Greetings,

Earlier this year you participated in a study about your social identification with the University of Queensland and other UQ students, and said that you would be interested in hearing about the results. We appreciate your help with our research, and we are happy to tell you about the findings. They study was conducted by Fiona Barlow, Jayneen Farquharson and Janie Busby under the supervision of Drs. Winnifred Louis and Catherine Amiot. If you would like to ask questions, to comment on what you read, or to find out more, you can contact project staff by phoning (07) 3346 9515, by emailing w.louis@psy.uq.edu.au, or by writing to Dr. Winnifred Louis, School of Psychology, McElwain Building / University of Queensland / St. Lucia, QLD 4072. You can also read about other studies that we’ve done on social identification at http://www.psy.uq.edu.au/~wlouis/.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION AMONG FIRST-YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS.
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WHAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR.

The aim of the study was to investigate social identification and it relates to specific types of behaviours (i.e., studying, partying, fitting into the uni context) throughout the academic semester. Social identity is defined as that part of the self-concept that derives from our membership in social groups. This part of the self has been found to be important and to predict many of our day-to-day behaviours. In our study, we looked at three facets of identity, the evaluative aspect (i.e., how positive is it to be a member of UQ), the cognitive (i.e., how strongly one identifies with UQ), and a cohesive aspect (i.e., how strongly does one relate to other UQ students). We also looked at different perceptions of social norms for being a student (i.e., what people thought other UQ students do in their day-to-day lives). Based on past research, we expected to find that when people identified strongly as being a student, and perceived students behaved in a certain way, they would be more likely to try to act that way too.

SOME DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS.

During March and April 2006, 525 participants completed the study. All participants were students from UQ, and were recruited while on campus, in class or participated for course credit. Participants ranged in age from 15 to 59 (but 75% were younger than 20), and slightly more than half were female (58%). Approximately half of the participants were enrolled in science (24%) or social science (22%) degrees, with other common degrees being Business/Accounting/Law (16%), Arts (14%) or Engineering/IT (11%). Most students were enrolled in four courses.

WHAT WE FOUND

1. OVERALL RESULTS. First we took measures of how much participants identified with UQ. The majority of participants (85%) identified with UQ and other UQ students, agreeing with statements such as ‘I feel connected to other UQ students’ and ‘in general I feel glad to be a UQ student’. Most students also felt that they were part of the UQ student body (61%), feeling a sense of belonging and friendship towards other UQ students. The three aspects of identity (evaluation, cognition, and perceived cohesiveness) all seemed highly inter-related. Only 12% felt that being a UQ student conflicted with other aspects of their
personality. Participants were generally happy with the grades they had received so far during the semester (65%), but less than half (44%) stated that they felt alert and energetic over the last two weeks.

2. BEHAVIOURS AND THOUGHTS OF UQ STUDENTS. Most participants thought that ‘the average UQ student’ intends to finish their degree (82%) and thinks highly of UQ (64%). However, only about half thought that the average UQ student wants to fit in with the student body (55%). Generally the participants thought that UQ students spend a lot of time socialising (73%) but few participants believed that the average UQ student studies hard (31%). Interestingly, there were some differences between the participants’ assessments of the average UQ student’s behaviour and their own behaviour. Most participants (similar to their judgements of others) thought highly of UQ (88%) and intended on completing their degrees (82%). However, the participants spent more time studying (41% said they studied hard) and socialised less (only 40% socialised often) than they thought the average UQ student did. Only 27% of participants stated that they tried to fit in with the student body.

3. WHAT PREDICTED BEHAVIOUR? We then examined whether participants’ beliefs about what behaviours UQ students generally display, and their identification with UQ, could predict their behaviour. Participants were more likely to say that they tried to fit in with other UQ students if they thought that other students were also trying to fit in, and if they identified strongly with UQ. Participants were also more likely to intend to finish their degree if they thought that the average UQ student also intended to complete their degree and if they identified strongly with UQ. How hard participants said that they studied was predicted by how much they thought others studied, and how much participants socialised was predicted by how much they thought others socialised. Finally, how highly students thought of UQ was predicted by how much they identified with UQ and how highly they thought other UQ students regarded UQ.

There were also relationships between participants’ ratings of how energetic they were, how happy they were with their grades, how conflicted they felt, and how much they identified with UQ. Those participants who felt accepted by other UQ students and a sense of friendship towards other students were more likely to be more alert and energetic and to be more satisfied with the grades they had received during the semester. Participants who did not identify strongly with UQ were more likely to feel that being a UQ student conflicted with other aspects of themselves.

CONCLUSION

These findings are in line with previous studies which suggest that what social group we identify with, and how we think members of that group behave (norms) influences our own behaviour. This first study was also followed by two follow-up questionnaires, completed by a subset of the students participating in this first study. The aim of these follow-up questionnaires was to examine how the students’ social identification with UQ and other UQ students changed over the semester. We are currently analysing that longitudinal data and these results will be available shortly.

THANKS AGAIN…

So that’s a description of what we found in this study. If you have any questions, or would like a copy of the longer write-up when we get that done (in several months) please get in touch. And thank you again for your participation and interest!