Do I Matter?
Assessing Co-curricular Programs with the University Mattering Scale (UMUM-15)
AALHE Annual Meeting, 2015
#AALHE2015

Jeremy Penn, Ph.D.
Director, Student Affairs Assessment
@NDSU_SA_ASSESS
owa’s winning streak at 20 and gave coach Frank Solich his biggest victory.
“The feeling that one makes a difference and is significant to his or her university’s community” (France, 2011)
Mattering is positively related to:

• Emotional evaluation of self-worth (self-esteem)
• The belief in one’s own ability to be academically successful (academic self-efficacy)
• Actively seeking out appropriate help to solve a problem on your own instead of trying to get someone else to solve your problem for you (instrumental help-seeking)
• And is a central human need!
**mar·ginal·ize**

/ˈmærjənlайz/  

*verb*

past tense: *marginalized*; past participle: *marginalized*

- treat (a person, group, or concept) as insignificant or peripheral.
- "attempting to marginalize those who disagree"
- *synonyms*: sideline, trivialize; isolate, cut off, shut out; disenfranchise, alienate, estrange, discriminate against
“There are thousands of kids here and half of the professors don’t know their students’ names. I get called ‘yellow shirt’ if I was wearing a yellow shirt instead of my name in a class of 15.”
“As a transfer student, I felt it was difficult to try to ‘jump in’ and find a place where I belong or make friends, as other upperclassmen have already built that ‘status’ or place within the university.”
Why Assess Students’ Sense of Mattering?

• Health and wellness of our students
• Supports academic success and (hoped) related to retention
• Examine extent to which students are able to contribute to the NDSU community and perhaps be related to support for NDSU after they graduate
Outline

1. Methods
2. Scale reliability and validation
3. Mattering and co-curricular programs
4. Mattering and retention
5. Implications for institutions
Methods

• Surveyed all new undergraduate NDSU students (3,180 transfers and new freshmen) in September, December and April

• Response rate
  – 36% in September
  – 30% in December
  – 19% in April
A Note About Response Rates

• In April:
  – Repeaters (n = 1474) 33% response rate
  – Non-repeaters (n = 1550) 7% response rate

• Non-repeaters received 15 email contacts about the 3 surveys and never clicked on the link or opted-out

• Suggests large portion of students (perhaps half?) unlikely to respond to emailed surveys

• Perhaps also avoid surveys near the end of the spring semester
Instrument

• University Mattering Scale (UMUM-15, Megan France, 2011)

• Questions focus on mattering to the “NDSU community,” not a specific group or category
Scale Reliability

• 15 items
• September: Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.92$ (n = 1,157)
• December: Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.93$ (n = 789)
• April: Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.93$ (n = 460)
Test-Retest Reliability

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Administration</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
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<td>September</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
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<td>December</td>
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<td>0.86</td>
<td>4.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 228 students completed the Mattering scale in all three administrations
- Mean changed slightly (non-significant), median and SD increased a bit more
Item Analysis

• “Easy” items (highest means):
  – Give me advice when I need it (4.8)
  – Be upset if I were mistreated (4.7)
  – Pay attention to me (4.50)
  – My successes are a source of pride (4.8)
Item Analysis

• “Difficult” items (lowest means):
  – If I were not a student here, the community would suffer (3.5)
  – When I have a problem, people of the community don’t want to hear about it (3.9)
  – No one in the community depends on me (3.9)
  – People in the community are invested in my life (4.07)
  – Usually aware of my presence (4.16)

• First item on list stands a bit apart from the group
  – Only critique: scale may not provide much information for discriminating between individuals with very high mattering
Illustration only – based on dichotomized scores and Rasch model
Scale Validation

• Scale score worked as anticipated
• Associated with retention, students who were more involved had higher scores, transfer students and off-campus students had lower scores
• No differences by college of enrollment
• Supported single-factor solution
• Small correlation with High School GPA (.08) and ACT composite (.01)
Results
DO YOU MATTER TO THE NDSU COMMUNITY?

- **Agree strongly:** 13%
- **Agree:** 53%
- **Neutral:** 27%
- **Disagree:** 6%
- **Strongly disagree:** 1%

All New Students
DO YOU MATTER TO THE NDSU COMMUNITY?

- Agree: 49%
- Agree strongly: 8%
- Neutral: 31%
- Disagree: 10%
- Strongly disagree: 2%

New Transfer Students
Outliers (very low scores) in every student group category
• Transfer students and students who lived off-campus had significantly lower mattering scores than on-campus and non-transfer students.
  – Are there things we can do for transfer and off-campus students to help them feel they matter?

• There were low-scoring and high-scoring students in every demographic group.
  – We all have the opportunity to interact with students who feel they matter and students who feel marginalized
Mattering and Participation in Co-curricular Programs
“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

--Carl Buehner (or maybe Maya Angelou)
Wellness Programs

New Students who used one or more Wellness Services (Counseling, Disability, Wellness Center) had significantly higher mattering than those who did not.
New students who used one or more Enrollment Management Services (e.g., Student Financial Services, Bison Connection One-Stop Shop, Registration and Records, etc.) had significantly higher mattering scores than those who didn’t use any
Welcome Week

New students who participated in Welcome Week in AUGUST had significantly higher mattering scores in DECEMBER than those who did not
Not just about participation – connection matters!

New students who were socially connected to Residence Life, Memorial Union (clubs / activities), or Student Life reported significantly higher perceptions of mattering than those who were not
Mattering and Fall-to-Spring Retention
All New Students
96% retained (fall to spring)

High / High

All New Students
94% retained

Low / High

All New Students
82% retained

All New Students
Low / Low

79% retained

All New Students
New Freshmen Only

- 100% retained
- 97% retained
- 86% retained
- 81% retained
Using Results
1. Allowed us to more clearly communicate one aspect of our work as a Division of Student Affairs – and a way to track and measure changes

2. Staff development and recognize achievements
Practical Ways to Support Students’ Sense of Mattering

• Learn students’ names and use them
• Help students get involved at NDSU and make connections – being part of a team, group, or organization
• Show students that you care what happens to them – never be too busy to make someone feel they matter
• Be proud of students’ accomplishments and saddened by their failures
Practical Ways to Support Students’ Sense of Mattering

• Be intentional about reaching out to those who may be marginalized
• Give students opportunities to contribute to NDSU in meaningful ways
• Recognize that developing students’ sense of mattering to NDSU is everyone’s responsibility – your efforts to care for our students matter!
1. Allowed us to more clearly communicate one aspect of our work as a Division of Student Affairs – and a way to track and measure changes
2. Staff development and recognize achievements
3. Validation of the UMUM-15 scale
4. Gathered evidence to highlight the importance of the work of the Division
Implications for Institutions wishing to Assess Mattering

• Contact Megan France (Introducing the Unified Measure of University Mattering: Instrument development and evidence of the structural integrity of scores for transfer and native students) for permission to use the scale

• Have conversations about what you are about – if you can name it and claim it, you can assess it!

• Remember to focus on positive findings, too!

• Interest in institutional collaborations?
“Staff in the Dining Center are the nicest ever!”
-NDSU student
“I personally think NDSU does a great job at getting students involved and offering options to assist students in anything they could possibly need. This university does a great job at caring and supporting the students!”

– NDSU student
For more information:

http://tinyurl.com/NDSUmattering

jeremy.penn@ndsu.edu