Academic Belongingness: Do students benefit from peer mentorship?

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Introduction

Academic Belongingness

- Academic belongingness contributes to academic success
- Defined as "the extent to which individuals feel like a valued, accepted, and legitimate member in their academic domain"

PSYCMentor

- Peer mentorship program launched in Fall 2020 by the Psychological & Brain Sciences Department (PBSI)
- Paired with the new first-semester experiences course
- Designed to provide a welcoming environment to help students acclimate to the psychology department/Texas A&M, as well as leadership opportunities for upperclassmen
- Focused on providing information, campus resources, extracurricular activities

Method

Participants

Race
- White (72)
- Black or African American (7)
- Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin (14)
- Asian (18)
- American Indian or Alaska Native (1)
- Middle Eastern or North African (1)
- Of two or more races (34)

Gender
- Men (12)
- Women (135)

Ability Status
- No disability (102)
- Has a disability (41)

Sexual Orientation
- Heterosexual/straight (127)
- Homosexual/gay/lesbian (5)
- Bisexual (12)
- Choose to self-identify or more than 1 selected (2)

Parental Education
- Less than a high school diploma (7)
- High school diploma/GED (12)
- Some college, or trade school/Associate’s degree (20)
- Bachelor’s degree (51)
- Master’s degree or higher (57)

Methods

- First-semester students were asked about their experiences in the middle & end of the semester
- 16-item measure of Academic Belongingness
- 1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree
- Sample items:
  - I feel at home at Texas A&M University
  - Being at Texas A&M is an enriching experience
  - Sometimes I feel I don’t belong at Texas A&M University (R)

Results

Belongingness

Time
- Main effect of Time: significant
  \[ F(1, 148) = 4.12, p = .04, \eta^2 = .03 \]

Gender
- Main effect of Time: ns
  \[ F(1, 145) = 1.76, p = .19, \eta^2 = .01 \]
- Main effect of Gender: significant
  \[ F(1, 145) = 4.72, p = .03, \eta^2 = .03 \]
- Interaction effect of Time x Gender: ns
  \[ F(1, 145) = .08, p = .78, \eta^2 < .01 \]

Race
- Main effect of Time: ns
  \[ F(6, 140) = .01, p = .91, \eta^2 < .01 \]
- Main effect of Race: significant
  \[ F(6, 140) = 1.74, p = .04, \eta^2 = .09 \]
- Interaction effect of Time x Race: ns
  \[ F(6, 140) = .66, p = .68, \eta^2 = .03 \]

Ability Status
- Main effect of Time: \( F(1, 141) = 2.95, p = .09, \eta^2 = .02 \) ns
- Main effect of Ability Status: \( F(1, 141) = .11, p = .74, \eta^2 < .01 \) ns
- Interaction effect of Time x Ability Status: \( F(1, 141) = .02, p = .90, \eta^2 < .01 \) ns

Sexual Orientation
- Main effect of Time: \( F(1, 142) = .24, p = .63, \eta^2 < .01 \) ns
- Main effect of Sexual Orientation: \( F(3, 142) = 1.07, p = .37, \eta^2 = .02 \) ns
- Interaction effect of Time x Sexual Orientation: \( F(3, 142) = .26, p = .85, \eta^2 < .01 \) ns

Parental Education
- Main effect of Time: \( F(1, 142) = 2.34, p = .13, \eta^2 = .02 \) ns
- Main effect of Parental Education: \( F(4, 142) = .72, p = .58, \eta^2 = .02 \) ns
- Interaction effect of Time x Parental Orientation: \( F(4, 142) = .93, p = .45, \eta^2 = .03 \) ns

Discussion

- Overall, students’ ratings of Academic Belongingness were higher at the end vs. middle of semester
- Sexual orientation, parental education, ability status did not impact Academic Belongingness
- Race and gender did impact Academic Belongingness
- Race and gender both had unequal group numbers, and the smaller groups may have skewed results

- Mentees were transfers & freshmen; all were in PBSI for the first time, many in A&M for the first time, making it essential to foster their sense of belongingness
- PSYCMentor launched COVID; mostly virtual format making it both more important and more difficult to foster belongingness given the circumstances
- First generation college students often face more challenges, but in this study they reported similar levels of belongingness compared to students who were not first generation