

# The Impact of Student Organizations on Sense of Belonging for International Students

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*This study looked at the impact that student organizations have on the sense of belonging of international students at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB). The research conducted aimed to identify if and how international students got involved with IUB-recognized student organizations, if the results correlated with a sense of belonging to campus, and any other potential trends that could be drawn from the data. The research drew implications about the effect student involvement has on belongingness to the college community.*

Student involvement on college campuses has long been associated with higher retention rates and a greater sense of student belonging (Astin, 1984). For this study, we looked at sense of belonging among undergraduate international students at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) and their level of engagement with IUB-recognized student organizations. To connect sense of belonging with level of engagement, we define terms, review existing research, and develop a conceptual framework in which to move forward.

Astin (1999) noted that student involvement "refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). Goodenow (1993) defined sense of belonging on a college campus as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment" (p. 80). Therefore, a highly involved student likely spends much time on campus, frequently interacts with faculty and other students, and participates actively in student organizations. These attributes positively influence students' sense of belonging.

Strayhorn (2012a) discussed the relationship between involvement in student organizations and a heightened sense of belonging in undergraduates. Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) offers more than 900 recognized student clubs and

organizations, or groups founded and led by students that meet and explore a range of subjects, including professional and general interests, recreational sports, religion, politics, service-based leadership, etc. (Trustees of Indiana University, 2015a). Part of IUB's mission is a commitment to "culturally diverse and international educational programs and communities" (Trustees of Indiana University, 2015b). This commitment includes fostering support for culturally diverse organizations created and led by IUB students, domestic and international alike.

Approximately 13% of the total undergraduate student population at IUB is comprised of international students (iStart, 2015). The Office of International Services (OIS) is charged with offering ongoing orientation, cultural, educational, and social programming for international students at IUB (Trustees of Indiana University, 2016); yet, they work directly with only 5 student organizations (T. Cook, personal communication, November 19, 2015). Accordingly, we identified limited research connecting individual engagement and sense of belonging for international students at American colleges and universities. Rienties, Beusaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, and Kommers (2012) emphasized that international students require additional attention and effort to achieve social integration as their home

support systems are oftentimes more difficult to access. International students experience loneliness and isolation due to a lack of familiarity in campus and cultural environment, limited or no peers, and little social support or sense of connectedness (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010).

As a university committed to culturally diverse and internationally educated communities, it is the duty of the entire academic body to integrate *all* students into the campus community. Research suggests that international students are at a greater risk of not persisting due to their varying cultural values, norms, and behaviors, which are less likely to fit into the American university environments (Berger & Milem, 1999; Rienties et al., 2012; Strange & Banning, 2015). As such, our study aspired to answer the following questions:

- Are international students getting involved with IUB-recognized student organizations and to what extent (i.e. attending meetings, organizational leadership, etc.)?
- Does international student's involvement in IUB-recognized student organizations impact sense of belonging to IUB's campus?
- What observations and trends of involvement within the international student population can be drawn?

By studying international students' perceived sense of belonging in relation to their involvement within IUB-recognized student organizations, this research identifies trends to provide avenues for future research, recommending strategies for faculty and staff to support international students in American college settings.

### **Literature Review**

Our literature review covers the rising trend of international students in the United States, students' sense of belonging with

college campuses, the impact involvement in student organizations has on sense of belonging, and the conceptual framework we used for our study.

### **Rising Number of International Students in the United States**

International students, or "students who have crossed borders expressly with the intention to study" (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organizations, 2010, p. 130), have reached a record population in the United States. As of 2014, the United States hosted more than twice as many international students than any other country in the world (Institute of International Education, 2014). This growing population of students is an important part of college campuses and it is essential that international students feel included in the community.

### **Sense of Belonging**

Research indicated, "students have a fundamental need to feel that they are an important part of a larger community that is valuable, supportive, and affirming" (Johnson et. al, 2007, p. 527). This emphasized a correlation between social involvement and sense of belonging (Berger & Milem, 1999; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Museus, 2014; Strayhorn, 2012a; Tinto, 2006).

Tinto's (1975) exploration into reasons people drop out of higher education revealed "a person may perform adequately in the academic domain and still drop out because of insufficient integration into the social life of the institution" (p. 92). Furthermore, Astin's (1984) theory of involvement emphasized that involvement leads to higher retention rates. The findings of Berger and Milem (1999) connect Astin's (1984) theory of involvement to Tinto's (1975) description of student persistence to show students with high levels of institutional commitment are

more likely to become involved and more likely to persist.

Tinto (2006) suggested that ‘what’ is important for student retention and graduation is different across student populations and environments, however the research does not provide clear factors on how to increase involvement for international students. Berger and Milem (1999) suggested adjusting Tinto’s model of student interactionist theory to be more inclusive of various student populations. They recommended “students who are most likely to persist are those who have values, norms, and established patterns of behavior that are congruent with [these] dominant [qualities] already in existence on campus” (Berger & Milem, 1999, p. 661). This is consistent with Strange and Banning’s (2015) ideas about person-environment congruence: that differentiated characteristics are less likely to fit in with an incongruent environment.

The rise in research on student involvement has been met with an increased focus on various student identities, including those of race and ethnicity. Museus (2014) developed the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model, which looked at the experiences of students of color and how their sense of belonging differed from White students. Museus (2014) noted that “students’ perceptions of the quality of their connections with the cultures of their respective campuses might be just as important as considering the quantity of these linkages” (p. 199).

### **Involvement in Campus Organizations**

Strayhorn’s (2012a) research revealed “students who were involved in campus clubs, organizations, and committees tended to have a greater sense of belonging in college than their peers who were not involved” (p. 111). Strayhorn’s research was the product of four different studies focused

on both White and Black domestic students in the United States. For some students of color, involvement in organizations helped to reduce or eliminate feelings of being an “other,” yet other students of color had a heightening of this “other” feeling (Strayhorn, 2012a). Rienties et al. (2012) also mentioned how being involved in student groups can influence social integration and lead to academic integration and lower levels of stress.

Student organizations are one form of High Impact Practices (HIPs), which are activities that an institution can offer allowing students to channel their time and energy towards a productive and meaningful experience (Kuh, 2009). While many HIPs have been identified that enhance a student’s likelihood of succeeding in college, only a few impact sense of belonging, such as engagement in co-curricular activities or undergraduate research.

Research in the field of student involvement and sense of belonging typically lacks information on international students or fails to indicate domestic/international status of the students involved in studies. Additionally, research on international students seldom includes specific information on their involvement with organizations, instead focusing on dropout rate, academic support (Nora, Urick, & Cerecer, 2011), and language barriers (Sherry et al., 2010). Taking this information into consideration, our study links sense of belonging for international students to their involvement in student organizations.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework used for our study was constructed with elements of Astin’s (1984, 1993) theory of involvement and Strayhorn’s (2012b) sense of belonging framework. These two theories examined

the influence of social interactions between individuals, and how these interactions influenced sense of belonging and increased satisfaction. These studies were developed with research that included some attention to heterogeneous populations, including those comprised of individuals of various cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Astin's exploration of student satisfaction in college examined the impact college has on a student's life. In his book *What Matters in College*, Astin (1993) stated that undergraduate students have a level of satisfaction at 75 percent or higher when they have opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. Strayhorn's (2012b) sense of belonging framework supports the theory of involvement by Astin (1984, 1993). With this in mind, Strayhorn (2012b) set out to explore students' use of social networking sites and how their use related to their persistence. International students had an overall lower sense of belonging than domestic students, and involvement in campus clubs and organizations positively impacted sense of belonging for all students (Strayhorn, 2012b). However, Strayhorn (2012b) only had 22 students (3%) identified as international students and excluded nationality.

To address this limitation, we adjusted Strayhorn's (2012b) model, which considered sense of belonging as a factor of student satisfaction, by utilizing an exclusive focus on international students. The Strayhorn model guided the investigation of how involvement in student organizations relates to IUB international students' sense of belonging. Sense of belonging ultimately increased student satisfaction and retention (Astin, 1993), which focused on the positive influence of student involvement on college student retention. Based on these theories, we hypothesized a positive directional trend for international students' sense of

belonging with involvement in clubs or organizations at IUB. Using a survey that was already tested for reliability and validity (see Johnson et al., 2007), we examined sense of belonging for IUB international students.

## Methods

By evaluating the sense of belonging in relation to international students' level of involvement with student organizations, we collected quantitative data through an electronic survey. Research indicated that web-based surveys can lead to higher response rates, higher levels of participation than that of paper-based surveys, and can be an efficient way to transfer data to computer software for further analysis (Issa, 2013). Our survey addressed all three determined research questions, and upon acceptance by IUB's Institutional Review Board, we moved forward with collecting responses from undergraduate international students. Participants completed our survey via an announcement emailed through OIS. Responses from different countries of origin established the varying cultural backgrounds that were considered when assessing participants' sense of belonging to campus. Once data was collected, we used descriptive and observational strategies to analyze trends that existed.

## Measures

Our survey consisted of questions to identify demographics, examine sense of belonging and satisfaction, and measure involvement in student organizations. We developed demographic questions to target trends during our analysis process, collecting birth year, country of origin, gender identity, academic class, and housing arrangement data. The sense of belonging portion of the survey was taken directly from scales used and validated in research

by Johnson et al. (2007). The section that we used for our survey revealed a high indication of consistency and reliability. Using a previous survey that has been tested for reliability and face validity is an acceptable practice for collecting data (Creswell, 2012). The Johnson et al. (2007) study achieved a 33.3% response rate, which underwent extensive review, pilots, and tests of internal consistency.

To evaluate sense of belonging, participants were presented with statements from Johnson et al. (2007) with answers placed on a five-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Participants considered aspects of their undergraduate experience that theoretically supported or diminished their physical, mental, and emotional connections to campus. The final section of the questionnaire addressed involvement in student organizations, with multiple-choice questions (except for a question about number of meetings attended), and included quantity and frequency of student organization engagement. Two questions specifically asked why students are or are not involved in student organizations to provide context to differing levels of engagement.

### **Procedures**

Construction and implementation of our web-based survey is supported by Fan and Yan's (2010) research for structuring the development, delivery, completion, and return of surveys. We collaborated with OIS to reach the largest potential number of participants through existing email databases, since research indicated that a sponsor can lead to higher response rates (Fan & Yan, 2010). OIS conducted an independent review to ensure that the survey aligned with their office's objectives and mission before sending it out to the target population.

Research indicated that special attention should be placed on the design, personalization, and information provided to participants through the process (Fan & Yan, 2010; Issa, 2013). As a result, we partnered with OIS to include a welcoming and informative letter to participants and provided subject headers throughout the survey. OIS sent out the survey twice within a four-day span to both contact students and remind them to complete the survey within the same week. Research indicated that participants are more likely to engage and answer surveys on Mondays and Tuesdays (Zheng, 2011) and Fan and Yan (2010) noted that Crawford et al. (2001) determined reminder emails should be sent out within two days of the original email survey.

### **Results**

Our survey received 176 completed participant responses, consisting of 62 (35.2%) men, 112 (63.6%) women, and two who preferred not to share their gender identity. The undergraduate international student population at IUB at the date the survey instrument was sent out consisted of 3,664 students (J. Warner, personal communication, November 3, 2015), yielding a response rate of 4.8%. The participants ranged from 18 to 32 years of age with the majority of responses (83%) between the ages of 18 and 22. Participants reported 22 different countries of origin with 45% from China and 17.5% from South Korea, the two largest demographics. Sixty-nine (39.2%) of the participants were first-year undergraduate students, 42 (23.9%) were second-years, 35 (19.9%) were third-years, and 30 (17%) were fourth-years. Fifty-five (31.2%) participants reported that they had not joined a student organization while 46 (26.1%) had joined one student organization, 39 (22.2%) had joined two

student organizations, and 22 (12.5%) had joined three or more student organizations.

### **Sense of Belonging**

Participants responded to a subset of questions, from surveys used by Johnson et al. (2007) and Bollen and Hoyle (1990), about their collegiate experiences as an IUB student in order to indicate their sense of belonging. According to the survey, 105 participants (60%) stated that they strongly agreed or agreed that they were a member of the IUB community, and 109 (61.9%) participants said they would choose the same college over again. When asked about comfort on campus, 149 participants (84.7%) responded that they felt comfortable on campus.

However, the other 27 participants (15.3%) indicated feeling neutral. When asked if IUB was supportive of them, 134 participants (76.1%) agreed. Finally, when asking participants if they felt a sense of belonging to the campus community, 111 participants (63.1%) reported that they did, 17 (9.7%) did not, and 48 (27.3%) felt neutral. Similar to the majority of participants indicating that they felt a sense of belonging to the campus community, 97 (55.1%) participants also reported involvement with student organizations may have caused a greater sense of belonging. Additionally, only six (3.4%) participants felt that they did not have a positive experience with student organizations.

### **Categories of Student Organizations**

The four organizations with the highest numbers of participants were the Malaysian Student Association, the Chinese Business Association, the Chinese Students and Scholars Association, and Ascend at Indiana University, a professional organization promoting leadership and global business potential of Pan-Asians (Indiana University Bloomington Chapter Ascend, 2014). These

four organizations are directed at serving the needs of Asian students, covering both professional and cultural needs.

### **Country of Citizenship**

Participants were from 17 different countries, with three students indicating citizenship in multiple countries. It is worth noting that three participants put a numerical value instead of a country. Survey data for these participants were removed for this question, reducing participants in this section to 173. The highest proportion of participants came from China (81 participants, or 45% of participants), with a high sense of belonging (indicating agree). Within this subpopulation, 40 (49.7%) were involved in student organizations, and 57 (70%) attended a student organization's event.

Several trends emerged from the 53 participants from Asia who did not report an overall high sense of belonging. Thirty-seven (69.8%) participants reported involvement with a student organization, with 47% attending five or more student organization events. When asked "Do you feel that you have a greater sense of belonging at IUB because of your involvement with student organizations?" 54% of these participants agreed and only 8% disagreed.

Out of seven participants from Europe, the three from Italy had a much lower sense of belonging than those from Austria or England. The Italians selected survey measures that indicated they felt comfortable on campus; were neutral on choosing the same college again; indicated IUB as being supportive and feeling like a member of the community; and did not have a sense of belonging to the campus community. The lack of participants from Europe made it hard to analyze these results. Report bias from too small a sub-population limits data analysis in quantitative research

as it increases the weight of individual responses (Creswell, 2012), which hindered conclusions for the European student population in this report. We include this information as a consideration for future research.

### **Gender**

Men and women reported similar percentages for sense of belonging. However, when observing the data in relation to statements of sense of belonging, the main distinction was found when participants were asked how comfortable they felt on campus. Men and women reported a 10% difference in how they agreed on comfortability on campus, men more than women. This correlates with Kelly & Torres' (2006) statement that women in general have higher concerns of campus safety, which we translate as level of comfort on campus. Furthermore, the two participants who preferred to not identify their gender reported low sense of belonging and disagreed that they had positive experience with student organizations. It should also be noted that while both men and women joined organizations at the same percentage (60.8%), 30% of men reported holding leadership roles, compared to 18.8% of women. For the two participants who did not identify their gender, both engaged with student organizations and took on leadership roles.

### **How They Got Involved**

Data revealed that only 43 participants (24.4%) attended the Student Involvement Fair, an event that promotes student organizations, local nonprofits, and IU support services to connect and engage IUB students (Trustees of Indiana University, 2015c). However, 108 participants (61.4%) attended a call out meeting for a student organization. This does not reflect participants who might have attended both

call-out meetings and the Student Involvement Fair. In addition, participants were asked to identify all the ways they got involved with a student organization. The top responses included a friend (55%), email notification from OIS (41%), social media (38%), and word of mouth (32%). Participants were able to select multiple options. Hence, percentage of results may overlap. The results highlight the importance of word of mouth and personal connections in recommending involvement in campus activities.

### **Number of Organizations**

Students involved in at least one student organization had an overall higher sense of belonging than those not involved in any student organization. Once a student is involved in four or more organizations, their sense of belonging increases, especially with regard to feeling like a member of the campus community, feeling comfortable on campus, and having a sense of belonging to the campus community.

### **Extent of Involvement with Student Organizations**

Overall, over half of undergraduate international students who completed the survey indicated involvement with student organizations. Of the survey participants, 107 (60.8%) students were involved with at least one student organization. Of these, 61% strongly agreed or agreed they had a positive experience with IUB student organizations. Additionally, 55% responded they had a greater sense of belonging because of their involvement, while 37% were indifferent. Level of involvement in student organizations varied when looking at meetings/events attended and leadership positions obtained. While 120 participants (68.2%) stated that they had attended a student organization's event (including meetings and social or networking events),

55 (45.8%) of those had attended five or more events.

The more events participants attended, the greater their reported sense of belonging was. When analyzing sense of belonging, those who attended five or more events tended to strongly agree and agree with the statements of belonging at higher percentages than those attending zero to four events. For instance, when reviewing the survey item that asked participants if “they felt like a member of the community,” those who attended five or more events reported they strongly agreed and agreed at 69%, while those who did not attend any events strongly agreed or agreed at only 49%.

### **Extent of Involvement within Student Organizations**

Of the participants, 41 stated that they had taken on leadership roles within student organizations. Of these, 59% held one leadership position and 37% held two. Those who responded that they had taken on leadership roles reported higher levels of belonging. When asked if they had a greater sense of belonging because of their involvement, 85% of those who had leadership roles responded with strongly agree and agree, while only 41% of those who did not have a leadership role indicated strongly agree and agree about having a greater sense of belonging. Looking at those who held leadership roles, 85% stated that they strongly agreed and agreed about having a positive experience with student organizations. On the other hand, 50% of those who did not have a leadership role stated that they strongly agreed and agreed about having a positive experience with student organizations.

## **Discussion**

### **Sense of Belonging**

When looking at overall sense of belonging, the results were surprising considering the implication that international students would have a harder time reaching a feeling of belonging on campus compared to domestic students (Sherry et al., 2010). While all participants reported high sense of belonging, first year students had the highest sense of belonging out of all undergraduates. Additionally, almost all of the participants (98%) indicated they were involved in some way. Those involved with a campus committee indicated higher rates of sense of belonging, which supports Kuh’s (2009) literature about HIPs. The high percentage of participants’ engagement on campus answered our first research question, which demonstrated that international students are getting involved.

### **Number of Organizations**

Once a student is involved in four or more organizations, their sense of belonging increases, especially with regard to feeling like a member of the campus community, feeling comfortable on campus, and having a sense of belonging to the campus community. This addressed our second research question that involvement in an IUB-recognized student organization directly impacts international students’ sense of belonging. There was a similar finding for the amount of events attended, which emphasized that students require time together in both informal and formal settings to feel more connected to the larger community. This mirrored the recommendations made by Braxton and Mundy (2001), who found an increase in retention when students are connected to their campus, including student organizations. This finding was also supported by Astin’s student involvement



theory (1999), which included the amount of physical energy that students devote to their time at their college. By investing more time in involvement on campus, or in this case specifically within student organizations, these students are rewarded by feeling a higher sense of belonging and are more likely to persist (Berger & Milem, 1999; Tinto, 1975).

### **Country of Origin and Cultural Impact**

There are suggestions that the disconnect between American culture and non-western international students' culture creates an incongruent environment, which establishes a barrier to having a strong sense of belonging (Berger & Milem, 1999; Rienties et al., 2012; Strange & Banning, 2015). Our study shows inconsistencies with this suggestion as the students from Italy had a lower sense of belonging, despite coming from a Western or Eurocentric environment that would be more compatible with American culture, and the Asian students overall had a higher sense of belonging, indicating they felt comfortable and compatible with the campus. At the same time, the very low number of European participants means that their views on campus comfort, support, and belongingness could be the result of idiosyncratic experiences rather than general experiences of students from these countries. Additional research is needed to examine the multiple factors at play and intricacies of this relationship.

A reason for the unexpected high sense of belonging from Asian students could be the types of organizations that these students joined. The results of this data informed the third research question (identifying trends that emerged from the data). The survey indicated that students heavily belonged to and attended events of culturally relevant organizations. This is supported by the literature as Museus (2014) suggested that a

cultural connection is an important aspect of connecting to the larger campus. However, a majority of Chinese participants reside on campus and spend time with peers, which can also positively influence sense of belonging, according to Kuh (2009). These two factors could be isolated in future research to determine the influence of residential status on sense of belonging.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations in the research should be acknowledged. Providing a survey enables participants to self-report information of their choice. As a result, the information provided may be falsified (Furnham, 1986). Additionally, although the survey was sent to 3,664 students, 217 students started the survey, and 176 surveys were considered for the research. While only a small proportion completed the survey, we believe the results are indicative of the population. Creswell (2012) noted concerns with a small (less than 10%) response rate via response bias, which may limit the meaning associated with identifiable trends. We considered the small sample size in all data analyses and noted concerns in data analysis, though the list is not exhaustive.

Using the survey by Johnson et al. (2007) provided multiple benefits for this study, but it was not designed specifically for international students. This survey also has limitations in the information collected, as the nature of the study was to provide observational trends and not in-depth explanations for the sense of belonging reported by international students. In addition, this survey was only offered in English, which may not have been the primary language for participants. While most questions were reviewed carefully and interpreted by each researcher as recommended in Fan and Yan (2010), there are colloquial references within different

questions that could have been misinterpreted. To limit the potential barriers, the survey instrument could have been provided in popular languages used by the international student population, as well as having been piloted by potential participants before it was released.

Despite asking participants to identify country/ies in which they hold citizenship, the survey was designed to consider international students as one static group. Rienties et al. (2012) noted concerns when consolidating groups of international students, as it “may oversimplify specific cultural adjustment processes across different countries, continents and cultures” (p. 698). Accordingly, results were stratified and examined separately. Thus, broad generalizations may not be indicative of how all international students perceive sense of belonging.

It is acknowledged that there are multiple ways that students could be engaging within the campus community to strengthen their sense of belonging, both through academics and other events with departments that are not student organizations. Such events could include programs sponsored through OIS, academic functions, or research projects hosted by faculty members.

### **Implications and Future Research**

As the rise in international student enrollment on college campuses continues (DeSilver, 2013; Institute of International Education, 2014), student affairs practitioners must find ways to connect and support students. Leong (2015) posed, “how might institutions of higher learning. . . better address international students’ needs?” (p. 473). Our research indicated IUB-specific responses that can be

considered by student affairs professionals at IUB as well as other institutions.

A major implication of this research is international students’ access to student organizations and how they get involved. As stated before, most participants initially got engaged with a student organization or were informed of one through word of mouth, interpersonal communication, OIS, and social media. The data demonstrated the importance that personal relationships had for participants in terms of getting involved.

Over three-quarters (75.6%) of participants either did not attend or do not recall attending the Student Involvement Fair. This event received institutional support from eight campus departments (Trustees of Indiana University, 2015c), although OIS is not a listed host. As an institutionally supported event, the Student Involvement Fair would likely benefit from collaborating with OIS to engage international students. Despite the limited number of international students attending the Student Involvement Fair, data showed that these students were engaged in student organization activities by other initial means. For instance, information from a known, trusted source often impacted the engagement of international students. Since OIS serves as a main source of information for international students, suggestions from that office would also lead to greater visibility for student organizations. Moreover, future research could look at the impact of interpersonal relationships between incoming international students with those already enrolled. Additionally, future research comparing the reasons domestic students get involved with student organizations would distinguish the impact interpersonal relationships and trust have for both domestic and international students.

A second implication is the level that international students are engaged in

leadership roles and the disparity between women and men in those roles. This study illustrated that those participants who were engaged in a leadership role tended to have higher sense of belonging and reported high levels of satisfaction with their experience. A suggestion for future research is to evaluate the motivation behind taking on a leadership role, as well as how international students are being prepared to take on those positions. In addition, leadership development offered to international students and how they receive and process those messages should be reviewed. When it comes to gender disparity among leadership roles, further research could investigate what gender roles mean to different international students. It should be noted that gender norms are created by society, reinforced by adults towards children during early childhood (Conry-Murray, 2015), and these norms may be different depending on country of origin. These cultural norms could have an impact on how international students perceive leadership, as well as how they engage with leaders or perform as leaders.

Another important element is the correlation between the student organization category and the number of international student members. Museus' (2014) work with the CECE model posits that "the extent to which college students have opportunities to physically connect with faculty, staff, and peers with whom they share common backgrounds on their respective campuses is associated with greater likelihood of success" (p. 210). Our data revealed that the four highest selected student organizations all focused on different themes but each culturally aligned with the large representation of Chinese or South Korean students. Additional research could investigate the trend and relevance of international students joining culturally driven organizations. There is the potential

that engaged students were able to recruit other international students of similar backgrounds into those organizations since the study has shown interpersonal relationships and trust are key factors into getting involved for international students.

Overall, our research supports Astin's theory of involvement (1984, 1993) and Strayhorn's sense of belonging framework (2012b). Even so, multiple considerations have been found that higher education professionals should address. Of particular note are (1) access to student organizations and how students get involved, (2) leadership development and the gender disparity within leadership positions, and (3) organizations that actively support cultural identities. This report indicated variance in each of these areas and calls for further research on how they affect international students' satisfaction and belongingness to their institution.

## Conclusion

In summary, our study looked at the sense of belonging of international students in relation to their involvement with student organizations. We reviewed the limited research on international students' sense of belonging and used Astin's (1984, 1993) theory of involvement and Strayhorn's (2012) sense of belonging framework to structure our study. We formulated a quantitative study, using the Johnson et al. (2007) sense of belonging, along with demographic questions and questions measuring levels of involvement. Our results addressed all three of our research questions (1) to identify if and how international students got involved with IUB-recognized student organizations, (2) if the results correlated with a sense of belonging to campus, and (3) if there were any other potential trends that could be drawn from the data. Our research indicated strong sense

of belonging and high levels of engagement for students, but does not necessarily prove correlation since students could gain a sense of belonging through student organizations and through other involvement. Overall, we bring forward considerations for additional research and implications which practitioners should contemplate as they look for ways to better support international students.

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