Greetings,

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: THE TRANSITION TO UNIVERSITY.
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WHAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR.
The aim of the study was to investigate social identification and how it relates to specific types of behaviours (i.e., studying, partying, fitting into the uni context) as well as academic performance and well-being 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. We were interested in identification with three groups: UQ students, faculty, and uni friends.

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 or in class on a voluntary basis, 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. We then asked people to come back for a second and third wave of data collection which took place near the middle and end of the first semester in 2006.

Those who came back were compensated $10 for each session, but we still only managed to retain 82 participants at Time 2 (16%) and 67 at Time 3 (13%). Older respondents were more likely to drop out, so that in the final sample 85% were younger than 20. This obviously raises important questions about the generalisability of the results! But in the analyses below, we focus on the folks whom we could track at all three points across the semester, to examine how things changed.

WHAT WE FOUND
1. CHANGE OVER TIME IN IDENTITIES. At Time 1, the majority of participants (91%) 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’. There was a small but significant drop to Time 2 (87% identifying with UQ students) and then no significant change ‘till the end of the semester (85%). We measured identification with faculty and friendship groups at Times 2 and 3: faculty ID was low (46%) and friendship ID was higher (64%) but neither changed over time.
2. CHANGE OVER TIME IN PERCEIVED BEHAVIOURS AND THOUGHTS OF UQ STUDENTS. At Time 1, most participants thought that ‘the average UQ student’ intends to finish their degree (87%) and thinks highly of UQ (66%). However, only about half thought that the average UQ student wants to fit in with the student body (54%) and few participants believed that the average UQ student studies hard (30%). Generally, participants thought that UQ students spend a lot of time socialising (81%). Over the semester, participants’ views of student behaviour became more work-oriented, but still 79% believed average UQ students wanted to finish their degree, 76% believed they liked UQ, 70% thought they socialised a lot, 58% that average students wanted to fit in and only 36% that they studied hard.

Interestingly, there were some differences between the participants’ assessments of the average UQ student’s behaviour and their own behaviour. At Time 1, most participants (similar to their judgements of others) intended on completing their degrees (90%) and a similar low number said they studied hard (32%). However, the participants thought more highly of UQ (91%) and socialised less (37% socialised often) than they thought the average UQ student did. Only 29% of participants stated that they tried to fit in with the student body. The average level of behaviour did not change over time.

3. CHANGE OVER TIME IN WELL-BEING. We looked at a number of variables linked to student well-being, like feeling energetic, feeling stress related to academic work at Time 2 and 3, and satisfaction with academic performance. Very few people reported feeling conflicted about being a UQ student (9% at Time 1, and 6% at Times 1 and 2). Energy levels were low (46% feeling energetic at Time 1), dropped at mid-semester to 36%, and then bounced back to 44% at Time 3. Somewhat in parallel, participants’ satisfaction with their academic performance fell from 74% at Time 1 down to 61% at Time 2, then bounced back to 66% at the end of the year. The end-of-semester was also linked to stress though, with 36% reporting stress from academic work at Time 2, up to 51% at Time 3.

4. RELATIONSHIPS AMONG IDENTITIES, BEHAVIOUR AND WELL-BEING. We were particularly interested in whether more positive outcomes in well-being could be linked to identities and behaviours. These analyses are still on-going. However, it looks as though controlling for earlier levels of well-being, both studying and partying were associated with lower stress about academic work and more energy in mid-semester. This sounds like evidence in favour of “work hard, play hard” but it should be noted that students who socialised more also tended to be less likely to say they would finish their degrees! For us, among the most interesting finding was that conflict experienced as a UQ student could be linked to higher stress even after controlling for additional factors. These are likely to be the findings we try to follow-up with further analyses.

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 and well-being. The small number of participants in the final sample is a real concern for us, however.

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!