Do Our Students Believe They Matter to Us? 
Experiences Assessing Mattering to Inspire Change at Two Research Institutions 
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NDSU
ASSESSMENT
DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS
Nebraska’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)
A Few Articles on Mattering to Get you Started


AWARENESS
CAUTION!
ALLIGATORS
NO SWIMMING

WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT PEOPLE

WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT WILDLIFE

Florida Department of Environmental Protection
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)
- Flourishing
- And is a central human need!
marginalize
/ˈmærjɪnlайz/ 🎧

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[s] 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?

If this is something we value, then we need to know whether or not we are successful at making our students feel they matter!
RESULTS
Methods

- Surveyed all new undergraduate NDSU students (3,180 transfers and new freshmen) in September 2014, December 2014, April 2015, and September 2015
- Response rate
  - 36% in September 2014
  - 30% in December 2014
  - 19% in April 2015
  - 30% in September 2015 (only sent to those who had already participated once or more and were still enrolled)
A Note About Response Rates

• In April 2015:
  – Survey Repeaters (n = 1474) 33% response rate
  – Non-repeaters (n = 1550) 7% response rate
• 93% of the 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 ever respond to emailed surveys while the other portion (maybe the other half?) are much more likely to respond
Instrument

• University Mattering Scale (UMUM-15, Megan France, 2011)
• Questions focus on mattering to the “university community,” not a specific group or category
Scale Reliability

• 15 items
• September 2014: Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.92$ (n = 1,157)
• December 2014: Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.93$ (n = 789)
• April 2015: Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.93$ (n = 460)
• September 2015: Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.94$ (n = 339)
Item Analysis

• “Easy” items (highest means):
  – Give me advice when I need it (4.88)
  – Be upset if I were mistreated (4.57)
  – Pay attention to me (4.42)
  – My successes are a source of pride (4.42)
Item Analysis

• “Difficult” items (lowest means):
  – If I were not a student here, the community would suffer (3.41)
  – People in the community are invested in my life (3.97)
  – Usually aware of my presence (4.15)
DO YOU MATTER TO THE NDSU COMMUNITY?

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

All New Students
September 2014
DO YOU MATTER TO THE NDSU COMMUNITY?

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

New Transfer Students
September 2014
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.

• There were low-scoring and high-scoring students in every demographic group.
University of Nebraska-Lincoln Results

- Used 4-point scale instead of 6-point scale
- 800 students completed the instrument
- Included broader range of students, not just new students
Score Results

Perhaps slightly lower than NDSU’s scores, but could be due to the scale conversion (converted overall score of 3.92 vs. 4.20 for NDSU)
Greek Students

Greek participants scored higher than most other sub-populations
Change over time

Scores tended to increase the longer students were retained
n=305
STUDENT AFFAIRS ASSESSMENT

25th percentile

End of Year Mattering (April 2015) vs. Initial Sense of Mattering (Sept 2014)

Legend:
- Large decrease
- Small decrease
- No change
- Small increase
- Large increase

NDSU NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

STUDENT AFFAIRS ASSESSMENT
In fact, if in any of the 3 administrations during the academic year we saw a mattering score below 3.8, the student was at a higher risk of attrition (85% vs 76%)!
After controlling for high school GPA, September mattering significantly predicted fall-to-fall retention.
Mattering and Participation in Co-curricular Programs
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 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 Involvement

Significant difference for those who reported no involvement (3.65) and those who were involved (4.01)
Using Results

I didn't have any accurate numbers so I just made up this one.

Studies have shown that accurate numbers aren't any more useful than the ones you make up.

How many studies showed that?

Eighty-seven.
PROGRAM PLANNING
STAFF TRAINING
Staff participation

Staff and departments are identifying strategies to increase students’ mattering
STUDENT EMPLOYEE AND RESIDENT ASSISTANT TRAINING
SCALE VALIDATION AND FUTURE ASSESSMENT EFFORTS
MORE CLEARLY COMMUNICATE

THE WORK OF STUDENT AFFAIRS
The Mattering of Staff

Administering the survey to student employees and permanent employees
-Do employees feel like they matter to us?
TAKE STEPS TO ENSURE OUR STUDENTS KNOW THEY MATTER TO US
Implications for Institutions wishing to Assess Mattering

• Contact Megan France (UMUM-15) for permission to use the scale
  – There are other scales available as well
• How does mattering reflect the work that you do?
• Remember to focus on positive findings, too!
Collaborations?
Not sure what form this would take yet – leave me your card if you are interested in participating in something!
“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

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