

Belongingness in Santa Fe College Students

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Abstract

This study evaluates factors impacting feelings of belongingness at Santa Fe College (SFC), including student-to-student interactions, student-to-professor interactions, extracurricular engagement, and real-life application. Sixty-five participants completed a survey gauging their perceptions of belongingness on campus alongside demographic information. Findings emphasize the influence of these categories, aiming to guide campus improvement initiatives towards enhancing students' sense of belongingness and subsequently boosting motivation and success.

Introduction

A strong sense of belonging has been correlated to be a crucial part of college success (Ames & Archer, 1988). Through studying student connections, there can be inferred solutions to increase students' sense of belonging and foster educational growth.

Our Purpose:

- Identify types of connection that students relate to their sense of belonging.
- Infer solutions to increase students' sense of belonging.

Related articles:

- Evolutionary perspective of why belongingness is necessary for humans. Included methods for measuring belongingness. (Malone et al., 2012)
- Study involving academic interventions assisting in student belongingness; defined as "social ties that facilitate the transfer of knowledge and procedures" (Gilken & Johnson, 2019). This article provided background for other college campuses initiatives to create belonging as well as the positive results of these initiatives.

Demographics: The ages ranged from 18 years old to 21 years old and older, and the majority (29.2%) of participants were 18 years old. A total of 34.4% of participants were first-generation students and 53.1% of students lived in Gainesville before enrolling into Santa Fe College. Refer to "Figure 2" for racial demographics.

Methodology

Procedure: We developed an online survey using Google forms consisting of 21 items that asked about the following areas: demographics, student to student relationships, student to professor relationships, extracurriculars and real-life application of their education, even though they are mutually exclusive. Participants were at least 18 years old, Santa Fe students, and were notified they could end the survey anytime and skip any questions. Students were asked to participate by a flier that was spread from their psychology professors on campus, who shared the survey with their students in class and by posting about it on Canvas. It was also sent out throughout various clubs on campus.

Results

Student-to-student

- 25.5% of students choose to remain silent due to concerns about being judged by their peers, while 44.1% identify both student and professor judgment as deterrents to speaking out; notably, only 2.9% refrain solely because of concerns about professor judgment.
- 63.2% of people students that say they don't feel comfortable participating or creating study groups are unsure about their sense of belonging or stated they do not have a strong sense of belonging on campus.

Student-to-professor

- 81.5% of students express a preference for establishing a rapport with their professors, citing that getting to know them, including work experiences, previous education, and hobbies, enhances their comfort level in class. (see Figure 3)
- 58.1% of students report feeling uncomfortable participating in students' life events such as intramural sports, elections, spring fest, and educational colloquiums because they believe they will not connect with anyone there.

Extracurricular

- 58.1% of students report feeling uncomfortable participating in students' life events such as intramural sports, elections, spring fest, and educational colloquiums because they believe they will not connect with anyone there.

Real-life Application.

- 63.9% of students feel personally connected to the real-life applications of the material they learn in class.

Other

- 57.9% of students who reported they did not have a strong sense of belonging at Santa Fe did not live in Gainesville before enrolling to the college.
- 45.2% of participants who are not Caucasian reported to not have a sense of belongingness or felt unsure of their belongingness on campus.

Reports of Belongingness

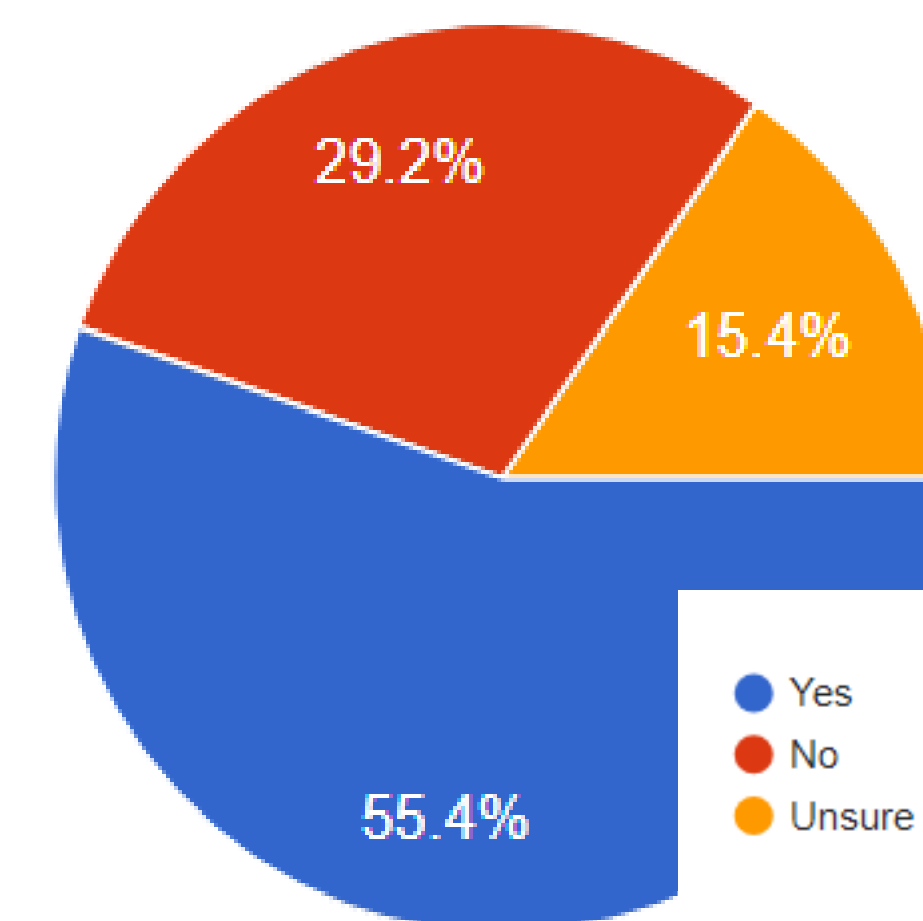
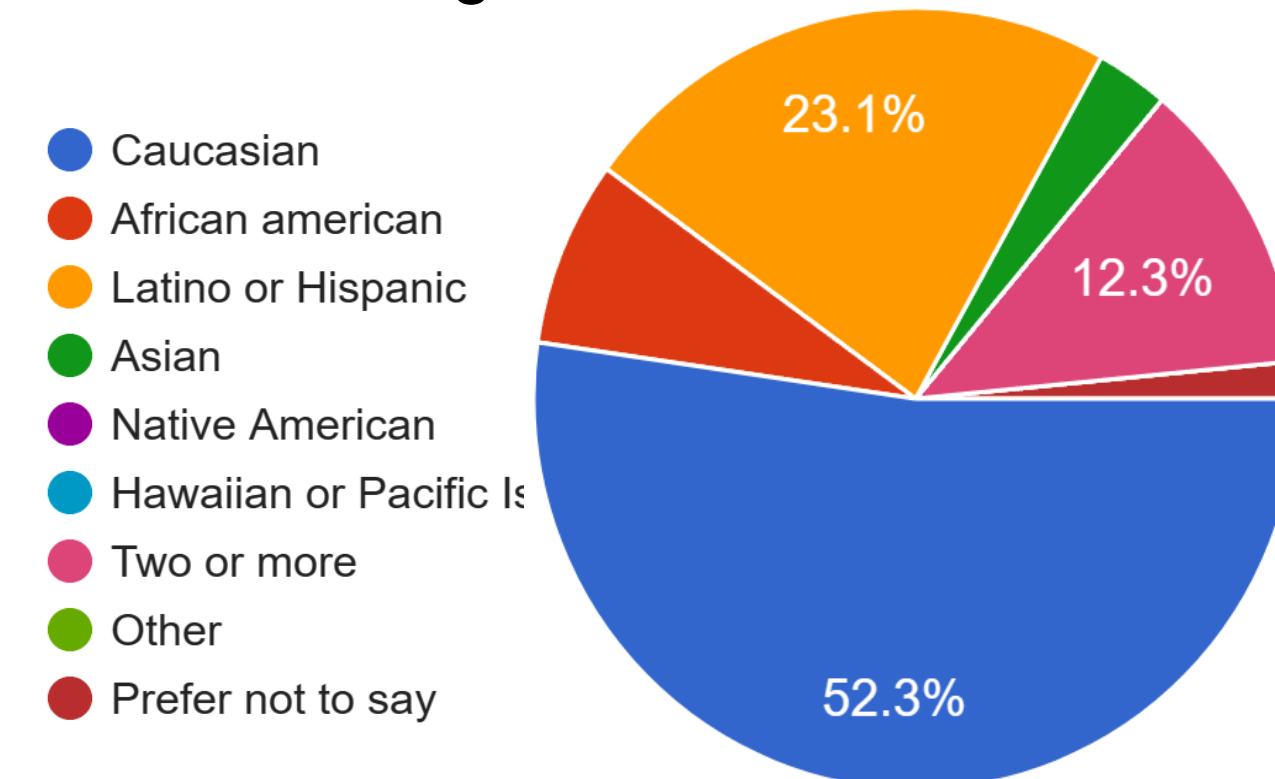


Figure 1

Figure 2



Discussion

Significance/Application

The study suggests that students lack a sense of belonging regarding their interactions with fellow students, often hesitating to speak in class due to fear of judgment from peers. Addressing this fear on the first day of class and promoting respectful communication throughout the semester can foster a more inclusive classroom atmosphere. Some students also struggle to engage in campus activities, feeling uncertain about connecting with others. Orientation programs and networking events tailored to newcomers to Gainesville can help integrate socialization. Students express a strong preference for personal connections with professors and practical applications of class material. Encouraging professors to share their personal experiences and academic insights can deepen this connection and sense of purpose. Prioritizing these approaches can enhance student motivation and well-being on campus.

Limitations/Future directions

The small sample size limits the study's generalizability, potentially skewing results. Moreover, as the survey distribution primarily targeted clubs and established groups, there's a possibility that students with a stronger sense of belonging were more inclined to participate, potentially introducing bias into the findings. Future research should focus on larger, more diverse samples and extended time for disbursement of the survey. More refined and specific inquiries within the identified categories are essential for gaining deeper insights into the factors influencing student belongingness.

Getting to know my professor (i.e. work experiences, previous education, hobbies) makes me feel more comfortable in class.
65 responses

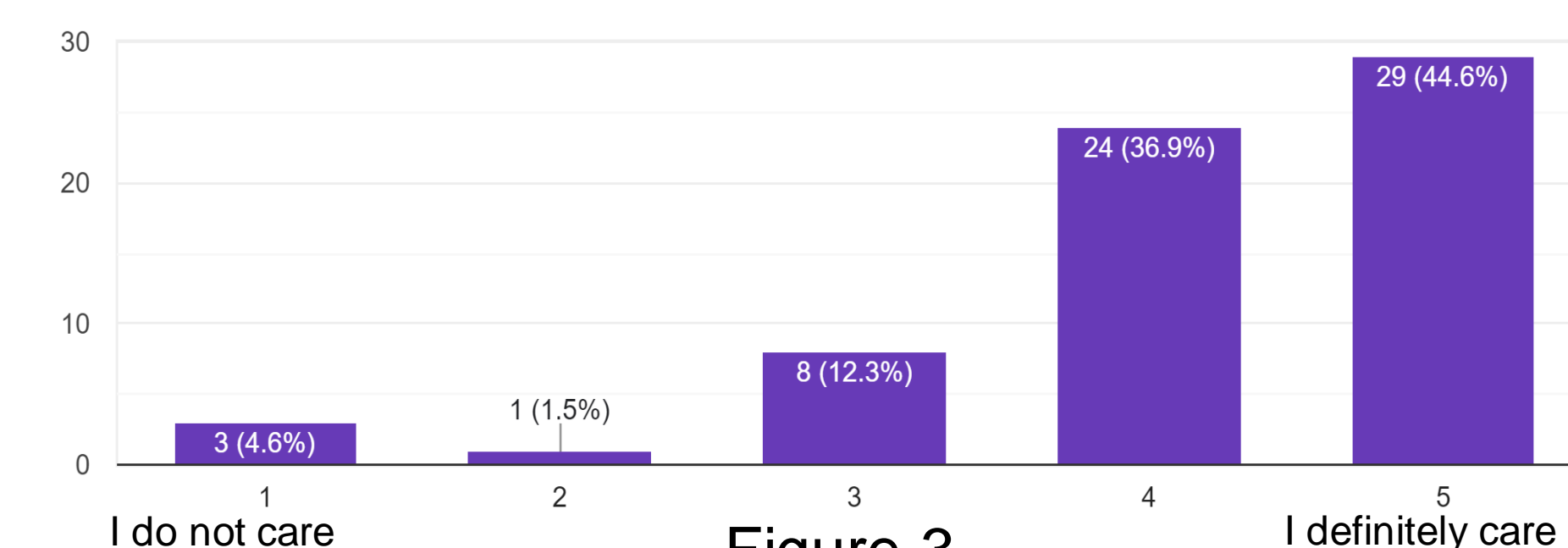


Figure 3

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