

## **Listening to students: The state and impact of student belonging in Business curricula**

**Background/context.** Informed educators have long recognised the importance of students' sense of belonging as critical to student engagement and persistence in their studies (e.g. Tinto, 1997, 2017; Thomas, 2012), but it has found even greater salience in the post-Covid learning environment.

**The initiative/practice.** In this paper, we report on a study we have been conducting over the past 2 years to make sense of student belonging in a large, multifaceted undergraduate Business degree with a very diverse cohort.

**Methods of evaluative data collection and analysis.** Phase 1, was exploratory and used an appreciative inquiry approach (student survey and co-design workshop) to make sense of what belonging means to students and what kinds of practices they felt fostered their experience of belonging. The insights generated in this phase informed trial interventions in two target subjects in Spring, 2021, Phase 2. In Phase 3, a quantitative survey (n=110) was conducted to evaluate these interventions and to further explore students' experience of belonging whether this is moderated by student demographics.

**Evidence of outcomes and effectiveness.** Students are generally comfortable contributing in class and receive academic support, however, perceived student isolation, peer support and friendship development are a concern. We found direct relationships between students' sense of belonging, in terms of academic support, class contributions and peer study support, and subject performance, however, this is moderated by student characteristics. Belonging is more strongly associated with student performance for recent school leavers and younger students. This means that belonging has particularly powerful outcomes for student transitioning to university. Our findings imply that teacher presence and opportunities for students to form networks with peers are critical in learning and assessment design.

### **References.**

Thomas, L. (2012). *Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change*. Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

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