

Social Group and Level of Contentment of UBC Students

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UBC SOCIAL GROUPS

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PSYC 321

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationships between the types and sizes of UBC students' social circles and their perceptions of contentment in these circles. 94 participants completed an online survey measuring the variables of group size, type, extroversion, frequency of contact, and perceived feelings of contentment. The results show that there is a small correlation, yet not significant between content score and group type, $r_{pb}(138) = -.144, p=0.09$. This correlation indicated that higher content score is correlated with unrelated campus life. There is also a small negative correlation between the level of contentment and group size that is not statistically significant, $r(138)=-.02, p=0.78$. In general, although some explanations could be provided for the correlations, the results are not significant. Therefore, we retain our null hypothesis, both size and type of a UBC students social circle do not correlate with their content feelings in their social group.

Literature Review

The transition to university can be a stressful life event since students are experiencing new environments, finding their identities and seeking complementary social circles. The social ties built during university provide students with the social support they need to manage the vast array of stressors they will encounter. The closely related concepts of social integration and social support have been found to be a vital to the successful transition to university life (Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). House and Kahn (1985) differentiates between these two concepts by defining social integration as the structural components of relationships, like size of groups, while social support represents the functional components, actual or perceived support. Although social ties within courses provide social support that particularly benefits academic achievement (Wilcox et al. 2005), little research has looked into the support gained from other student groups.

Literature in social satisfaction has been largely directed to the changing preferences of aging adults (Lansford, Sherman & Antonucci, 1998) however, it may be possible to use similar theories to understand the changing social disposition of university students. The socio-emotional selectivity theory suggests that as we age our goals for social interactions change according to how we define our future (Carstensen, 1995). Although this theory was used to describe the social differences between 18- and 50-year-old generations, throughout university, student's perspectives of the future are also likely to change as they acquire their identity. The act of seeking this identity likely motivates university students to seek novel groups and activities. Research has indeed found that when asked who they would like to spend time with, younger respondents were less likely to choose familiar social partners than older respondents (Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990). These researchers concluded that young individuals are less satisfied with their social groups than their older counterparts. Is this true? Very little research has looked at how content students are with their social clique.

To begin to understand these interactions, this study seeks to answer whether social group type and group size (social integration) has a correlation with the feelings of content of the University of British Columbia students. For the purpose of this study we define contentment as the sum of social satisfaction and support. We hypothesize that both size and type of UBC students social circle will correlate with their content feelings in their social group.

Methods

Participants Our participants are all UBC students. We conducted the survey by both online and in-person. In total we have 95 participants, 20 are in person and 75 are online. And among the 95 participants we removed 2 participants because one of them chose the option "others" for social group type and he filled in "m" in the space provided which its meaning was not clear. For the 2nd participant, he used 12 second to finish the survey. Due to the insufficient amount of time, the legitimacy of the answers are doubted. 45 participants filled out an additional optional survey so we collected a total of 140 sets of data from 95 participants. Among the 95 participants, 53.2% are from Arts, 17% from Science and 9.6% from Land & Food System. The mean age is 21.2 years old, the average current year of study is 2.6 years and the average year of living in Vancouver is 3.76 years. The reason we asked for such information is to see if the group size is affected by the year of living in Vancouver.

Conditions The independent variables of this study are the social circle type and size of group.

'Group Type' was determined by the first question of the survey, "choose one of the following descriptions that best describes the social cycle that you are most connected to". According to the Encyclopedia Britannica's "social group" entry (n.d.), social groups are closely

related to their daily activities. This provided the bases of our ‘group type’ categorization. By keeping in mind the possible intentions of the UBC stakeholders, we decided to focus on the groups and activities that would be present in a typical student’s life. Using a list of popular campus activities collected by the Office of Institutional Research of Brown University (2011) sampling Brown University’s students, social group type was measured by a list of 12 group types with an additional option for ‘other’ which participants could name their groups if they did not fit any of the 12 categories. We also summarized and created 3 more social group types after viewing the answer from the option of “Others.” They were the general university groups: classmates from specialization, university friends (didn’t specify where they knew this social group), jump start (orientation in UBC), so at the end there were 15 different social group types in our analysis. After choosing a group type, participants were asked to answer the remaining questions based on this choice. To further analyze the influence of social circles present on campus versus the influences of circles absent from campus these 15 types were then divided into two groups scored 1 ‘unrelated to campus life’ and 2 ‘related to campus life’. These two groups were then compared with ‘contentment’ level. If the participant thinks he or she belongs to more than one social group, they are invited to fill in the optional section of the survey.

Group size was measured by asking participants to indicate (a) what percentage this group accounted for out of their total social network and (b) the number of people in this group with options ranging from the lowest interval of 1-2 scored as 1 to the largest interval, 10 or more scored as 4.

Measures The dependent variables were the participants perceived level of contentment with chosen group type.

We operationalized ‘content’ for one’s social circle by measuring satisfaction and social support. Satisfaction was theorized to be found in those who chose familiar rather than novel social partners (Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990). We conceptualized this to represent a state of equilibrium with no desire or need for change. Satisfaction therefore was measured by asking participants whether they would like to change something in their current circle or not, choosing ‘no change needed’ rated high in satisfaction. Social support, the functional aspect of social relationships, was more thoroughly defined through the availability and adequacy of supportive ties (Barrera, M. Jr., 1986). This construct was thus measured by asking participants how much of their social needs were being fulfilled, adequacy, and how much they turned to this social circle for social support, availability. Both questions were measured on a 11 point scale 1 being 0% and 11 being 100%. Scores of each question were then summed up to provide each participant with a ‘contentment’ value, with the highest possible score being 35.

We also assessed the frequency of contact since it might be a mediating variable which affects the level of contentment. Frequency of contact was assessed through a multiple choice question ranging from daily, scored as 1, to a couple times a term scored as 4. As a result a higher score in this variable would be interpreted as a lower frequency of contact.

Another potential mediating variable was participant’s level of extroversion. Introverts are described as preferring solitary activities were as extroverts show preferences for more social activities (Carver, C. S. & Scheier, M. F., 2012). These personality characteristic thus have the potential to influence the individual preferences for group size and type. The extroversion scale used was taken from the International Personality Item Pool representation of the Neuroticism, Extroversion, and Openness scale (IPIP-NEO). Rather than using the 130 inventory, from the

shortened version of the NEO, we selected 10 items that specifically measured extroversion. Participants were asked to rate on a scale of 0 -11 how they related to each statement. The final extraversion score was created from the sum of each response with 5 of the 10 questions being reverse scored to control extreme response sets. For the purpose of our study the highest score achievable was 110. Higher scores signified higher levels of extroversion.

Procedure Qualtrics was used to create an online format of the survey. The completed survey was then posted on a variety of social media pages including the Facebook pages: UBC textbook 4 sale, Walter Gage Residence 2014-2015, Buy and Sell - UBC textbooks, UBC Faculty of Arts, a researcher's personal page, and the UBC Arts Undergraduate Society. In addition researchers in groups of two recruited participants face-to-face at the UBC student union building on March 18th and the Buchanan café March 20th. Average time used to complete the survey was 2 minutes and 59 seconds. Informed consent was granted in the first section of the survey; this section informed the participants the purpose of the study and provided contact information. After consent, participants were asked to enter their email address to be entered into a draw for one of two Starbucks gift cards as an incentive. There were two parts in the survey. After completing the first half of the survey, participants were given the option to fill out an additional section describing another social group they were connected to for a second entry into the draw. Participants who were recruited face-to-face filled out the survey the same way as those recruited online, but through the use of the researchers' personal laptops, tablets and smart phones. Face-to-face participants were informed of the incentive both verbally and within in the survey. All participants were recruited between the 18th and 20th of March.

Survey responses were coded and entered into the statistical program SPSS. Participants who filled out the optional section of the survey were given two participant spots. Since these participants had answered the extroversion and demographic questions in the mandatory part, they were not asked to fill these parts again. Instead, data measuring participants' extroversion and demographics were duplicated for the two group 'types', and differed only in 'type' and the responses based on this group type.

Results

Contentment and group type There is a small correlation yet not significant between content score and group type, $r_{pb}(138) = -.144, p = 0.09$. This correlation indicated that higher content score is correlated with unrelated campus life.

Contentment and size There is a small negative correlation between the level of contentment and group size that is not statistically significant, $r(138) = -.02, p = 0.78$. After controlling the extroversion variable, there is a small, negative and not significant correlation between contentment and size $r(138) = -.02, p = 0.86$.

Group type and size There is a moderate positive correlation between group type and group size, $r_{pb}(138) = .445, p < .001$. This indicates that when the social group is related to campus life, the size of that group is usually bigger.

Other correlational findings

Contentment and meeting frequency There is a small positive correlation between the level of contentment and meeting frequency that is statistically significant, $r(138) = .18, p = 0.04$. This indicates that a higher content score is associated with higher meeting frequency (the negative sign is because of the data coding, the score on SPSS of higher meeting frequency is lower than the lower meeting frequency). Controlling the "extroversion" variable, there is a small, negative

and significant correlation between feeling of content and meeting frequency, $r(138) = -0.19$, $p = 0.03$. This correlation suggests that regardless of how extrovert is a person, higher level of contentment is linked to more frequent meeting.

Group type and meeting frequency There is a small negative correlation between group type and meeting frequency, $r_{pb}(138) = -.236$, $p = .005$ that is significant. This correlation indicates that if having a social group that is related to campus life is associated with lower meeting frequency, or having a social group that is not related to campus life is associated with higher meeting frequency.

Extroversion and size of group There is a small, positive and significant correlation between extroversion and size of group, $r(138) = .217$, $p = 0.01$. This suggests that a more extrovert person is linked to a larger size of group.

Meeting frequency and extroversion There is a small, positive and significant correlation between extroversion and meeting frequency, $r(138) = .182$, $p = .032$. This suggests that a more extrovert person is linked to a group which meets more frequently.

Demographic variable and other variables It shows that demographic variable, including years of studying at UBC, the year standing in UBC, years of staying in Vancouver have little and insignificant correlation to the contentment score, group type and size, meeting frequency and extroversion score. Refer to Table B for detailed correlations.

Other descriptive results Refer to Table C, D and F.

Discussion on hypothesis

Group type and size of group with level of content Our results suggest that when people meet with their social group which is not related to the campus life, they feel more content; however, the level of contentment is not associated with the size of the group. But when we look into the correlation of group type and size of group, we found that there is a moderate correlation between group type and the size, which suggests that when the social group is correlated to campus life, the group size is usually bigger than those group which is not related to campus life and is the group which people feel more content. This may suggest that people feel more content with a smaller social group which they can enjoy more attachment to different group members.

According to Fredrickson & Carstensen (1990), they concluded that young individuals are less satisfied with their current social groups than their older counterparts. Our results are not enough to justify this conclusion. Since the unrelated to campus life group is correlated to a higher contentment score, and one of the component of this variable is "high school friends", we could interpret that the older high school friends group is likely to bring a higher score of contentment; however, the unrelated to campus life group is also made of work colleagues, which we have no idea whether this is a novel group or an old group, so we cannot simply conclude that unrelated to campus life group is correlated to higher level of contentment because our participants feel more content to spend time with the older counterparts.

In general, although some explanations could be provided for the correlations, the results are not significant. Therefore, we retain our null hypothesis; both size and type of a UBC students' social circle do not correlate with their content feelings in their social group.

Discussion on other findings

Frequency and level of contentment Our results suggest when people meet more frequently, regardless of their extroversion, they are more likely to have a higher level of contentment. This might be interpreted as people usually feel more content about a social group when they spend more time with that group.

Extroversion, size of group and meeting frequency We suspect that extroversion is a potential

intermediate variable since an introvert person might prefer a smaller group and meet less, which is not related to whether the group is unrelated to campus life. We found that a more extrovert person is associated to a larger size of group and the group which meets more frequently.

Group of residence Our results also suggest that the residence group might be an interesting group to research more since its members have the highest level of content, the most frequent meeting time, and they are most extroversion group, but their group of size is relatively smaller than the others.

Limitations, challenges and improvement

Generalizability of samples The location of collecting our data was at the main east of the campus. This is where most business and art students are, which means that our data may not generalize to the entire student population. By choosing just the east side of the campus, we may have missed to represent students from the other side of the campus such as students from the faculty of science, engineering, medicine, and kinesiology. We should have more face-to-face survey participants in more location on campus rather than arts section.

Construct of social groups Since there were too many activities happening on campus, it was difficult for us to categorize different social group types on campus. Therefore, we adopted the social group categories from a study done in Brown University in the survey, but it might not precisely represent the typical social groups in UBC. Thus, we put the option of “other” on our survey to ask what activities they formed their social groups in and where. Most students answered that they formed their social groups from different clubs, orientation, and residence. We then had to open new categories for these answers, but it means that our original measure of social group was not constructed well. A pilot study should be run before the actual study, in order to identify the groups on campus. We can also conduct interviews with UBC students to identify common social group type in UBC.

Recommendations for UBC

Our results show that students at UBC seem to most frequently belong to groups created before university, in high school, groups based on ethnicity and culture, as well as groups that are unrelated to campus life. The results of our research could potentially be used by UBC and student bodies (e.g., AMS) to organize events catering to these group preferences, and create events or clubs that provide opportunities for those groups who measured low in ‘contentment’ to socialize (like those currently involved in student publications).

Our research shows that people are more likely to have higher level of contentment the more frequently they meet, regardless of their extroversion or introversion. Moreover, our research also shows that student publication is the least content group. Thus, we recommend UBC to identify what factors may have contributed to lower ‘content’ measures for student publication. Many of our participants’ social group were noted to be “unrelated to campus life.” Because we do not know what this implies specifically, we recommend UBC to identify what “unrelated to campus life” activities students are engaging in that could be contributing to high measures of contentment.

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Appendix

Appendix A.

Consent Form

Welcome to our study. We are running a survey on how satisfied UBC students are with their current social networks as our group project for the PSYC 321-Environmental Psychology course. The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. You will answer a series of questions about your social network in the survey. Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary and anonymous. You can refuse to participate or withdraw from the survey at any time. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential. All documents will be identified only by code number and stored securely. You will not be identified by name in any reports of this study. Data in this survey will only be accessed by the students, the course instructor, and the teaching assistant. Results of this study will be used to write a research report. There are no risks associated with participating in this survey. If you have any questions about the study, please contact us below.

Name: Ashley Tucker

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Name: Peony Tam

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Name: Koci Xu

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Name: Lisa Lee

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You can also contact the course instructor, Dr. Jiaying Zhao, assistant professor in the Department of Psychology and the Institute for Resources, Environment and Sustainability at UBC. Dr. Zhao can be reached at 604-827-2203, or environmentalpsychology321@gmail.com.

Appendix B. Survey Questions

By filling out this survey you are entered into a chance to win one of two \$10 Starbucks gift cards. The draw is optional. If you want to enter the draw, please fill in your email in the box below.

Email:

1. Choose one the following descriptions that best describes the social cycle that you are most connected to. At the end of the survey there is an optional section for an additional group that you feel connected to.

- a) Varsity sports
- b) Intramural sports
- c) Music and theater group
- d) Political group
- e) Cultural/ethnic group
- f) Religious or spiritual group
- g) Student publication
- h) Online social media
- i) Student government
- j) High school friends
- k) Work Colleagues
- l) Un-related to campus life
- m) Other:

Answer the following questions based on the group you chose above

2. How much of your entire social circle does this group make up?

0 (0%) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (100%)

3. How many people are in this social cycle?

- a) 1-2
- b) 5-6
- c) 8-10
- d) 10 or more

4. How often do you meet members of this group?

- a) Daily
- b) A couple times a week
- c) A couple times of monthly
- d) A couple times a term

5. How satisfied are you with this current circle?

0 (0%) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (100%)

6. Would you like to increase or decrease the number or you friends in this group?

- a) Increase

- b) Decrease
- c) No change is needed

7. How much of your social needs are fulfilled by this social circle?

0 (0%) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (100%)

8. How much do you turn to this social cycle for social support?

0 (0%) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (100%)

9. Would you like to increase or decrease the amount of time you spend with the members of this social cycle?

- a) Increase
- b) Decrease
- c) No change needed

In the following questions, on a scale of 0-10, rate each question as it relates to you

10. I feel comfortable around people

0 (Strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Strongly agree)

11. I have little to say

0 (Strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Strongly agree)

12. I make friends easily

0 (Strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Strongly agree)

13. I keep in the background

0 (Strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Strongly agree)

14. I'm good at handling social situations

0 (Strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Strongly agree)

15. I would describe my experiences as somewhat dull

0 (Strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Strongly agree)

16. I'm the life of the party

0 (Strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Strongly agree)

17. I don't like to draw attention to myself

0 (Strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Strongly agree)

18. I know how to captivate people

0 (Strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Strongly agree)

19. I don't talk a lot

0 (Strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Strongly agree)

20. What is your year of birth (YYYY)? _____

21. What is your current year of study?

- a) First year
- b) Second year
- c) Third year
- d) Fourth year
- e) Grad school

22. How many years have you studied at UBC?

- a) 1-2
- b) 3-4
- c) 4-5
- d) 5 or more

23. What faculty are you in? _____

24. How long have you lived in Vancouver?

- a) under a year
- b) 1-2 years
- c) 3-4 years
- d) 4 or more
- e) Born in Canada

Optional section: If you feel strongly connected to an additional social circle at UBC please complete the following questions about that social circle.

* If you fill in the following survey, you will have an additional chance to win the Starbucks gift card.

1. Choose one the following descriptions that best describes the social circle that you are most connected to. At the end of the survey there is an optional section for an additional group that you feel connected to.

- a) Varsity sports
- b) Intramural sports
- c) Music and theater group
- d) Political group
- e) Cultural/ethnic group
- f) Religious or spiritual group
- g) Student publication
- h) Online social media
- i) Student government
- j) High school friends
- k) Work Colleagues
- l) Un-related to campus life

Answer the following questions based on the group you chose above

2. How much of your entire social circle does this group make up?

0 (0%) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (100%)

3. How many people are in this social cycle?

- a) 1-2
- b) 5-6
- c) 8-10
- d) 10 or more

4. How often do you meet members of this group?

- a) Daily
- b) A couple times a week
- c) A couple times of monthly
- d) A couple times a term

5. How satisfied are you with this current circle?

0(not at all) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10(extremely satisfied)

6. Would you like to increase or decrease the number of your friends in this group?

- a) Increase
- b) Decrease
- c) No change is needed

7. How much of your social needs are fulfilled by this social circle?

0 (0%) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (100%)

8. How much do you turn to this social cycle for social support?

0 (0%) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (100%)

9. Would you like to increase or decrease the amount of time you spend with the members of this social cycle?

- a) Increase
- b) Decrease
- c) No change needed

Appendix B.

Table A. Summary of correlation results

		Correlations							
		Group_type	Group_size	Meeting_freq uency	Year_standin g	Year_of_stud ying_at_UBC	Years_of_livin g_in_Vancouv er	Contentment	Extroversion
Group_type	Pearson Correlation	1	.445**	-.236**	.093	-.017	-.184	-.144	.145
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.005	.373	.870	.077	.090	.089
	N	139	139	139	94	94	94	139	139
Group_size	Pearson Correlation	.445**	1	-.197*	.075	.025	.110	-.024	.217*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.020	.471	.815	.293	.780	.010
	N	139	139	139	94	94	94	139	139
Meeting_frequen cy	Pearson Correlation	-.236**	-.197*	1	.159	.145	-.090	-.177*	-.182*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.020		.127	.164	.389	.037	.032
	N	139	139	139	94	94	94	139	139
Year_standing	Pearson Correlation	.093	.075	.159	1	.625**	.039	-.208*	.015
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.373	.471	.127		.000	.711	.045	.886
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
Year_of_studying _at_UBC	Pearson Correlation	-.017	.025	.145	.625**	1	.273**	-.108	-.020
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.870	.815	.164	.000		.008	.302	.847
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
Years_of_living_in _Vancouver	Pearson Correlation	-.184	.110	-.090	.039	.273**	1	.127	.030
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.077	.293	.389	.711	.008		.222	.778
	N	94	94	94	94	94	94	94	94
Contentment	Pearson Correlation	-.144	-.024	-.177*	-.208*	-.108	.127	1	-.044
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.090	.780	.037	.045	.302	.222		.609
	N	139	139	139	94	94	94	139	139
Extroversion	Pearson Correlation	.145	.217*	-.182*	.015	-.020	.030	-.044	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.089	.010	.032	.886	.847	.778	.609	
	N	139	139	139	94	94	94	139	139

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Appendix C.

Table B. Summary of descriptive results of different social group type

Group type	N	Content	Size	Meeting Frequency	Extroversion
(1) Varsity	3	20.33	3.33	1.67	73
(2) Intramural	5	23.4	3.2	1.6	72.4
(3) Music & theater	2	18.5	2.5	2.5	74
(4) Political	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
(5) Ethnic/cultural	13	23.92	3.54	2.31	75.39
(6) Religious	9	21.33	3.78	2.22	63.89
(7) Students publications	3	14	3.33	3.33	59.67
(8) Online social media	10	20.9	3.3	2.4	64.8
(9) Student government	3	21.33	3.33	2	71.33
(10) High school	46	25.48	2.36	2.63	65.02
(11) Work colleagues	12	21.33	2.25	2.58	62
(12) Unrelated	17	24.88	2.65	2.41	67.24
(13) Others	5	24.00	2.8	2.6	58.2
(14) University clubs/groups	8	25.5	3.75	1.87	75.75
(15) Residence	3	28.33	2.33	1.33	80.67
Averages	138	23.69	2.85	2.4	67.34
Mode(s)		22	4	2	76, 79

Appendix D.

Table C. Top 3 Content, Size, Meeting Frequency, and Extroversion table

Variables	Content (out of 35)	Size (out of 4)	Meeting frequency (out of 4, 1 is meeting most frequent: daily)	Extroversion (out of 110)
Group types	Residence (28.33)	Religious (3.78)	Residence (1.33)	Residence (80.67)
	High school (25.48)	University clubs/ groups (3.75)	Intramural (1.6)	University clubs/groups (75.75)
	Unrelated to campus life (24.88)	Ethnic or cultural group (3.54)	Varsity (1.67)	Ethnic/ cultural group (75.39)

Appendix F.

Table D. Least 3 of Content, Size, Meeting Frequency, and Extroversion Table

Variables	Content (out of 35)	Size (out of 4)	Meeting frequency (out of 4, 4 is meeting least frequent: a couple times a term)	Extroversion (out of 110)
Group types	Music and theater (18.5)	Work colleagues (2.25)	Religious (3.78)	Others (58.2)
	Varsity (20.33)	Residence (2.33)	University clubs/ group (3.75)	Student publication (59.67)
	Online social media (20.9)	Music and theater (2.5)	Ethnic and cultural (3.54)	Work colleagues (62)