I Feel at Home: Comparing Sense of Belonging in Varying Campus Recreation Programs

NIRSA

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We want our students to thrive at our universities, however...

Negative influences, such as stress and lack of sleep, can negatively influence school performance and behavior.

How can we help students from all backgrounds thrive?
Importance of evaluating wellbeing

When we evaluate wellbeing, we can:

- Learn more about what our students need
- Develop targeted, evidence-informed programs
- Evaluate the effectiveness of those programs
Engagement and belonging are important to wellbeing & retention

- **Engagement**: Meta-construct that includes behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004)

- **Belonging**: A feeling of being important to the school and valuing, or an appreciation of successes in school-related outcomes (Finn, 1989)
The Research Question

One way students feel a greater sense of belonging and engagement to their university are through activities (e.g., varsity sports, campus recreation, or fraternity/sorority).

But...

Are students who participate in varsity sports not as engaged as their peers resulting in them feeling like they do not belong to their university?
Methods

- WFU’s Wellbeing Assessment
  - Spring 2018
  - 16 schools; 6,290 – 6,291
- Weighted using raking
- Mplus (v 8.1)
  - MIMICs using MLR; reporting STDYX
  - Measurement model fit: RMSEA .03 - .03 (90% CI); CFI = .99; SRMR = .02
Fraternity / Sorority
Varsity
Club / intramural
Campus rec
Others

Belonging

~ 0 - .12
~ 0 - .23
~ 0 - .10

Happy
Engage.
Model 3

Engage.

- Fraternity / Sorority
- Varsity
- Club / intramural
- Campus rec
- Others

Belonging

Happy

~ .04 - .23

.40

.51
Model 3, Expanded

- .20 Fraternity / Sorority
- .20 Varsity
- .23 Club / intramural
- .15 Campus rec
- .06 - .16 Others

Engage.
What’s the explanation?

Fraternity / Sorority
Varsity
Club / intramural
Campus rec
Others

Other cognitive appraisals? Other affective experiences?

Engage.
- How can we foster engagement at universities?
- Specific activities do not seem to be associated with engagement.
How can we more carefully create activities based on better knowledge of student needs, interests, and values?
Implications

• Could we:
  
  • Talk with students in different activities to learn why those activities (but not others) are engaging for them?
  
  • Decrease activity overwhelm by removing activities that aren’t as strongly associated with student needs, interests, and values?
  
  • Conduct more detailed program evaluation to better understand why some programs are (not) well-attended? And whether attendance is always a good indicator of interest? Or needs and values?
  
  • Create more balanced offerings across a range of needs, interests, and values? Are most of our programs currently focused on particular areas?
Interested in learning more?

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