

PHOTO COURTESY MACKEY MITCHELL ARCHITECTS



DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana

Authors



AUTUMN BECK

Undergraduate Research Assistant
Business Management and Film and Media Studies
Southern Methodist University
anbeck@smu.edu



MATT NADLER

Residential Community Director
Southern Methodist University
mnadler@smu.edu



DUSTIN K. GRABSCH

Director for Academic Initiatives
Southern Methodist University
dgrabsch@smu.edu

A Content Analysis of College Student-Proposed Definitions of Sense of Belonging to a Residential Community

THOUGH COLLEGE STUDENTS' SENSE OF BELONGING has been a frequent subject of research, what it means in terms of a residential community remains unclear, specifically what it means from a student perspective. We sought to fill this gap by providing a clear definition of the sense of belonging in connection to a residential community. We followed an interpretive research paradigm and solicited 2,400 on-campus residents at a 4-year university within the southern United States. We received survey responses from 38% ($N = 920$) of them, of which 581 respondents supplied a definition. The responses produced three emergent themes: space and place, strengthening connections, and outcomes of belonging. Based on these themes, we posit a student-grounded definition of residential sense of belonging. Additionally, we discuss the importance of including physical space as a component within this definition. Our proposed definition and findings are written with university housing and residence life professionals, campus planners, architects, and student affairs professionals in mind. This definition further details what it means from a student perspective to belong to a residential community, which may inform these professionals on how to best enhance the student experience in college. This study adds to the growing understanding of sense of belonging in higher education.

Within higher education, studies have examined students' sense of belonging in many contexts, and researchers have prescribed their own vernacular for and definitions of the student experience. As studies have shown, enhancing a student's sense of belonging leads to a more positive collegiate experience and greater success (Brazzell, 2001; Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Holloway-Friesen, 2018; Pittman & Richmond, 2007). Residential

communities were designed to create similar positive effects to enhance student success and well-being (Beamer, 2020; Samura, 2016), but little has been published about how students in residential communities *experience* belonging rather than merely acknowledging its presence. To positively affect a student's sense of belonging, we argue that it first takes a more intimate understanding of what belonging means within the student context. Therefore, we aim to answer the

This definition posited by students encompasses three themes: space and place, strengthening connections, and outcomes of belonging.

following question: How do students define the sense of belonging to their residential community? This research represents a novel approach to articulating this sense of belonging according to students' perspectives rather than definitions posed by researchers.

Findings from this study will deepen campus housing professionals' understanding of what it means to belong to a residential community from a student perspective, which can inform how they devise and execute interventions to connect with, support, and bolster belonging within their residential communities. Ideally, cultivating students' sense of belonging to a residential community may lead to a stronger sense of belonging in connection to larger groups and, eventually, the institution.

DEFINITIONS OF SENSE OF BELONGING

According to Bronkema and Bowman (2017), residence halls are living-learning environments aimed to promote university pride, student belonging, and retention, as well as to connect students to resources they need to be successful. "Belonging" is an umbrella term that encompasses several concepts such as community, home, solidarity, recognition, and support (Hoffman et al., 2002). Researchers and student affairs administrators alike have developed their own definitions, and Schussler and Fierros (2008) were among the first to propose that "sense of belonging encompasses students' feeling of identification with the school, sense of shared values, and experience of integration into the academic and social systems of the

institution" (p. 87). Furthermore, students overwhelmingly related "achieving a sense of belonging to one's ability to integrate socially at the university" (Schussler & Fierros, 2008, p. 86), which indicates the importance of campus involvement in developing a strong sense of belonging. More recently, according to Strayhorn (2019),

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. (p. 4)

This newer definition builds on those previously posited by adding elements related to mattering and support.

SITUATING RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY SENSE OF BELONGING

Current literature has examined and measured the sense of belonging to a university in several subsets of the college population, ranging from those defined by minority/demographic characteristics (Duran et al., 2020), class (Freeman et al., 2007; Leach et al., 2008), and organization (Knekta et al., 2020) to a broader university-wide scale (Krafona, 2014). Different aspects of the student experience impact belonging in different ways, but to our knowledge there are no studies specifically examining sense of belonging to a residential community. To fully understand the experience of students in a residential community, further research

must be done to answer key questions left unanswered by the current body of literature. By addressing these questions, collegiate administrators, faculty, and staff can foster a stronger sense of belonging and the positive outcomes related to student success.

METHOD

As part of a larger exploratory sequential mixed-methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) research study, we utilized data obtained from one cross-sectional (Pajo, 2017) administration of a survey to a roster of college students in order to understand their sense of belonging to their assigned residential community. We followed an interpretive research paradigm, which views a phenomenon (sense of belonging to a residential community) through the meanings that people (residential students) attribute to it in a specific sociocultural context (residential community on a specific university campus; Guido et al., 2010). Interpretive approaches like this one have been adapted and frequently used in higher education and student affairs research (Guido et al., 2010; Klein & Myers, 1999; Walsham, 2006).

Data Collection and Participants

Data were collected through a voluntary Qualtrics survey distributed to residential undergraduate students at a medium-sized private university in the southern United States. The research site enforces a 2-year live-on policy and operationalizes a residential college model. We utilized a roster method, and all students currently residing in university-operated undergraduate housing were invited to participate (Marsden, 1990) via their university email, following tailored recruitment methods (e.g., use of first name, residential community, and relevant

incentives to the population) to bolster the response rate (Dillman et al., 2009). Nonrespondents received up to three reminders. A raffle was advertised for respondents to win one of seven potential prizes.

Of the 2,400 residents who received the survey, 38% ($n = 920$) responded. Of these, 581 contributed text to the open-ended question inviting them to define their sense of belonging to their residential community. Twenty-three outliers included responses that were unrelated to the posed survey question or were indiscernible and therefore not encompassed within an emergent theme. A total of 30 responses were excluded from analysis, leaving a total of 551 responses in analysis.

The 581 open-ended responses were submitted predominantly by women (57%; $n = 328$). The sample contained 48% first-year ($n = 280$), 29% second-year ($n = 166$), 13% third-year ($n = 75$), and 10% fourth-year ($n = 59$) students. The racial and ethnic makeup was predominantly White (60%; $n = 346$), and the remaining sample identified as Asian ($n = 59$), Black ($n = 37$), American Indian ($n = 1$), international ($n = 12$), Hispanic of any race ($n = 84$), or two or more races ($n = 33$); there were no students who identified as Native Hawaii/ Other Pacific Islander. The sample included first-generation college students ($n = 14$), students with a Greek-letter-organization affiliation ($n = 45$), and transfer students ($n = 36$).

Instrument

The 39-item researcher-developed survey was designed to understand how residential students define and experience belonging with respect to their residential community. As part of the survey and of primary interest to the present study, participants were asked

an open-ended question: “How would you define a sense of belonging to [your residential community]?”

Data Analysis and Positionality

Data analysis was based on inductive content analysis through which coding categories were developed directly from the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). We employed a nonstatistical and exploratory methods epistemology that involved inductive reasoning (Berg, 1995).

We followed interpretive approaches throughout our data analysis (Thorne et al., 1997). The data were read and reread by the research team to achieve immersion. Subsequently, initial start codes ($n = 27$) were derived centering on the concept of affordances (Creswell & Creswell, 2017)—for example, how students defined sense of belonging to their residential community as a result of their specific context at the university and within the residential community. Each text definition could be simultaneously coded (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Similar or related codes were subsumed in meaningful categories, which, as a process of further abstraction, were grouped into the main themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Each step was conducted as a research team to achieve consensus and agreement, reflexive journals were maintained after meetings, and an audit trail was established in a spreadsheet.

All research team members are associated with a social science research team employed by a housing and residence life department. All members identify as White and possess familiarity, ranging from 2 to 5

years, with the research setting. One research team member is a first-generation student, and one is an undergraduate. Data analysis evolved as a negotiation process among these parties with the advantage that, as insiders, they were able to explain and interpret the phenomenon from the position of the specific sociocultural and political context.

FINDINGS

Findings from the content analysis revealed three emergent themes, with further subthemes that offer additional dimensionality. Table 1 lists the original start codes and counts produced by our inductive content analysis, followed by the subsequent five categories into which they were organized.

Table 2 presents descriptions of the three themes that emerged from respondents' definitions. The first theme, space and place, emerged from 31% ($n = 276$) of the total count. The second theme, strengthening connections, emerged from 36% ($n = 320$) of the total count. The third theme, outcomes of belonging, emerged from 33% ($n = 287$) of the total count.

Space and Place

We noticed that space and place was an emerging theme described by respondents. As shown in Table 2, the space-and-place theme encompasses the subthemes of (a) physical location, (b) housing staff, (c) opportunities, and (d) events. In all, 276 codes (31%) included in their response an element of space and place. One Hispanic female resident who has lived on campus for five semesters mentioned all space-and-place subthemes.

... dimensions of space and place were prominent components within a residential community definition of sense of belonging.

TABLE 1

Start Codes Organized into Categories

CATEGORY	START CODES	COUNT
Space (<i>n</i> = 129)	space	92
	housing staff	37
Place (<i>n</i> = 147)	socialization	73
	involvement	25
	traditions	49
Strengthening connections (<i>n</i> = 144)	members	20
	friends	54
	concern for others	15
	respect	11
	identity	9
	connection	25
	relationships	10
Characteristics (<i>n</i> = 176)	comfort	46
	safe	7
	integrated	30
	bonded	14
	welcome	48
	commonalities	20
	diverse	11
Outcomes (<i>n</i> = 287)	community	73
	family	41
	pride	33
	home	66
	support	30
	know, knowing, known	44
		883 Total

TABLE 2

Theme Names, Descriptions, and Counts

THEME NAME	DESCRIPTION	COUNT	%
Space and place	Respondents described two contextual elements as part of their belonging narrative. Space comprises elements of physical location (such as common area and lounges) and the housing staff who work in the building (such as RAs, RCDs, and FiR). Place elements highlight events (such as specific programs) and opportunities (such as involvement and leadership councils) occurring within the physical location, encompassing all social experiences such as hanging out, spending time together, and annual traditions of the residential community.	276	31%
Strengthening connections*	Respondents expressed elements of what it means or feels to belong, emphasizing the importance of connection to others to achieve belonging. Often these connections were described as a developing period or process where these signals could be observed or experienced prior to achieving belonging. This theme encompasses the developing strength of the respondents' connections.	320	36%
Outcomes of belonging	Respondents produced definitions with rich descriptions of the intended outcome or product of belonging. This theme encompasses psychosocial outcomes like pride, identity importance, feeling the residential community is a family/community, and knowing/being known to other members. Additionally, environmental outcomes emerged through vivid characteristics or adjectives related to the culture and climate.	287	33%

Note. RA is resident assistant; RCD is residential community director; FiR is faculty in residence.

* The theme "strengthening connections" combines the categories of "strengthening connections" and "characteristics" from Table 1.

I knew I belonged in [my residential community] when I really started going to events and getting to know the others in my community. Having Sunday dinners at [the faculty-in-residence's] apartment definitely went a long way in making me feel seen and appreciated in [my residential community]. From there, getting involved in commons council made me feel like a contributing member of [my residential community], and reaffirmed that sense of belonging.

The faculty apartment (physical location) facilitated an event (Sunday dinner) for the respondent that was hosted by her faculty-in-residence (housing staff), resulting in the opportunity to get involved in the community council. Each space-and-place subtheme is further described below utilizing respondent quotations.

Physical space. Ninety-two respondents (10%) explicitly or implicitly mentioned physical location as being part of their sense of belonging to the residential community, as revealed in comments such as “[having a] friend group based on where you live,” “we all chat and hang out in [the community] lounge,” and “if you live there you belong there.” In these responses, where one lives (the residential community) and where one hangs out (the community lounge) constitute the physical space in which respondents feel as though they developed their sense of belonging to their residential community.

Housing staff. Connection to staff was depicted in 37 codes (4%). This subtheme was included in the theme of space and place because of the unique roles that staff have in residential communities. A Hispanic female resident who had lived on campus for 2 years shared that seeing the FiR (faculty-in-residence) family “hold events and the traditions, as well as [the FiR’s] commitment to [the residential community]”

related to her sense of belonging. This direct link—the FiR’s act of hosting events—led to a sense of belonging, displaying the impact that staff have on their residents’ sense of belonging. Other staff, such as resident assistants (RAs) and residential community directors (RCDs), were also mentioned as factors. Respondents included examples like “the RA is very helpful,” “being remembered by your RA, FiR, and RCD,” and “trust in the faculty and staff.” The actions taken by staff—providing help, remembering names, and developing trust—all contributed to residents feeling that they belong in their residential community.

Opportunities. From the content analysis, opportunity (11%; $n = 98$) often took the form of what residents can get out of their residential community (the “opportunities” theme is a combination of the “socialization” and “involvement” start codes from Table 1). One multiracial female student with three semesters living on campus noted that her residential community “gives students an opportunity to find a second home on campus,” which is how she defined her sense of belonging.

Events. Closely related to opportunity are events (6%; $n = 49$): programs that occur within the community for residents (“events” are noted as “traditions” in Table 1). One White female resident who had lived on campus for three semesters shared that “being comfortable attending events” is a component of achieving a sense of belonging. Respondents highlighted several components of their sense of belonging: “feeling involved in the events and activities that take place here,” “frequently attending events,” and “the sense of belonging comes as soon as you attend events and get involved.” In sum, responses revealed that dimensions of space and place were prominent components within a residential community definition of sense of belonging.

Strengthening Connections

A total of 320 (36%) codes contained responses that described the theme of strengthening connections. This theme relates to definitional components that signal the strength of connections with others who are affiliated with the residential community. For instance, respondents indicated a certain strength of connection when they used words like “relationships,” “members,” “bonded,” and “friends.” As one White male respondent who has lived on campus for three semesters noted, “Personally, just forming and maintaining relationships within [my residential community] offers a sense of belonging.” One White female resident who had lived on campus for three semesters shared her definition for sense of belonging: “A sense of belonging to [my residential community] is feeling a strong bond to [the community], almost like you would to your favorite sports team.” And, finally, a frequent word used by participants to signal strengthening connections was “friends.” As one multiracial female shared after living on campus for one semester, “I think it means that I have friendships with the people in rooms around me or on my floor.” This example not only illustrates the theme of strengthening connections, but also further supports the earlier findings on how space and place contribute to a sense of belonging.

Overall, strengthening connections seemed to demonstrate deeper connection to and development of concern for others. One Asian female respondent with three semesters living on campus summed this up with her definition of belonging to her residential community: “I would define it as having a close community and network of people to depend on, and individuals that I

would confide in or trust.” When prompted for a definition of belonging to his residential community, a White male student who had lived on campus for three semesters responded, “Everyone watches out for each other. You are always backed by [the residential community].” These responses reveal that fortified or strong connections were of frequent importance within student-proposed definitions of sense of belonging to a residential community.

Outcomes of Belonging

A total of 287 codes (33%) contained responses that included the concept of sharing outcomes of belonging within their definitions. These outcomes were further organized into two subthemes: psychosocial (22%; $n = 191$) and environmental (11%; $n = 96$) outcomes.

Psychosocial. Psychosocial outcomes within student responses related to feelings, behavior, self-esteem, social interactions, relationships, and social cognition. Social relationships and connections related to being known by members of the residential community. As one White male with three semesters living on campus shared, “I think it is both to know and to be known by other members of [the residential community].” Further, a Hispanic female who had lived on campus for three semesters noted, “In [my residential community], my sense of belonging stems from the way I can walk the halls and recognize many other residents.” Both of these respondents emphasized a social cognition that they developed, or that others developed, related to their presence. One White female with three semesters living on campus illustrated social support presence as an outcome of belonging when she reflected, “I think a sense of belonging means that if I were to need help I could receive it.”

... where one lives (the residential community) and where one hangs out (the community lounge) constitute the physical space in which respondents feel as though they developed their sense of belonging to their residential community.

Another prominent psychosocial outcome was pride, which was revealed in responses such as “something you can take pride in,” “taking pride in the place you’re living,” and “I feel a strong loyalty to [this residential community].” Furthermore, pride and loyalty were also used to define belonging in deficit terms because the outcome was not present. For instance, a White female student who had lived on campus for one semester said that “the people are really nice but I don’t feel the intense [community] pride.” Thus, its presence or absence was a determining factor in student-proposed definitions of belonging to a residential community.

Finally, respondents shared the concepts of home and family as products of belonging. These were distinct from the strengthening connections theme because they were described by respondents as the pinnacle measures of when belonging is achieved rather than being seen as a process or step. In his definition of belonging to his residential community, one male respondent of mixed race who had lived on campus for seven semesters said, “If you can refer to [your residential community] as ‘home’ in passing or during a conversation that’s when you know you feel like you belong.” He described this outcome as the realization of a change in association with the residential community. The idea of the residential community as a family was expressed by multiple respondents: “It’s a family. We care about each other,” “It feels like a family you can always count on,” and it has a “family-like atmosphere.” These outcomes were often described at the end of the student-proposed

definitions. We also noticed the declarative nature of responses for this outcome—“it’s a family”—alluding to an achieved or final state of connection. Finally, respondents described these same psychosocial outcomes as an indication of a sense of belonging *not* being achieved: “I don’t view the people as my family yet.”

Environmental. Environmental outcomes were included in 11% ($n = 96$) of the student-posed definitions. Environmental outcomes were found to be products of the residential community, encompassing comfort and authenticity, safety, integration, commonalities, and embracing diversity. The identification of a feeling of comfort and authenticity as an environmental outcome was shared by a White male respondent with three semesters living on campus: “I define a sense of belonging according to the general comfort level that I feel when I’m in [my community].” A White female who had lived on campus for three semesters described it as “feeling respected and appreciated by all the other members of the residential commons.” These comments imply that belonging was achieved when residents experienced a feeling of comfort and authenticity. A Black male student who had lived on campus for five semesters shared that his definition of belonging to his residential community meant “where [my residential community] reflects aspects of me and we all work together.” In sum, the environment could be collectively summarized by participants as a comfortable, respectful, and diverse place where each member is appreciated.

We posit that sense of belonging to a residential community—which can be defined as the resident's journey shaped by active leadership and inspired within a physical and experiential environment—results in strong connections to people and place.

Environmental outcomes also included safety, a concept that goes beyond physical harm, locked doors, and identification card access to include the notion of authenticity of self. This feeling was remarked on by a White female resident who had lived on campus for one semester: “a safe, comfortable, and inclusive community where I can be myself and interact with people from a variety of backgrounds.” Again, the environment helped respondents connect their residential community experience to other experiences of belonging and mattering.

Lastly, an integrated environment was also an outcome in student definitions. One multiracial female respondent who had lived on campus for one semester wrote, “I feel that if I told anyone I lived in [my residential community] they would immediately welcome me and want to include me into conversation.” This integration is considered an environmental outcome because it seemed to be expressed as universal (“anyone”). Another respondent animated this outcome when stating, “I would define [belonging] as knowing that you are accepted, welcomed, and included, part of the community.”

DISCUSSION

We aimed to understand sense of belonging within the explicit context of and connection to a collegiate residential community. The three themes that emerged from student responses support our implications for further research and practice. We posit a student-proposed definition of sense of belonging to a collegiate residential community and emphasize the importance of physical space

in the definition of a residential community sense of belonging.

This study builds on past research by offering a definition—grounded in student responses—regarding sense of belonging to a collegiate residential community. We posit that sense of belonging to a residential community—which can be defined as the resident's journey shaped by active leadership and inspired within a physical and experiential environment—results in strong connections to people and place. Our proposed definition highlights the interplay of this study's three themes of space and place (with a call to campus housing staff and institutional agents), strengthening connections, and outcomes of belonging. In the proposed definition, the concept of space and place is described as the context for belonging, while strengthening connections illustrates the upward trajectory that occurs through regular engagement with space-and-place variables.

This new definition is important for practitioners and scholars alike as it offers an operational definition for sense of belonging to a residential community within the collegiate context. There are similarities and distinctions between our proposed definition and those previously established in the field of higher education. While not contradictory, previous scholars' definitions referenced in the literature review have varied in their identification of the factors that contribute to sense of belonging. Similarly, students proposed definitions offering various components that define belonging for them. Our definition identifies belonging as a process, not as a dichotomous variable where belong-

ing is either achieved or not achieved. We call out to and place responsibility on institutional agents (e.g., campus housing professionals) to engage in understanding students' sense of belonging and in offering the kind of residential experience that contributes to this positive outcome. Scholars must work to further understand how students not only define but also discuss the process by which sense of belonging is cultivated within a residential community. Why is it important that the process, as opposed to the achievement, be understood? Residence life professionals are well positioned to optimize the design and reconstruction of residential student spaces to support the highest levels of personal and academic collegiate achievement.

IMPLICATIONS

Future research is necessary to expand knowledge on the topic of how students establish a sense of belonging in their residential community. Specifically, how do students move from strengthening their connections to experiencing the outcomes of belonging? Are the outcomes of belonging expected and understood by residents before joining a residential community? Though we have achieved a critical student-proposed definition of sense of belonging to their community, we are left with more questions. Our research did not ask students to provide examples, stories, or further details on how they may have moved through the process of strengthening connections to experiencing the outcomes of belonging. These lived experiences would be a powerful tool for administrators to be aware of in order to help

students feel as though they belong, which would support their personal and academic achievement in college.

Finally, our research also has implications for campus planners', architects', and housing professionals' planning, building, and renovating of physical spaces in collegiate housing. Recent scholarship urges that residential academic support spaces and other physical environments can cue belonging and student success if executed properly (Salter et al., 2020). Despite these findings, current researchers have proclaimed that the role that campus space plays in the development of student belonging still needs further study (Samura, 2016). Our findings echo those of Johnson et al. (2007), as our respondents revealed that space and place are important in their definitions of residential belonging, including how events and opportunities matter in creating a sense of belonging. Further illustrating that sense of belonging must be researched in context (here, in collegiate residential communities) is the important consideration of space and place. Our respondents mentioned the "community lounge," "common space and sharing that community," and "based on where you live" as factors impacting their residential sense of belonging.

LIMITATIONS

This study has limitations that warrant discussion. First, the unique setting of the institution, student demographics (the majority were first-year respondents), the residential live-on requirement, and residential college model may impact transferability of the

In the proposed definition, the concept of space and place is described as the context for belonging, while strengthening connections illustrates the upward trajectory that occurs through regular engagement with space-and-place variables.

Residence life professionals are well positioned to optimize the design and reconstruction of residential student spaces to support the highest levels of personal and academic collegiate achievement.

findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, student-provided definitions used terms that may be intangible, subjective, or not overt in their text related to their individual experience. For instance, many used the term “family” to express a sense of belonging to their residential community. This individual and subjective experience warrants further investigation potentially via interviews and focus groups to begin developing a more shared understanding of the residential community sense of belonging. A third limitation is that sense of belonging to a residential community may interact with lurking variables. For instance, students described fitting in and being accepted as components of their definition. While not explicitly stated, a student’s social identity and its salience may impact their sense of belonging to their residential community. Additionally, how a student feels about belonging to the larger university may impact this sense of belonging. Therefore, more research is recommended with sensitivity to the role played by social identity in residential community sense of belonging.

CONCLUSION

Students have defined belonging to their residential community to mean that the resident’s journey is shaped by active leader-

ship and inspired within a physical and experiential environment, resulting in strong connections to people and place. This definition posited by students encompasses three themes: space and place, strengthening connections, and outcomes of belonging. The need for this definition is urgent as it is the first one contributed by student input, and it will allow scholars and practitioners alike to build on previously provided definitions. Additionally, our definition, perhaps uniquely, identifies belonging as a scale, not a dichotomous variable where belonging is either achieved or not achieved. This definition is important for practitioners and scholars as it offers a student-grounded operational definition for sense of belonging to a residential community within the collegiate context. This definition will aid in work performed by residence life professionals as it provides a unique insight into how students define belonging. This definition should inform practice in such areas as strategic planning, programming models, and daily interactions with residents. As a recommendation, further research is suggested to examine how to best operationalize and implement this definition of belonging to enhance the student experience on college and university campuses. ■

REFERENCES

- Beamer, M. (2020). Residence hall living: Four notions about community. *The Journal of College and University Student Housing*, 46(2), 88–94. https://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/acuho/journal_vol46no2/index.php#/p/87
- Berg, B. L. (1995). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (2nd ed.). Allyn and Bacon.
- Brazzell, J. C. (2001). A sense of belonging. *About Campus*, 5(6), 31–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/108648220100500608>
- Bronkema, B., & Bowman, N. A. (2017). A residential paradox? Residence hall attributes and college student outcomes. *Journal of College Student Development*, 58(4), 624–630. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2017.0047>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2009). *Internet, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method* (3rd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Duran, A., Dahl, L. S., Stipeck, C., & Mayhew, M. J. (2020). A critical quantitative analysis of students' sense of belonging: Perspectives on race, generation status, and collegiate environments. *Journal of College Student Development*, 61(2), 133–153. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2020.0014>
- Freeman, T. M., Anderman, L. H., & Jensen, J. M. (2007). Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 75(3), 203–220. <https://doi.org/10.3200/jexe.75.3.203-220>
- Gopalan, M., & Brady, S. T. (2020). College students' sense of belonging: A national perspective. *Educational Researcher*, 49(2), 134–137. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X19897622>
- Guido, F. M., Chávez, A. F., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2010). Underlying paradigms in student affairs research and practice. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 47(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.2202/1949-6605.6017>
- Hoffman, M., Richmond, J., Morrow, J., & Salomone, K. (2002). Investigating “sense of belonging” in first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 4(3), 227–256. <https://doi.org/10.2190/dryc-cxq9-jq8v-ht4v>
- Holloway-Friesen, H. (2018). On the road home: A content analysis of commuters' sense of belonging. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 36(2), 81–96. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csaj.2018.0017>
- Hsieh, H., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Johnson, D. R., Soldner, M., Leonard, J. B., Alvarez, P., Inkelas, K. K., Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., & Longerbeam, S. D. (2007). Examining sense of belonging among first-year undergraduates from different racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(5), 525–542. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2007.0054>
- Klein, H. K., & Myers, M. D. (1999). A set of principles for conducting and evaluating interpretive field studies in information systems. *MIS Quarterly*, 23(1), 67–94. <https://cci.drexel.edu/faculty/sgasson/Readings/Klein&Myers%5B1999%5D-PrinciplesForInterpretiveFieldStudies.pdf>
- Knekta, E., Chatzikyriakidou, K., & McCartney, M. (2020). Evaluation of a questionnaire measuring university students' sense of belonging to and involvement in a biology department. *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 19(3), ar. 27. <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.19-09-0166>

- Krafona, K. (2014). A sense of belonging in a university community: A study of undergraduate students. *International Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*, 4(1), 16–20. <http://article.sapub.org/10.5923.j.ijpbs.20140401.03.html>
- Leach, C. W., van Zomeren, M., Zebel, S., Vliek, M. L., Pennekamp, S. F., Doosje, B., Ouwerkerk, J. W., & Spears, R. (2008). Group-level self-definition and self-investment: A hierarchical (multicomponent) model of in-group identification. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(1), 144–165. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.95.1.144>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosn006>
- Marsden, P. V. (1990). Network data and measurement. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 16, 435–463. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.16.080190.002251>
- Pajo, B. (2017). *Introduction to research methods: A hands-on approach*. SAGE Publications.
- Pittman, L. D., & Richmond, A. (2007). Academic and psychological functioning in late adolescence: The importance of school belonging. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 75(4), 270–290. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JEXE.75.4.270-292>
- Salter, P. S., Grabsch, D. K., Crist, J. D., Lagisetty, J., Dyer, L. B., & Olvera, E. (2020). CUE-ing student success: Evaluating academic support space in residential communities. *The Journal of College and University Student Housing*, 46(2), 66–87. https://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/acuho/journal_vol46no2/index.php#/p/65
- Samura, M. (2016). How can residence hall spaces facilitate student belonging? Examining students' experiences to inform campus planning and programs. *Planning for Higher Education Journal*, 44(4), 90–101.
- Schussler, D. L., & Fierros, E. G. (2008). Students' perceptions of their academics, relationships, and sense of belonging: Comparisons across residential learning communities. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 20(1), 71–96.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2019). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Thorne, S., Kirkham, S. R., & MacDonald-Emes, J. (1997). Interpretive description: A noncategorical qualitative alternative for developing nursing knowledge. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 20(2), 169–177.
- Walsham, G. (2006). Doing interpretive research. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 15(3), 320–330.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This article proposes a new definition of sense of belonging. How does your campus and housing department define sense of belonging, and how does it compare/contrast to the authors' definition?
2. How is your campus and housing department purposefully designing physical spaces that enhance students' sense of belonging?
3. How might your housing departments strengthen connections between students to establish a *residential* sense of belonging?
4. How do students' social identities impact their sense of belonging on your campus?
5. How do definitions of sense of belonging vary for different populations on your campus?
6. What ways can your campus better assess and evaluate its definitions of sense of belonging?

Discussion questions developed by Kyle Fasset, the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill; and Tony Cawthon, Clemson University in South Carolina.