Sense of Belonging Increases During Health Professions Students' Education

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BACKGROUND

- The Commission on Accreditation of Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) describes "a sense of belonging - the subjective feeling of deep connection with social groups, physical places, and individual and collective experiences ─ is a fundamental human need that predicts numerous mental, physical, social, economic, and behavioral outcomes" (Allen et al 2022).
- Belonging is associated with higher grades, self-confidence, and wellbeing outcomes.
- CAPTE's 2024 Standards and Required Elements include describing the effectiveness of the program director in promoting a culture of belonging.
- However, there is a lack of evidence documenting the sense of belonging in student physical therapists.



PURPOSE

- The primary purpose of this study was to document if there is a change in the sense of belonging of a single cohort of student physical therapists between the first and second years.

SUBJECTS

- 35 Texas State University Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) students.
- Students identified as male (9, 25.7%), female (25, 71.4 %), and non-binary (1, 2.9%).
- The average age was 23.5 (SD=2.73).



RESEARCH METHODS

Study design

- Descriptive observational design.

RESEARCH METHODS

Instrumentation

- This study used the Sense of belonging at Texas State University Department of Physical Therapy (SBTSUDPT) scale
  - an adapted version of the Sense of belonging at Imperial College London scale.
- It is a 10-question survey that includes 5 questions regarding faculty and 5 questions regarding students.
- The survey uses a 5-point Likert response scale and total scores range from 0-40.

Procedures

- This study was approved by Texas State University's Institutional Review Board #9483. Students were recruited via email.



RESEARCH METHODS

Data collection

- Participants completed the SBTSUDPT scale via Qualtrics Surveys software, Version 2023 of Qualtrics, Copyright © 2023 Qualtrics.
- Surveys were completed during an in-person class.

Data Analysis

- Statistics were calculated using Microsoft® Excel® for Microsoft 365 MSO (Version 2403).
- A paired *t*-test was used to compare mean scores of students in their first and second years.

RESULTS

- The survey total score mean was 26.9 (SD=5.56) for students in their 1st year and 30.0 (SD=5.86) for students in their 2nd year.
- There was a significant difference in mean scores $t_{(34)} = 2.88$, $p < .01$.

CONCLUSION

- Sense of belonging increased as students progressed from the 1st year of the doctor of physical therapy program to the 2nd year.
- Health professions programs should create a culture that promotes belonging as part of a broader approach to improve student grades, self-confidence, and wellbeing outcomes.

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