with a faculty member on a research project	1.91	0.71
4. I like to utilize an academic support service such as a tutor ,resource, or the writing center	1.96	0.79
5. I am interested in joining campus, department ,or hall organizations	1.72	0.67
6. I am feeling a sense of connection with CUG	1.97	0.96

Sense of National Identity

This items assess the international students' national identity in CUG, (i. e. what they think about the difference of the race, ethnic, religion), the means scores about friends comes from their own countries were 2.42(SD=1.3), the topic about the reason of conflict gets the means cores 2.82(SD=1.32), and when asked how often they talk about the cultural, the scores were 2.12(SD=0.58). As a result, they talk a lot about the cultural awareness with friends from different countries and different cultural and background are not the reasons in their conflict. These shows that international students highly get involved into the campus environment.

TABLE 2. Sense of National Identity

Items	Means	SD
7. Most of my friends are my country mates.	2.42	1.30
8. Sometimes have a conflict with someone that I believe is based on the difference in my belief, background, or lifestyle.	2.82	1.32
9. I discuss topics related to cultural awareness with friends.	2.12	0.58

Extent of different goals at CUG

Most of the goals at CUG were offered in the survey were considered important factors. "Developing leadership skills" had the highest score with a mean score of 1.66(SD=0.6), followed closely by goals (sores bellow 2.00) "had conversations with students of different countries" and "acquiring knowledge in areas that complement/enhance my academic interest area", it seem to reflect the intentions of participants is to knowing the world and doing well in study. It is interesting to note that "had conversations with peers about current local, national or world events" and "attended a lecture, play, or cultural event on campus (not required for class)"were not the most important goals to pursue, compared with other goals, the participants may view that developing their own personal skills and learning is the highest expectations in students life.

TABLE 3. Extent of goals at CUG

Items	Means	SD
10. Had conversations with peers about personal values.	1.98	0.72
11. Had conversations with peers about current local, national or world events.	2.06	0.67
12. Had conversations with students of different countries.	1.84	0.52
13.Acquiring knowledge in areas that complement/enhance my academic interest area	1.84	0.47
14.Gaining appreciation of attitudes/culture differences	1.95	0.65
15.Participating in community services	2.03	0.56
16. Being a member of a student organization or university-affiliated group (band, athletics, student government, clubs, fraternity, sorority, etc.)	1.97	0.66
17.Attended a lecture, play, or cultural event on campus (not required for class)	2.00	0.76
18.Developing leadership skills	1.66	0.60

The Relationship between demographic variables and Goals on campus.

Conclusion were presented in Table 4, Table 5 and Table 6. First, we conducted analysis of variance (ANOVAS) in Table 4 to examine whether Goals on campus varied as a function of the demographic variables including religion, identity. We got the conclusion that religions difference will impact almost goals except four of them.

In Table 5, compared with persons believed in Christianity and Islam, participants with no religions got lower significance. The goals about "Had conversations with peers about current local, national or world events", participants believed in Christianity higher ($p < 0.05$) than persons without religions "Had conversations with students of different countries", "Acquiring knowledge in areas that complement/enhance my

academic interest area" also had the same conclusions. Persons without religions didn't had a strong extent to get achievements compared with participants who believe in Christianity and Islam.

Because of the limited numbers of four styles of students (e.g. visiting fellows .language students, senior visiting fellow), just undergraduate students and graduate students have been put into calculate.as a result, the different style of students didn't have a significant impact with their goals on campus except developing leadership skills (t=2.04, p<0.05).

Second, a t-test was conducted for the demographic variables including gender and continents, we conclude that gender had a significant effect with goals about developing leadership skills, male had a significantly higher (t=4, 77, P<0.05) than female. Conclusion detailed in Table 6, nearly all Africa students got the significantly higher scores than students in Asia, and the results indicated that their continents significantly impacted nearly each of their goals on campus.

Table 4. The Religions Difference of International Students University Goals

	Christianity		Islam		Buddhism		No Religion		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
SMEAN10	2.00	0.99	1.91	0.80	2.17	0.41	2.10	0.85	0.47	0.703
SMEAN11	1.99	0.83	2.04	0.84	2.17	0.75	2.26	0.71	1.01	0.39
SMEAN12	1.77	0.69	1.73	0.71	2.33	0.52	2.15	0.75	4.44	**0.005***
SMEAN13	1.73	0.55	1.81	.071	1.47	0.52	2.18	0.79	4.73	**0.003***
SMEAN14	1.84	0.62	1.84	0.82	1.83	0.41	2.41	1.00	5.57	**0.001****
SMEAN15	1.93	0.64	2,01	0.81	1.83	0.41	2.31	0.77	2.43	0.067
SMEAN16	1.97	0.84	1.79	0.76	2.50	0.84	2.31	0.77	4.86	**0.003***
SMEAN17	1.84	0.83	1.99	0.96	2.17	0.41	2.28	0.72	2.32	0.076
SMEAN18	1.49	0.60	1.57	0.80	1.67	1.21	2.18	0.7	8.07	**0.000*****

Notes. SMEAN means different items of goals at campus
*p<0.05, ** p<0.01, ***P<0.001

Table 5. Multiple Comparisons Goals of Different Religions

	I	J	Means Difference(I-J)	SE	P
SMEAN12	2	4	-0.422	1.36	0.024*
SMEAN13	1	4	-0.45	0.14	0.01*
	2	4	-0.37	0.13	0.038*
SMEAN14	1	4	-0.57	0.15	0.004*
	2	4	-0.57	0.15	0.003*
SMEAN15	2	4	-0.52	1.15	0.01*
SMEAN16	1	4	-0.69	0.15	0.000**
SMEAN17	2	4	-0.61	0.14	0.01**

Notes. 1 means believe in Christianity, 2 means believe in Islam, 3 means believe in Buddhism, 4 means no religions.
*p<0.05, ** p<0.01

Table 6. The Continents Difference of International Students University Goals

	Africa		Asia		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
SMEAN10	1.92	0.89	2.14	0.74	-1.65	0.100
SMEAN11	1.94	0.80	2.38	0.81	-3.54	0.000**
SMEAN12	1.72	0.66	2.19	0.78	-3.86	0.000**
SMEAN13	1.74	0.65	2.11	0.72	-3.53	0.001**
SMEAN14	1.79	0.74	2.31	0.84	-4.310	0.000**
SMEAN15	1.96	0.76	2.20	0.69	-2.00	0.046*
SMEAN16	1.84	0.76	2.33	0.85	-4.02	0.000**
SMEAN17	1.85	0.88	2.36	0.77	-0.88	0.000**
SMEAN18	1.51	0.71	2.10	0.81	-5.13	0.000**

*$p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$

The Correlation of Goals on campus with Attitude about CUG and Sense of National Identity

As we can see in Table 7 ，the attitude about CUG had a significant positive correlation($p<0.01$) with all the goals mentioned in the survey, however, the sense of national identity had no relation with goals except the first one goal. Schoolmates and faculty and the perspectives about campus had a significant impact in goals on campus.

Table 7. Correlations among the Variables

Variable	Attitude about CUG	Sense of National Identity
SMEAN10	0.28**	0.16*
SMEAN11	0.30**	0.067
SMEAN12	0.32**	0.03
SMEAN13	0.31**	0.04
SMEAN14	0.31**	0.40
SMEAN15	0.21**	-0.038
SMEAN16	0.39**	0.047
SMEAN17	0.36**	0.087
SMEAN18	035**	0.094

*$p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$

INTEGRATED DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how the sense of belonging on campus impact the goals in university. It shows the high score in the study, they liked to live on campus and wants to make friends from different countries, and it means they get involved in the university no matter their race and religions. On one hand, they gain the opportunity to expand their knowledge and worldviews in the new country, they also face complex difficulty at the same time. So they hope to get peer support and get help from the faculty, the more close relation with campus, the stronger intention to get achievements in different goals.

Environment

When comparing items that measured attitude about CUG, the results indicated that they had a very high sense of belonging on campus. A possibly explanation may that

many students comes from Africa where belongs developing countries, compared with their countries, China developed much faster and it's a challenging life for them to live in a country with different cultural, Learning advanced technology and knowledge, two years or three years later, they will bring advanced technology back to their own countries. Adaptation will be the main question before they begin to learn technology, so they may eager to know Chinese culture and people around here, and gradually adapt to the Chinese life during the process. China University of Geosciences is very famous in China, and some of its majors are the top of the country, many international students study in engineering, geological engineering which is the best majors in CUG with numerous resources. At the same time. The university also has a lot of policies for foreign students supporting them to involve in campus.

The degree of internationalization of CUG is high, so international students can easily exchanges ideals with persons from different countries and to get friendship with them, most of the students are undergraduate students or graduate students, when they face conflicts , they may use more rational approach.to solve the problem and cultural differences can't lead to conflicts .

Expectation

The data reflected that they had a strong intention to develop their personal skills and expand their worldviews, get achievements in study, a possible explanation may that learning and adaptation are their main duties, Many foreign students family background requiring them to have more personal skills such as leadership and communication ability, so they want to develop their abilities at campus.

Attitudes

As mentioned before, attitudes about CUG had a significant positive correlation with goals at campus, it's interesting to find that sense of national identity had no significant correlation with goals, the possible explanation that students with strong belonging on campus, involving in university and learning knowledge, making friends with different countries are powerful motivations and help them become members of the university.

Identity

Foreign students have their own special college and have their own residence hall, they have similar habits and religions, the majority of students are comes from different countries while belongs to the same continent, so cultural conflicts can't be a problem in their life.

LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results. The primary limitation with the survey is related to the narrowly constructed responses from the participants. More than 1/2 participants from Africa, which limited in a few countries, the conclusions from the research obtained may not be available in a larger scale.

Some participants comes from Asian where English are not as a mother language, it might appear deviation in the understanding of some of the questionnaire items.

 Influenced by social desirability, most participants will choose the options in line with the expectations of the society , such as expressed in the strong sense of belong-

ing at campus and communicate expectations, so the participants may be more tend to choose the higher scores on the attitude about university belonging.

SUMMARY

Belonging on campus which can affect an international student's degree of academic achievement is a crucial part of their college experience. First, Building a friendly community and help them getting involved in diverse environment to create some educational partnerships(peer support、Learning community etc.); Second, help students clarify their social identities, such as race, gender, or the conditions they encounter on campus; The third, creating some programs (include ethics, religion, lifestyle, national identity etc.) to facilitate students' sense of belonging on campus and Inter-cultural understanding; the fourth, Asia Pacific student affairs practitioners should do some research and case study in these functional areas to improve their professional level.