

INTRODUCTION

With the adoption of the new RLSH Mission: Residence Life and Student Housing fosters the foundational SMU experience where every student belongs, learns, and connects through their residential community. We make campus home. The question arose: What does it mean to “belong” in a residential setting at SMU? The department set out to answer that question with the intention of utilizing it to improve the Residential Commons experience for our students.

Our study began at the start of the Fall 2020 semester and will continue until the end of the Spring 2025 semester with the goal of answering the question: **How does sense of belonging to a residential community change over time?**

LITERATURE

Past research not only includes studies about sense of belonging to the college campus, but also to subsections of the university environment whether it be a specific class section or residence hall. In fact, Cheng (2005) suggested that a student’s sense of belonging is found to be most important in their residence halls, and while there is much research centered around themed living-learning communities, not much exists in relation to belonging in a residential college model. The residential college model, which is at the center of this study, is rooted in the traditions of residential colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, and is characterized by multidisciplinary students living together, students of all academic levels living together, live-in faculty, shared governance between faculty, staff, and students, and spaces intended for holistic learning and development (Penven, et al., 2013). Additionally, residential colleges are often champions of high-impact practices (HIPs) such as faculty interaction, leadership positions, and diverse interactions (Kuh, 2008). Many HIPs, such as service learning, participation in a learning community, and research with faculty, as well as holding formal leadership roles have been shown to correlate with a strong sense of belonging (Ribera et al., 2017).

While much has been studied about the corollaries to belonging, there is still little longitudinal research in the area of belonging on a college campus. Using the established scales developed by Leech (2008) and Hoffman (2003), this study examines how a residential college system fosters a sense of belong for its residents over time.

METHODS

Quantitative; longitudinal-panel study with 1 survey distributed twice as a pre-post-test per academic year for 5 consecutive years. This poster presents the first three semesters of data collection. Survey distribution was part of the Move-in and Sense of Belonging Survey (Fall- August-September) and Faculty-in-Residence Performance Evaluation and Sense of Belonging Survey (Spring- May).

Survey Contents:

Leach et. al., (2008) scale – Measuring In-Group Identification

- Individuals’ identification with an in-group is often treated as a general psychological connection. However, recent work suggests that a multicomponent approach is more appropriate.
- Scale items were presented with a Likert-type response scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

Hoffman et. al., (2003) scale – Revised Sense of Belonging Scale

- The primary objective of original study that the Hoffman scale was created to develop, test, and further refine a “sense of belonging” instrument that could be used to more fully understand why students persist in, or withdraw from, college.
- Scale items were presented with a Likert-type response scale that ranged from 1 (completely untrue) to 5 (completely true)

Leach et. al.

Self-Investment

Centrality (3 statements)

- I often think about the fact that I am part of my Residential Commons.
- The fact that I am a part of my Residential Commons is an important part of my identity.
- Being a part of my Residential Commons is an important part of my identity.
- Being a part of my Residential Commons is a part of how I see myself.

Satisfaction (4 statements)

- I am glad to be a part of my Residential Commons
- I think that my Residential Commons has a lot to be proud of.
- It is pleasant to be part of my Residential Commons
- Being a part of my Residential Commons gives me a good feeling.

Solidarity (3 statements)

- I feel a bond with my residential Commons.
- I feel solidarity with my Residential Commons.
- I feel committed to my Residential Commons.

Self-Definition

In-Group Homogeneity (2 statements)

- Members of my Residential Commons have a lot in common with each other.
- Members of my Residential Commons are very similar to each other.

Individual Self-Stereotyping (2 statements)

- I have a lot in common with the average member of my Residential Commons.
- I am similar to the average member of my Residential Commons

Identification (6 statements)

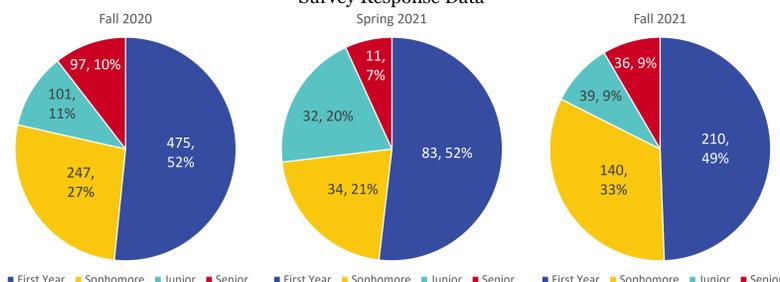
- I see myself as a member of my Residential Commons’ community
- I identify with other members of my Residential Commons
- Being a member of my Residential Commons just feels natural to me
- I feel (personally) implicated when members of my Residential Commons are criticized
- My university and my Residential Commons is an important group to me
- I have a lot of respect for my Residential Commons

Data Analysis:

Utilized Statistical Package for the Social Sciences to: (1) frequencies of respondent demographic; (2) only included complete; (3) calculated means of each instrument’s subscales; (4) inverted Perceived Isolation for ease of understanding; (5) compared means; and (6) performed paired sample t-tests to determine significance in changes.

RESULTS

Survey Response Data

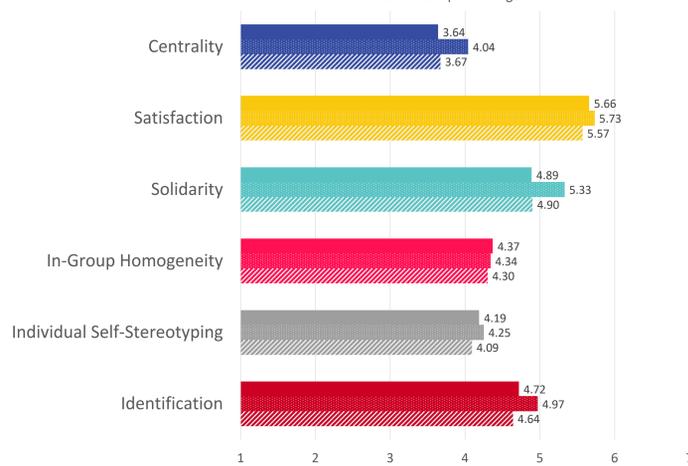


	Invited	Number of Responses	Completed Responses	Response Rate
Fall 2020	2,514	920	704	37%
Spring 2021	2,504	724	160	22%
Fall 2021	3,041	815	425	27%

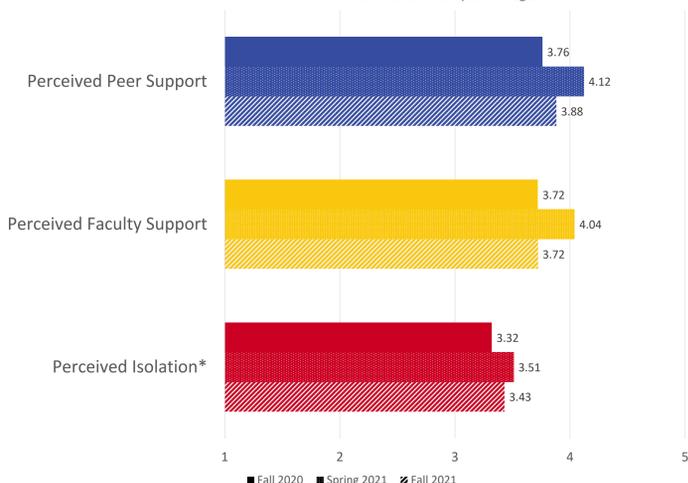
Paired- Samples t-Tests: Fall 2020-Spring 2021

	Mean Difference	N	Significance (2-tailed)	Cohens d
Centrality	-0.18	93	.403	2.02
Satisfaction	0.05	93	.682	1.26
Solidarity	-0.28	93	.067	1.45
In-Group Homogeneity	-0.17	93	.394	1.76
Individual Self-Stereotyping	-0.09	93	.654	1.85
Identification	-0.03	93	.822	1.38
Perceived Faculty Support	-0.27	93	.016	1.05
Perceived Peer Support	-0.20	93	.032	0.87
Perceived Isolation	0.06	93	.639	1.32

Leach Subscale Campus Averages



Hoffman Subscale Campus Averages



CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Fall 2020:

- Perceived Isolation*
 - Anecdotally, we need to consider that COVID-19 could have an impact on Perceived Isolation this semester.
- Campus average scores are trending positive, except Centrality.
 - Centrality, or how much students think of their commons affiliation as part of who they are, can be improved with greater emphasis on commons values at the start of the semester.

Spring 2021:

- Perceived Isolation*
 - Scores may be lower than anticipated due to continued programmatic changes across campus and within the Residential Commons due to COVID-19.
- All Campus averages are trending positive.

Fall 2021:

- All campus average scores, except for Centrality, are trending positively.
 - Based on scores from the previous fall, this is to be expected.

Fall 2020- Spring 2021:

- In-group homogeneity was the only score that decreased between Fall 2020 and Spring 2021.
- Solidarity increased by the highest amount.

Fall 2020- Fall 2021:

- Aside from Centrality, Perceived Isolation* and Perceived Faculty Support, averages went down from last fall.

Initial recommendations:

- Greater focus needs to be put on building Centrality within each Residential Commons. This can be done throughout the year by creating an emphasis on the values of each commons as they relate to individuals values.
- Additionally, In-group Homogeneity and Individual Self-Stereotyping can be improved by focusing on events that bring students together based on specific interests, goals, and values.
- While Isolation may be lower (i.e., students are feeling more isolated) than we would like to see, it’s important to know that this number may increase as society and SMU adjust to new operations around COVID-19, as long as staff continue to focus on making sure students are receiving plenty of opportunities to participate in social events and get involved in leadership roles within the Residential Commons.

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