

A sense of belonging: relationships between nursing students and their learning environments

Malade Yigremachew & Steve Cessna

Abstract

The determination that students make to become a skilled nurse through their bachelor's degree programs is enhanced by their desire to provide care in the clinical field. During their college period, students go through various phases. The emotional exhaustion and stress could undermine students' academic achievement and confidence. A vital component of college performance is belonging to colleagues, in classrooms or on campuses. It may affect the academic adjustment, performance and ambitions of a student, or even whether a student is in school to graduate or not. This research project investigates the sense of belonging of nursing students at EMU. How the sense of identity varies based on the social identities of students such as their ethnicity, academic achievement, social interactions, psychological orientation or their overall campus conditions.

Background

- Students who enjoyed teacher support were much more likely than those who received no teacher support to finish their programs. Shelton therefore argues that schools should have a diligent and welcoming environment for learning. Colleges need to tutor students and provide direct support to strengthen the learning of students (Shelton,2003).
- The dropout rate of college students in the ranges between 30 and 50 percent. Some of the reasons for dropping out of college are mental health, disability and poverty. Recognizing the need to build a positive, warm and friendly school environment to improve the success of students is essential by educational institutions (O'Keeffe, 2013).
- Research shows that a good socialization has a favorable influence on students of graduation rate and promotes a sense of belonging. The student's grade point average is positive correlated with the student's sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012).

The Purpose of the Research

- Exploring the demographic trends influencing belonging problems.
- Exploring the link between concern for identity, sense of belonging and academic success of students.

Research questions

- Do students' reports of belonging or belonging uncertainty at EMU?
- What is the relationship between belonging, belonging uncertainty, and student's academic achievement in relation to their nursing program?

Method

The participants at the Eastern Mennonite University were 46 first year nursing students. We asked the students to answer a series of questions concerning their time at EMU, related to the possible impact that a sense of belonging to EMU might bring. Students replied to all survey question on a scale of 5 points with five marking the upper end of the scale (ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree).

We observed a favorable relationship toward their field of study among first-year students who ranked themselves belonging at EMU (figure 1). Likewise, students who have a sense of uncertainty in their belonging have shown a poor sense of belonging to EMU community (figure 2). Including student high school graduations academic level and current academic success, we find no degree of belonging insecurity. No significant difference was observed between GPA and incoming academic grade average in the area of nursing and students sense of belonging (figure 3). There were no significant differences between under-represented non-white minority students and white students in their belonging of uncertainty at EMU. Nevertheless, when we looked at students' current sense of belonging, we found that the non-white students sense of belonging level of EMU was smaller than of white students (figure 4).

Conclusion

These results should be used by universities to foster an environment in which all students can experience a sense of belonging. With a good sense of identity, students often have better performance in education, but little is understood about the concerns of their sense of belonging uncertainty when they reach college. Apart from having negative correlation with each other, belonging and belonging uncertainty may present various psychological pathways to understand students psychological state. Un-represented students had less sense of belonging on educational institutions. In addition, students who were racially majorette showed a similar degree of related sense of belonging insecurity in the future.

Reference

Shelton, E., (2003). Faculty Support and Student Retention. *Journal of Nursing Education*. 42(2) Pp 68-76.

O'Keeffe, P., (2013). A Sense of Belonging: Improving Student Retention. *College Student Journal*. 47(4) Pp 605-613.

Strayhorn, T. (2012). *College Students' Sense of Belongingness: A Key to Educational Success for All Students*. New York: Routledge.

Result

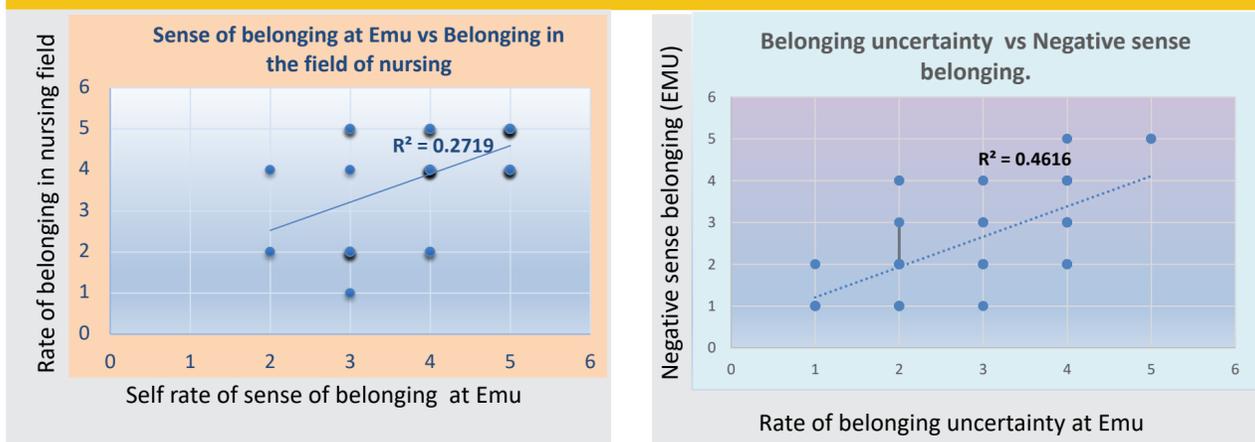


Figure 1.

Figure 2.

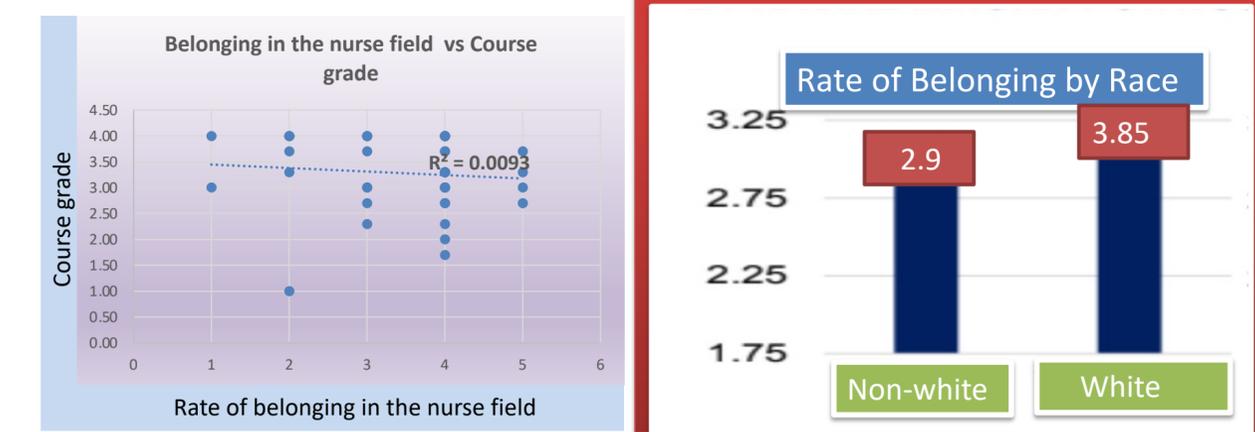


Figure 3.

Figure 4. P=0.04

Student Questionnaire: A Sense of Belonging

- I feel that I belong in my school and people at EMU are friendly to me.
- Students in my school take my opinions seriously and I can be always myself.
- Most teachers at EMU are interested in me, and I am treated with as much respect as other students at my school
- I feel like I belong in the field of science.
- I feel like I'm at a crossroads in my nursing career.
- I don't belong in the nursing program.
- My teachers help me understand what I need to learn and how to be successful in my studies.
- There is at least one teacher or adult I can talk to in my school if I have a problem.
- Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong at EMU.
- I feel very different from most other students at EMU

