FOSTERING SUCCESS: THE QUESTION OF BELONGINGNESS AT THE GRADUATE LEVEL

by

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Abstract

This mixed methods research study explores the relationship between belongingness and academic success for graduate students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). With Canadian universities diversifying student populations by drastically increasing the number of students being admitted from non-English speaking backgrounds, knowing how best to support NESB learners is of great concern to institutions, administrations, and educators.

Researchers from many disciplines, particularly psychology, recognize that belongingness is an essential human need and motivation, yet it is often overlooked in education. Belongingness has been advanced as a powerful means of fostering academic success in higher education, yet in the field of Additional Language Teaching and Learning (ALTL), it is not well understood. This research can inform both educators and those involved with institutional policy enactment in ways to build stronger academic and institutional learning communities for NESB students.

In this study, graduate students from both English and non-English speaking backgrounds were surveyed at a research-intensive Western Canadian university in order to better understand perceptions of belongingness, language acquisition, and academic success. NESB participants were then interviewed to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. Data from 36 survey responses and 3 interviews were gathered and interpreted through hermeneutic phenomenological approaches.

The results of the study indicate that participants, particularly NESB students, perceived belongingness as an important aspect of their academic success at the graduate level. In particular, they identified that their peer to peer relationships, their relationships between students and faculty, and the classroom and campus environment all played key roles in their perceptions of belongingness. The data suggests that having a greater sense of belongingness would increase students’ feelings of happiness and satisfaction, as well as increase loyalty and allegiance to the university. This research has implications for educators and institutions concerned with inclusive education and best practices for English as a second language (ESL) and English as an additional language (EAL) students. It may also have impacts for other student populations as well, such as Aboriginal students, at-risk students, and even students from traditional or mainstream backgrounds.
Preface

This thesis is an original intellectual product of the author, Angela Finley. The research reported in Chapters 3 to 5 was conducted through the protocols of The University of British Columbia’s Okanagan Campus Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) under the project title: Fostering Success: The Question of Belongingness at the Graduate Level, Certificate Number: H13-02576 (see Appendix A).

As per UBC’s BREB guidelines, the data collection was conducted by Angela Finley under the guidance of the Principal Investigator and the thesis committee. The committee for this project included:

- Dr. Scott Roy Douglas
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<td>ALTL</td>
<td>Additional Language Teaching and Learning</td>
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<td>BREB</td>
<td>Behavioral Research Ethics Board</td>
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<td>EAL</td>
<td>English as an Additional Language</td>
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<td>ELAS</td>
<td>English Language Admissions Standards</td>
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<td>EAP</td>
<td>English for Academic Purposes</td>
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<td>ELLs</td>
<td>English Language Learners</td>
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<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
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<td>ESB</td>
<td>English Speaking Background</td>
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<td>ESP</td>
<td>English for Special Purposes</td>
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<td>IELTS</td>
<td>International English Language Testing System</td>
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<td>IGS</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies</td>
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<td>LPI</td>
<td>Language Proficiency Index</td>
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<td>NESB</td>
<td>Non-English Speaking Background</td>
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<td>TOEFL</td>
<td>Test of English as a Foreign Language</td>
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<td>PCU</td>
<td>Pacific Coast University</td>
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Glossary of Key Terms

Belongingness: To be a member of a group or have connections which invite that feeling; to feel valued and supported within that membership.

Social and cultural capital: Knowledge based on social and cultural understandings that facilitates membership into a specific group.

English medium university: An institution of higher education conducted primarily in the English language.

Hermeneutics: A qualitative research method based in the practice of interpreting concepts and ideas.

Inclusive education: Education that avoids the exclusion of particular groups.

Nature: Outdoor space that is untamed, wild, and populated with diverse species.

Phenomenology: Qualitative research that studies and describes the “lived experiences” of participants.

Social reproduction: The reinforcement of culturally-dominant perspectives, traditions, and values within institutions.
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It takes a whole community to raise a child and I was lucky to grow up in the community that raised me. I would also like to express my appreciation for my widespread, extended family in the Slocan Valley and to all others who have been a part of my journey.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all those who strive for

social justice, equality, and sustainability.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview of Chapter 1

Canadian universities are currently diversifying their student population by drastically increasing the number of graduate students being admitted from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) (CIC, 2013; ISI, 2014). Though these students are required to meet specific English language standards for entrance into universities, many linguistic and social issues still need to be addressed once they arrive, including: language difficulties (Berman & Cheng, 2001), confidence to express personal thoughts (Cheng, Myles, & Curtis, 2004), cross-disciplinary writing skills (Cooper & Bikowski, 2007), understanding social and academic expectations (Hennebry, Lo, & Macaro, 2012), discipline-specific writing skills (Huang, 2010), anxiety around oral communication (Kim, 2006), academic skills (Melles, 2009), adaptation to local social and cultural life (Myles & Cheng, 2003), language accuracy (Storch & Tapper, 2009), and the development of confidence and effective learning strategies (Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). With these rapidly changing demographics and multilingual and multicultural classrooms becoming more common, the need to know how best to support English as an Additional Language (EAL)\(^1\) learners is becoming essential.

According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, there are 260 000 international students in Canada, many from non-English speaking backgrounds (CIC, 2013). With rapid globalisation and current immigration policies, the number of graduate students from non-English speaking backgrounds attending Canadian universities is expected to increase dramatically over the next ten years (CIC, 2013).

However, once these students arrive, institutions are often challenged in how to address the specific needs of NESB graduate students, particularly in regards to language ability.

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\(^1\) In the literature of Additional Language Teaching and Learning (ALTL), English as an Additional Language (EAL), English as a Second Language (ESL), and English Language Learner (ELL) are often used interchangeably (Douglas, 2010a). EAL refers to the fact that many individuals from minority language backgrounds in Canada may know more than one language other than English, thus English is not their second language, but rather an additional language to the languages they already know. Use of the term EAL rather than ESL avoids positing speakers of EAL in a deficit framework. In addition, the term NESB is used to describe individuals from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds. It is important to note that NESB individuals may have greater English language skills than those from English speaking backgrounds. English language competency levels are not indicated by the use of any of these terms.
Belongingness is a basic and fundamental need in human psychology (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1970; Osterman, 2000; Thomas, 2012), yet it is often lost within the educational system (Beck & Malley, 2003; Kunc, 1992; Osterman, 2000; Thomas, 2012). This study seeks to address that discrepancy by gaining a better understanding of the relationship between a sense of belongingness and academic success for graduate students from NESB. Research indicates that a sense of belongingness plays a major role in academic success (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Thomas, 2012); however, this topic within the field of Additional Language Teaching and Learning (ALTL) at the graduate level has not been well-explored (Shapiro, 2012). Myles and Cheng (2013) examined intercultural interactions for NESB graduate students and Hennebray, Lo, and Macaro (2012) studied the desire for international students to integrate with students who are native speakers of English in order to improve language ability; however in the review of the literature, articles on the topic of belongingness for NESB graduate students were not found. This study aims to address this gap in the literature.

This research project consists of a mixed methods study (Creswell, 2003; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012), including an online questionnaire and in-depth interviews, with the intent to learn more about the relationship between a sense of belongingness, language acquisition, and academic success at the graduate level. As Gay, et al. (2012) identify, mixed methods includes both quantitative and qualitative data in one research project. In a mixed methods design, numerical and qualitative data are triangulated in order to support each other within a study.
In this inquiry, using both Likert-scale and open-ended questions, 36 graduate students from both English speaking backgrounds (ESB) and NESB were surveyed about their perceptions of belongingness at an English medium university. For purposive sampling reasons, three NESB graduate students were then interviewed in order to better understand how to foster academic success for this population. Three NESB graduate student volunteers formed a sample of convenience based on availability for participation in the study (Gay, et al., 2012).

The hypothesis of the study suggests that belongingness is an integral aspect of language learning, and that an increasing sense of belongingness will accompany positive perceptions of the academic experience. By gaining a clearer understanding of belongingness for NESB graduate students, the aim of this research is to provide insight into how best to support academic success for NESB graduate students within the university environment. The hope is that this study will also offer insight into ways that universities can best create productive working relationships with graduate students not only from non-English speaking backgrounds, but from English speaking backgrounds as well.

Though some research has been done on the needs of graduate students from NESB, there remains much to be learned about the role of belongingness and academic success for English language learners (ELLs) at this level. By studying belongingness and ELLs in higher educational settings, the intent of this study is to offer a unique insight into the nature and role of inclusive education at the graduate level.

1.2 Summary of Relevant Literature

Belongingness is intimately connected to issues of identity, environment, and the ability to leverage social capital (Egbo, 2009; Osterman, 2000). Maslow (1970) posited that belongingness needs are essential and motivating, and that when these needs go unsatisfied, “a person will ... strive with great intensity to achieve this goal” (p.20). Baumeister and Leary (1995) further analyzed the need to belong and concluded that it “can be considered a fundamental human motivation” (p.521) and “can be almost as compelling a need as food” (p.498).
In education, Goodenow (1993) defined belongingness as a “students’ sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (teacher and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class” (p.25). It is this definition of belongingness that is the focus of the current study. Building on this concept of belongingness, Kunc (1992) writes that the drive to belong is an aspect of our educational system that is greatly misdirected, and states that “belonging has been transformed from an unconditional need and right of all people into something that must be earned” (Kunc, 1992, para.20).

Lack of belongingness within the educational system has the negative effect of alienating many students from school and creating a disconnect from learning, with repercussions including feelings of isolation, depression, and loneliness (Beck & Malley, 2003; Kunc, 1992). Krashen’s (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis identifies that these pressures can create emotional barriers, such as anxiety, that may further prevent students, particularly language learners, from being able to learn, thereby exacerbating difficulties in school. If a sense of belonging is not being met, a very powerful motivation is also lost or greatly reduced (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Without a focus on belongingness, the educational structure then creates two major consequences: intrinsic belongingness needs go unmet and, where there is little chance of success under these conditions, the powerful and motivating factor of belonging is greatly reduced (Kunc, 1992).

The need to belong to a group that can provide linguistic opportunities is particularly critical for those studying English. Norton and Toohey (2001) suggest that those who enter into and are included in groups learn additional languages faster and more efficiently than their less social peers. Coelho (2004) agrees that “language learners need frequent opportunities to engage in extended, purposeful interaction in the target language” (p.146), linking to Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, which states that educational development improves by working together with adults or peers just beyond the learners’ competence level, and strongly indicates the importance of integrated and conscientious social interaction for language learners.
The need for socio-linguistic competence for English language learners, which “involves speaking or writing at an appropriate level of formality for the situation, observing cultural norms, . . . and recognizing or using varieties or dialects of English” (Coelho, 2004, p.109) is another essential aspect of language learning. Egbo (2009) identifies that these forms of “social and cultural capital” (p.15) are difficult to obtain unless one can gain access to the socio-linguistic environments that support its acquisition. The most successful language learners access or create linguistic communities of practice (Engstrom and Tinto, 2008), making it easier to gain the social interaction necessary to improve their language abilities. Educators can use these and other techniques to help support language learning (Lopez, 2012).

The idea of using the fundamental drive to belong as a learning and motivational tool for mainstream learners is becoming increasingly understood (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Thomas, 2012). As Goodenow (1993) suggests, when students feel like they belong, they have higher motivation, a greater personal outlook for achievement, and are able to find more meaning in their work. The What Works? Student Retention and Success report (Thomas, 2012) explores models for improving student belonging in the context of university campuses in the UK. The findings of the study point to four elements for increasing student belongingness, retention, motivation, and engagement at universities: “1) supportive peer relations, 2) meaningful interaction between staff and students, 3) developing knowledge, confidence, and identity as successful learners, and 4) experience that is relevant to interests and future goals” (pp.14-15). These assertions connect well to Egbo’s (2005) ideas, which indicate that a better sense of community in schools found “through empowering classroom practices” (para.3) is highly desirable. Her suggestions assert that “praxis oriented initiatives must give students a voice, foster their intellectual growth, affirm student identities, and focus on the needs of the individual” (2009, p.209).

In relationship to NESB graduate students, Myles and Cheng (2003) discuss the need for structured “intercultural contact” (2003, p.259). Lee (2009) also mentions the importance for instructors to be aware of cultural differences and to make provisions to promote interaction in class by highlighting the need for teaching classroom communication techniques and participation skills, while Krase’s (2007) analysis of a student/advisor relationship
emphasized the need for supportive academic relationships that would enable students to more fully participate in their disciplines. Rochecouste, Oliver, and Mulligan (2012) suggest that socializing correlates with positive academic results and recommend increasing social and cultural integration opportunities for students, and Cadman (2002) proposes a restructuring of the educational framework to be more transformative by developing student-generated curriculum and ensuring positive learning environments.

In addition, Louv (2008) writes extensively on the importance of human connections to nature, and writes that “green space fosters social interaction and thereby promotes social support” (p.51). He suggests that forming attachments to a specific location “can bind adults to a place and give them a sense of belonging and meaning” (p.158). However, Louv also adds that “disconnection from nature even when it is available has enormous implications for human health” (p.43). Based on these concepts, as graduate students from NESB are mostly arriving from international contexts, an element of this study was to ask if a connection to place and/or nature had the potential to increase feelings of belongingness. Louv writes that “humans seldom value what they cannot name” (p.141), thus also highlighting the importance of learning the local language and terminology of a place.

Despite these findings, a survey of both national and international literature on NESB graduate students produced fewer than twenty published articles on the topic (Berman & Cheng, 2001; Cadman, 2002; Cheng, Myles, & Curtis, 2004; Cooper & Bikowskí, 2007; Hennebry, Lo, & Macaro, 2012; Huang, 2010; Kim, 2006; Krase, 2007; Lee, 2009; Melles, 2009; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Rochecouste, Oliver, & Mulligan, 2012; Sloan & Porter, 2010; Storch & Tapper, 2009; Strauss, 2012; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011), with none of these articles specifically identifying the topic of belongingness in education. Though research has been done to examine ELLs at the graduate level, there is need for more information on the topic of belongingness.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand the relationship between perceptions of belongingness and academic success for graduate students from NESB. A clearer
understanding of this issue may provide insight into more effective ways to support ELLs at the graduate level, thereby promoting academic success for these students. As belongingness is posited as an integral aspect of language learning (Egbo, 2009; Norton & Toohey, 2001), a clearer understanding of this important topic may be of benefit not only to this unique population, but also institutions, instructors, other students, and university support staff. By asking student participants about their perceptions of belongingness at the university and interpreting the data through phenomenological approaches, the aim of the study was to put the voices of the students first and fill a gap in the existing literature on this topic. As the educational and social supports that these students need, particularly at the graduate level, are not well understood, evaluating how students can be better supported by their institutions, will promote not only the academic success of students, but also the health and sustainability of the university as well.

1.4 Research Hypothesis

The research hypothesis for this study suggests that there is a relationship between a sense of belongingness and graduate student academic success, with an increasing sense of belongingness accompanying perceptions of positive academic experiences and a decreasing sense of belongingness accompanying perceptions of negative academic experiences. Belongingness is also advanced as an integral aspect of language learning. These topics are of particular interest in order to understand how best to foster the academic and social success of NESB graduate students.

1.5 Research Questions

The research questions for this project asked:

- How can an institution create a better sense of belonging for its graduate students both from ESB and NESB?
- To what extent is a sense of belongingness influenced by English language acquisition?
- How is academic success influenced by the need to belong?
What can be done to create a better sense of belongingness for NESB graduate students at English medium universities?

To what extent is a sense of belongingness influenced by place and/or nature?

1.6 Objectives and Outcomes

By gaining a better understanding of ways that educators and administration can support student’s English language learning at the graduate level, these findings may be of some value for assessing current English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs and/or for making program recommendations that more accurately reflect the needs of graduate students from NESB on university campuses, in particular on the one where this study was located. There is hope that this research may also point the way to examining and evaluating issues of belongingness for other student populations as well, such as Aboriginal students, at-risk students, and even students from traditional or mainstream backgrounds.

1.7 Significance of Study

This study speaks to the question of social connectedness, a key concept in education (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Thomas, 2012) that has become even more relevant for universities as the number of international students continues to grow (ISI, 2014). ELLs are of particular interest because of their distinct educational needs, and as English language education is a burgeoning area in the academic community due to the benefits gained from recruiting international students, this issue is also of economic importance for many educational institutions.

Current research supports the notion that connectedness plays a large part in academic success (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Thomas, 2012) and that educational frameworks addressing the social aspects of education are of particular value for students from NESB, (Krase, 2007; Lee, 2009; Rochecouste, Oliver, & Mulligan, 2012).
Students tend to do poorly or leave schools where they do not feel socially or academically supported, and segregated and alienated populations are not sustainable for universities (Thomas, 2012); therefore, a better understanding of how to support and retain graduate students from NESB is of significance for academic administrations. As an example, two aims of The University of British Columbia’s (UBC) Place and Promise Annual Report are to “[i]ncrease awareness and experience of the benefits of intercultural learning” (Place and Promise, 2014) and to “[m]ake UBC a living laboratory in environmental and social sustainability” (Place and Promise, 2014), this study also matches some of the intended goals of a research intensive university such as UBC.

By asking students how a greater sense of community through belongingness could be built, the hope was to increase student voice and gather invaluable knowledge for devising better programs, which could then create more inclusive, and therefore more desirable, social and academic communities. An increased sense of belongingness for students can contribute to higher graduation rates (Thomas, 2012), which supports economic stability for both students and the institutions, while tuition from international students coming to more inclusive, therefore more desirable schools, could also be used to support a broad number of initiatives, at little extra cost to administrations (Eaton, 2009).

1.8 Overview of Research Methods

This was a mixed methods research study influenced by phenomenological approaches in the interpretation of the data. The study included an online survey and semi-structured interviews with a wide cross-section of graduate students at a research-intensive Western Canadian university, in this study called Pacific Coast University (PCU).

Following the research methods outlined in Chapter 3, interested participants were enlisted for the study through the use of “snowball sampling” (Gay, et al., 2012, p.143). This sampling technique facilitates the recruitment of participants without requiring direct access to their contact data. It also allows participants to recommend others to take part in the

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2 PCU was used as a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of participants taking part in the study. This action is similar to other studies in ALTL that have used a pseudonym for the institution (e.g. Lee & Marshall, 2012), or that have explicitly avoided mentioning a research site by name (e.g. Mossman, 2012). The recruitment materials in the appendices have been modified to include PCU as the research site.
study. This is a recruitment strategy typically used in situations in which it may be difficult to find participants (Gay, et al., 2012).

Participants from both ESB and NESB completed an online survey developed specifically for the study, in which demographic information, as well as quantitative and qualitative data related to belongingness, was gathered. From the participants in the online survey, three students from NESB were invited to take part in a semi-structured 30 minute interview on issues of belongingness. The overarching research question, “What can be done to create a better sense of belongingness for NESB graduate students at English medium universities?” was the major focus of the discussion, but gaining a better understanding of students’ experiences, particularly in relationship to language acquisition and the environment on campus, was also considered.

Data from both the survey and the interviews were then sorted, coded, and analyzed for emergent themes using qualitative approaches informed by phenomenological traditions, such as those outlined by Creswell (1998). This approach involves presenting the “lived experiences” (Creswell, 1998, p.51) of the participants about a particular phenomenon, in this case belongingness. As Creswell (2003) writes, in “[p]henomenological research...the researcher identifies the ‘essence’ of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study” (p.15). For Creswell, phenomenological data analysis starts by dividing the data into “meaning units” (Creswell, 1998, p.150) that can be combined as clusters of information. These clusters form the basis for providing a description of the phenomenon. During the analysis, Creswell highlights the importance of “bracketing” (1998, p.52) or setting aside all one’s own preconceived ideas in order to focus on the participant’s views in the data. In this study, the units of meaning were then combined into numerical data tables similar to those found in Douglas’ (2014) study, in order to gain a clearer picture of the findings. Other qualitative approaches, as described by Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012), were also used for the data analysis, but were supplemented with an understanding of phenomenology as outlined by Creswell. This method was chosen in order to best represent the “lived experiences” (Creswell, 1998; Gay, et al., 2012; Groenewald, 2004) and voice of participants, while also providing a numerical analysis of the findings, thus it is considered a mixed methods approach.
1.9 Limitations and Delimitations

Due to the fact that all participants involved in this study were from only one university, these findings are not suitable for generalization. However, the gathered data may serve as an indicator for possible areas of study for other institutions or researchers. As this study only has a relatively small number of participants, the data set is also very limited. Though the information gathered from this research project generated many valuable insights, it would be difficult to make any generalizations from it due to the restrictions of collecting such a small sample (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). In order to facilitate the interpretation and reporting of the findings, an important assumption had to be made. The assumption was that participants were able to share an honest assessment of their experiences about belongingness. In addition, this study only investigated the experiences of graduate students enrolled in studies at the research site. The study was delimited to graduate students in order to focus on the concept of belongingness from their perspectives.

1.10 Definitions of Key Terms

One of the key terms used in the study was ‘belongingness’, which was defined by Goodenow (1993), as a “student’s sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (teacher and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class” (p.25). This definition was found at the top of the online survey, so that students would have a common understanding of the term. Another key term used in the study was ‘nature’, defined by Louv (2008) as “natural wildness: biodiversity, abundance” (p.8). This definition was also provided in the survey. The definition for ‘academic success’ was not provided in the survey, as one of the questions asked students to provide their own definitions of academic success. Finally, for the purposes of this study, ‘inclusive education’ was defined as:

a pairing of philosophy and pedagogical practices that allow each student to feel respected, confident and safe so he or she can learn and develop to his or her full potential. It is based on a system of values and beliefs centered on the best interests of the student, which promotes social cohesion, belonging, active
participation in learning, a complete school experience, and positive interactions with peers and others in the school community. ... Inclusive education is put into practice within school communities that value diversity and nurture the well-being and quality of learning of each of their members (Government of New Brunswick, 2009).

1.11 Organization of the Thesis

Chapter 1 outlined the key elements and the context for the research project. The second chapter, Chapter 2, discusses the literature surrounding the topic. Chapter 3 presents the methods for the research project. The findings and results obtained in the study can be found in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 concludes the thesis with a discussion of the results and conclusions for the study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Overview of Chapter 2

The preceding section, Chapter 1, introduced the context of the study and established some of the key points that will be examined throughout the thesis. This chapter identifies and presents a review of the research and literature on the topic of belongingness in education, particularly in relationship to students from NESB. The purpose of this review is to provide both the conceptual and theoretical frameworks behind the study by analyzing factors related to belongingness for English language learners from the perspectives of the prevailing theories and literature in the field. Figure 2.1 provides a schematic overview of the conceptual and theoretical constructs contributing to the framework for this study. This figure uses a series of embedded concepts in order to best represent the relationships between the need to belong, belongingness in education, and belongingness and NESB graduate students. The points at the top signify issues highlighted in the literature that support belongingness (Louv, 2008; Thomas, 2012).

![Figure 2.1 Conceptual framework of belongingness for NESB graduate students](image)

*Figure 2.1 Conceptual framework of belongingness for NESB graduate students*
2.2 Educational Importance of the Study

As many ELLs face challenges on the fundamental level of language, an increased understanding of how to integrate belongingness into curriculum is particularly valuable. Exploring belongingness for English language learners at the graduate level requires a clear understanding of the need to belong as well as awareness of the negative effects of not belonging, and connects to issues of identity, environment, community, and the ability to leverage social capital in the English language. Though some research on the needs of graduate students from NESB has been done, there remains much to be addressed on the role of belongingness and academic success for this population.

2.3 Scope of the Literature Review

The research question guiding this review is: What can be done to create a better sense of belongingness for NESB graduate students at English medium universities? To introduce this topic, a working definition of belongingness is first established by introducing a theoretical framework around the need to belong, in which it is proposed that belongingness is a fundamental and highly motivating need for most humans. This study draws from Maslow’s (1970) belongingness hypothesis and combines it with principles from the field of ALTL by recognizing that belongingness is an essential part of the language learning process. Goodenow’s (1993) definition of belongingness in education is also introduced. Next, a comprehensive examination of why belongingness is important in education, both for mainstream students and ELLs is presented through the works of both Canadian and international educational researchers, both inside and outside the field of English language acquisition. Finally, research and literature pertaining to institutional and classroom praxis that incorporates belongingness is discussed, as well as justification for the integration of these practices into pedagogy for English language learners.3

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3 Aspects of sections 2.4 to 2.7 of the thesis were adapted from an unpublished graduate research paper (Finley, 2013).
2.4 The Need to Belong

“To belong: To be a member of a group, to have the right personal or social qualities to be a member of a group, to be appropriately and naturally placed or situated” (Oxford, n.d.).

This section of the literature review will first examine some of the major theoretical perspectives surrounding the belongingness need, based on the findings of leading psychological researchers in the field. It will then examine the need to belong through the perspective of education.

The need to belong can be considered one of the most powerful human drives (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1970). Some important aspects of belongingness include feeling a sense of membership, having qualities that match the expectations of a group, and being positioned either socially or physically in ways that are fitting to an individual’s sense of well-being (Oxford, n.d.). In Motivation and Personality (1970), Maslow examined of the topic of belongingness from psychological perspectives. He identified that belonging is an elemental and highly motivating need for most human beings, as well as being a fundamental aspect of a healthy community. Maslow (1970) writes that when the need to belong goes unsatisfied, “a person will hunger for relations with people in general - for a place in the group or family – and will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal” (p.20). He also identified belongingness as one of five major needs; the others include: physiological, safety, self-esteem, and self-actualization (see Figure 2.2). As Ondrik (2011) writes, Maslow theorized that “human beings are motivated to satisfy needs” (p.19), with belongingness considered to be one of the integral “[d]eficiency needs... critical to physical and psychological well-being” (p.19).
In response to Maslow’s theory, psychologists, Baumeister and Leary (1995), undertook a major investigation of the “belongingness hypothesis” (p.497) by collecting empirical data from over three hundred research articles in order to make a determination about whether or not belonging could indeed be considered a key human motivation. Their findings suggest that Maslow was correct, stating that “human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships” (p.497), a fact that strongly supports Maslow’s theory of belonging. They also identified that “belongingness can be almost as compelling a need as food” (p.498); thus, confirming Maslow’s suggestion that belongingness is indeed, highly motivating for most people. Baumeister and Leary (1995) also conclude by stating that “the present state of the empirical evidence is sufficient to confirm [that]... the need to belong can be considered a fundamental human motivation” (p.521).

Figure 2.2 - Maslow’s (1970) hierarchy of needs
2.5 Belongingness and Education

“If psychology has erred with regard to the need to belong ... the error has not been to deny the existence of such a motive so much as to under-appreciate it” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p.522).

If belongingness is indeed as integral as researchers have suggested, then the psychological and motivational implications of belonging clearly hold a great deal of relevance for teaching and learning (Shapiro, 2012; Van Houtte & Van Maele, 2012). This section examines belongingness in relationship to some key theoretical perspectives in education and educational research.

In terms of belongingness, issues of identity, place, and connection are all elements that have many implications within educational systems and pedagogy (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004). Though educational matters were not specifically identified in Maslow’s work, he did assert that: “Any good society must satisfy... [the belongingness] need, one way or another, if it is to survive and be healthy” (1970, p.20). As Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest, however, the motivational aspects of belongingness are often undervalued. Kunc (1992) identifies that each of these elements: connection, community, and motivation, have important implications for how the belongingness need can either be a benefit or a detriment to students in schools.

Goodenow’s (1993) definition is highly applicable when considering academic belonging. He writes:

Belonging is defined here as students’ sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (teacher and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class. More than simple perceived liking or warmth, it also involves support and respect for personal autonomy and for the student as an individual (p.25).
The sense of social connectedness that Goodenow defines is an integral idea in educational theory (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004); however in practice it is frequently found to be deficient (Beck & Malley, 2003). As Kunc (1992) identifies, social recognition in schools is often difficult to obtain without accomplishment. He suggests that the belongingness need is an element of schooling that is often misguided, writing that “belonging has been transformed from an unconditional need and right of all people into something that must be earned” (para.20). Purpel (1989) too, asserts that, in schools: “Achievement becomes the basic condition for acceptance” (p.43).

Noddings (2012) identifies the negative connotations of evaluating human worth through achievement and points out the inequalities of this model, writing: “We do a disservice to both students when we put a higher value on the calculus grade than an equally well-earned grade in metal shop” (p.778). Despite the fact that, as McIntosh (1990) writes, "the feeling that one belongs within the human circle ...should not be seen as a privilege of a few" (p.7), the act of creating and fostering belongingness is often not consciously practiced in many school environments (Beck & Malley, 2003; Kunc, 1992).

Kunc (1992) also asserts that students who are deemed acceptable by others can get their belongingness needs met in schools through popularity, academics, or athletics. However, he adds that for those who do not meet traditional or mainstream definitions of success, satisfying the belongingness need can be much more challenging. In order clarify his point, he created a model based on Maslow’s hierarchy which illustrates the idea that achievement is often seen as a prerequisite for belongingness in schools, rather than the other way around (see Figure 2.3).
This view of achievement in schools has many repercussions for students within the educational system, and can cause feelings of alienation and disengagement from learning (Beck & Malley, 2003). Other ramifications of not belonging can include: anxiety/depression, loneliness, and isolation as well as derivative consequences, including cliques, addiction, gangs, and bullying (Beck & Malley, 2003; Kunc, 1992). These topics are also mentioned by Baumeister and Leary (1995) who write that “many of the emotional problems for which people seek professional help (anxiety, depression, grief, loneliness, relationship problems, and the like) result from people's failure to meet their belongingness needs” (p.521). These stressors can cause also lead to anxiety and other emotional difficulties that further prevent students from learning, thereby making academic and social struggles even more difficult (Krashen, 1982). As Yeh and Inose (2003) write:

an individual with a high sense of connectedness can easily form relationships with others and participate in social groups and activities, whereas, people who lack connectedness are inclined to experience low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (p.17).

Krashen’s (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis indicates that students, particularly those from NESB, can be significantly affected by this issue. In a later work, he identified the
importance of consciously addressing the issue within the learning environment, writing, “the more our classes are low anxiety, the better off our students will be” (Krashen, 2002, p.222).

However, as Kanpol (1999) identifies, competitiveness and individualism in education are often more highly-valued than the embracing of individual differences. Giroux (1996) identifies that this competitive model undermines social needs. He states: “Ignoring the primacy of the social, the current discourse on choice appeals to the logic of competitiveness, individualism, and achievement” (p.16). Kanpol (1999) suggests that learning environments that are competitive rather than collaborative, deter learning rather than motivating it. As Beck & Malley (2003) identify, attentiveness to ‘success’ in education, often produces social inequity that elevates, rather than alleviates societal problems. In addition, when the need to belong is not addressed, a significant level of motivation is lost or considerably diminished (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Adding to this problem, the hegemonic structure in many institutions means that the question of belongingness is rarely recognized as an issue of importance (Beck & Malley, 2003), thus the problems continue to be perpetuated. Egbo (2009) identifies the issue of “cultural reproduction” (p.15), which suggests those in the cultural majority are unfairly favoured by educational systems that work to maintain the status quo. Kanpol (1999) concurs, stating: “Within hegemonic formations lies ... the hidden curriculum - those unspoken values, norms, and ideologies that are passed on to students as common sense (competition, success, discipline, stereotype, gender division, etc.)” (p.34). As Beck and Malley (2003) identify, if these norms cannot be met by students, then ‘success’ in the conventional sense becomes unobtainable, adding that two major outcomes arise from an educational structure that does not deal with this issue. First, the need to belong goes unaddressed and second, the influential and motivational aspects of belongingness are greatly decreased.


2.6 Belongingness and English Language Learners

“Every human life starts in relation, and it is through relations that a human individual emerges” (Noddings, 2012, p.771).

As Noddings (2012) identifies, relationships between people are an integral aspect of developing the growth of one’s own individuality. In the case of language learners, Norton and Toohey (2001) suggest that the development of linguistic capabilities for English language learners also emerges in relation to others. They identify the importance of belonging to groups that can offer prospects for practicing the language and suggest that people who can connect or integrate into groups are able to learn additional languages more quickly and more efficiently than others. They write, “good language learning requires attention to social practices in the contexts in which individuals learn” (Norton & Toohey, 2001, p.318). As Norton and Toohey (2001) found, ELLs who had formed or accessed a linguistic “community of practice” (p.311) were the most successful because these communities provided needed social interactions to improve linguistic competency. Coelho (2004) too, agrees, writing: “language learners need frequent opportunities to engage in extended, purposeful interaction in the target language” (p.146). Engstrom and Tinto (2008) concur, noting that in their research, “students in ... learning communities were more academically and socially engaged” (p.47).

The idea of linguistic communities of practice connects well to Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, which identifies that students who work with adults or peers just beyond their level of competence can improve their academic development, a finding which strongly supports the value of conscientiously creating opportunities for language learners that include highly integrated social interactions. In addition, Coelho (2004) suggests that supporting socio-linguistic competence for ELLs should include instruction that teaches “speaking or writing at an appropriate level of formality for the situation, observing cultural norms..., and recognizing or using varieties or dialects of English” (p.109). Some examples may include body language, conversational techniques, and competence in strategic thinking that are based in social or cultural traditions (Coelho, 2004). As Egbo (2009) writes, obtaining social and cultural capital can be challenging, and without access to
the socio-linguistic settings that support its acquisition, Norton and Toohey (2001) suggest that English language learners are at a significant disadvantage.

Engstrom and Tinto (2008) state that collaborative work helps students, and particularly English language learners, “feel less alone, more confident of their ability to succeed…, and more supported in their studies” (p.48). From a societal perspective, Coelho (2004) identifies that “students from some cultural backgrounds may be more comfortable in a classroom that balances collaboration with more traditional competitive activities” (p.190). This idea is supported by research done in both the People’s Republic of China (Nevis, 1983) and South Korea (Raymond, Middlestaedt, & Hopkins, 2003) that suggests cultural background may greatly impact the belongingness need. Despite the problems of cultural relativism inherent in cross-cultural study, in regards to developing linguistic competencies, this topic presents an interesting view of pedagogy for English language learners from societies that have strong philosophical stances based on collectivist ideologies.

The question of belongingness in educational institutions also directly impacts individual English language learners, who are easily isolated by issues of linguistic and cultural difficulties (Kim, 2012). Maslow (1970) identifies the effects of “being a transient or newcomer rather than a native” (p.20) on the integral need to belong and indicates the challenging consequences that outsiders experience. Egbo (2009) recognizes that “schools are by no means level playing fields” (p.16) for students, largely due to the fact that specific cultural and linguistic knowledge, or “social and cultural capital” (p.15), helps ensure academic and social success to those who possess it. She adds that this knowledge, gained through cultural or socio-economic inheritance, also serves to discriminate against those who lack it. In addition, Kim (2012) pinpoints that feeling a sense of exclusion from the majority, being seen as culturally dissimilar, and having anxiety around oral communication are all key inhibitors of success for NESB students.
2.7 Supporting NESB Students

“Higher education must accept that the implications of offering access to non-traditional students do not end, but rather begin, at the point of entry”
(Bamber & Tett, 2001, p. 15).

With Canadian universities diversifying student populations by drastically increasing the number of students being admitted from NESB (ISI, 2013), issues around how to accommodate ELLs is becoming a much-discussed topic in higher education (Anderson, 2014; Friesen & Keeney, 2013). English language education is a growing field in the academic community, and due to the economic benefits gained from recruiting international students, this population will continue to be of importance for many educational institutions into the future (Eaton, 2009). However, issues of student retention and academic success for ELLs remain problematic once students are admitted into higher education institutions (Douglas, 2010a; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). Though these students are required to meet specific English language standards for entrance into universities (Douglas, 2010a; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012), they have distinct educational needs, with many linguistic, social, and cultural issues still needing to be addressed once they arrive. Berman and Cheng, (2001) identify that many international graduate students face English language difficulties. Cooper and Bikowski (2007) found that graduate students from NESB needed more skills training in frequently assigned academic coursework, which links to Terraschke & Wahid’s (2011) identification of the need for more preparation in reading, assessment, and writing tasks. Melles (2009) also found that a focus on written English skills was something NESB graduate students needed. Kim’s (2006) findings identify that graduate students from NESB need practice using academic oral language. Oral challenges, such as the ability to express one’s personal thoughts both in and out of the classroom, were also identified by Cheng, Myles, and Curtis (2004) and Hennebry, Lo, and Macaro (2012). Advanced reading requirements in English-medium universities were noted as challenging for NESB students by Roessingh & Douglas (2011), while Myles and Cheng (2003) identified the need for more intercultural contact and social activities. In addition, the need for clarification of academic and social expectations for NESB graduate students has also been noted in the research.
(Hennebry, Lo, & Macaro, 2012; Huang, 2010; Kim, 2006; Storch & Tapper, 2009; Strauss, 2012).

Major shifts in university demographics and the increase in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms has increased the need for a better understanding of how best to support English language learners, particularly in terms of academic success and student retention in higher education (Shapiro, 2012). However, as Bamber and Tett (2001) identify, particularly in higher education, the needs of students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds are often left unaddressed once they are admitted to the university. These researchers strongly suggest that the relationship should actually start, not end upon admission. In response to this idea, Thomas (2012) recently completed a study that researched seven United Kingdom, higher educational institutions. Findings from each of the universities emphasized “the importance of students having a strong sense of belonging” (p.12) not only for increasing academic success, but to ensure student retention. This report, titled *What Works? Student Retention and Success*, identifies four key elements to increase belongingness for students. These include: “1) supportive peer relations, 2) meaningful interaction between staff and students, 3) developing knowledge, confidence, and identity as successful learners, and 4) experience that is relevant to interests and future goals” (pp.14-15). These findings link well to Egbo’s (2005) suggestion that it is highly desirable to build communities in schools through the use of “empowering classroom practices” (para.3). Egbo adds that “praxis oriented initiatives must give students a voice, foster their intellectual growth, affirm student identities, and focus on the needs of the individual” (2009, p.209).

Using the need to belong as a way to both increase learning outputs and improve motivation for all students is increasingly being recognized in higher education (Thomas, 2012); however, to ensure academic success for all students, it is integral to also identify and address the specific belongingness needs of distinct populations, such as English language learners and other groups often marginalized within the university setting (Shapiro, 2012; Yeh & Inose, 2003). As Goodenow (1993) identifies, when students feel a sense of belonging, they are more motivated, have a greater personal outlook for achievement, and are able to find more meaning in their work, thus creating stronger students within the academic community. The following sections use some of Thomas’ (2012) ideas as a lens through
which to further examine institutional and pedagogical practices that could increase a sense of belongingness for English language learners, particularly in the university environment, thereby improving academic success for these students.

2.7.1 Positive Student to Student Relationships

“Social engagement can be seen to create a sense of belonging and offer informal support through interaction with friends and peers ... in the social sphere of the institution” (Thomas, 2012, p.14).

As Thomas (2012) identifies, peer to peer social support found within academic institutions increases feelings of belongingness. Activities that create both a sense of belonging and a sense of interpersonal stability in relationships are seen to be of benefit to most students (Thomas, 2012), but may be particularly beneficial to ELLs (Norton & Toohey, 2001). Collaborative opportunities for learning are seen as especially useful for creating a sense of belongingness because “all members... work together to achieve a common purpose” (Beck & Malley, 2003, para.20). This teaches learners how to build functional, working communities in the target language (Engstrom and Tinto, 2008), which create supportive learning environments that can be of great benefit for students from NESB.

An important aspect of belongingness is acknowledged as the maintenance of recurring social connections and interpersonal relationships that are established, concerned, and ongoing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Myles and Cheng’s (2003) findings indicate that “intercultural contact, and the social cohesion that can result from such contact, should be formally structured into student life” (p.259). This kind of contact could include organized social activities with other students, as well as peer-pairing, both in and out of classrooms. Providing students with formal opportunities to speak with native English speakers (Myles & Cheng, 2003) would also be of benefit. Coelho (2004) proposes that “extracurricular activities” (p.161) and “peer tutors” (p.186) would increase student interaction and motivation in academic matters, while both Engstrom and Tinto (2008) and Rochecouste, Oliver, and Mulligan (2012) found that more socializing among peers creates positive academic results, thus supporting the idea of providing increased social opportunities for
English language learners. As Thomas (2012) notes, institutional activities that increase supportive social engagement with peers are considered beneficial for creating a sense of belonging among students.

2.7.2 Positive Student to Faculty Relationships

“The capacity of students to engage and staff to offer an engaging experience must be developed, thus a partnership approach in which everyone is responsible for improving student belonging, retention and success is required” (Thomas, 2012, p.17).

2.7.2.1 Relationships between Instructors and Students

Thomas (2012) also identifies the importance of positive relationships between staff and students that increase a sense of belongingness for students. These positive relationships can align educators, and in fact all university staff, with the same goal, to create campuses where all students feel they belong. Egbo (2009) acknowledges the significance of the instructor to student relationship and identifies the importance of teachers meeting students’ individual needs. She writes: “Teachers must treat each student as an individual human being requiring special attention... as it is in fact good teaching to pay attention to individual differences” (p.211). Lee (2009) agrees, highlighting the necessity for educators to “appreciate the diverse language and cultural backgrounds of the students” and to “make appropriate provisions for international students’ ... contributions” (p.154). Kanpol (1999) concurs, suggesting that good pedagogy must heed “cultural and social heritage as a method to learn more about the individual's particular historical, cultural, social, and economic circumstances and differences” (p.45). He recognizes that each person must be seen on individual terms, while also being included as a full member of the classroom community. The idea of “supervision as pedagogy” (Lee & Green, 2009, p. 617) is another element of this topic. It suggests that supervisors support graduate students from a more holistic perspective. This, along with the building of “warm and supportive relationships” (Strauss, 2012, p. 288) between staff and students, are desirable elements for enhancing student belongingness. The teacher-student connection is also highlighted by Van Houtte & Van
Maele (2012) who identify that students’ feelings of belongingness are linked closely to positive relationships with instructors, particularly around issues of ‘faculty trust’. This idea emphasizes the need for teachers to maintain belief in their students’ abilities to meet required academic outcomes.

In addition, as Egbo (2005) writes, “positive educational outcomes for students, particularly those from nonmainstream backgrounds, depend on the degree of teachers’ commitment to inclusive practices that embrace and value difference” (para.2). Her proposition is maintained by Beck and Malley (2003) who state that: “The bond between the teacher and student creates the foundation upon which a sense of belonging can develop” (para.12). Unfortunately, as Hennebry, Lo, and Macaro (2012) found, “academic staff are not all equally sensitive to the needs of [non native speaking] NNS students” (p.225), thus, as Myles and Cheng (2003) state, the need to address these issues as well as others such as, “stereotyping and discrimination” (p.260) is crucial in the university environment.

2.7.2.2 Clarifying Academic Expectations

Huang’s (2010) identification of the “mismatch between students’ perceived needs and expectations and those of instructors” (pp.532-533) suggests that having clear academic and social expectations is integral to student success (Hennebry, Lo, & Macaro, 2012; Huang, 2010; Kim, 2006; Storch & Tapper, 2009; Strauss, 2012). Also key is providing the tools for students to “develop the literacy behaviours they will need to participate in their target discourse communities” (Krase, 2007, p. 68). The ability to participate within a target discourse community is connected to Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) concept of cultural capital, which suggests that those students who are members of the majority group have insider advantages that allow them to succeed academically. Roessingh, Kover, and Watt (2005) further refine the definition of cultural capital as being that “something more” (p.17), which contributes to academic success, but is not just language proficiency. Egbo (2009) suggests that a greater understanding of the ‘literacy behaviours’ that can support the successful attainment of “cultural capital” (p.15), will improve feelings of belongingness because students are more easily able to partake in the community. The sharing of cultural capital is also thought to assist in democratizing institutions by enabling students to engage in
dialogues that do “not elevate the teacher-other as individual knower and devalue the student as an objectified, unknowing entity” (McLaren, 2003, p.534).

2.7.2.3 Caring Relationships

In terms of the relationships between faculty and students, Noddings (2012) suggests that: “Time spent on building a relation of care and trust is not time wasted” (p.774). This concept of building relationships is also noted by hooks (1994). She states: “Caring about whether all students fulfill their responsibility to contribute to learning in the classroom” (p.40) is essential for teaching diverse students. Both Kessler (1991) and Nieto (2003) identify that building concerned and responsive relationships engages students and can greatly improve the academic success of students. Nieto (2003) also recognizes the significance of a teacher’s acceptance for supporting students’ identities, stating: “students should not have to ‘discard themselves’ to be accepted” (p.16). Nieto continues with an example of good practice in teaching. In this quote, she identifies how one teacher promoted belongingness in her classroom through both caring relationships and the acknowledgement and acceptance of her student’s differences. About this teacher, Nieto writes:

She encouraged her students … to hold on to their language and to feel pride in their culture. More than most, she knows that students' identities do not disappear simply because schools refuse to acknowledge them. Teachers' caring promotes an essential sense of belonging for students whose backgrounds differ from the mainstream (p.16).

2.7.3 Learner Identity and Academic Success

“Effective interventions ... develop students’ confidence, demonstrate future relevance, and nurture belonging” (Thomas, 2012, p.15).

2.7.3.1 Improving Academic Success

Thomas (2012) suggests that supporting student academic success also means providing them with the experiences that build confidence, support relevant future goals, and
increase feelings of belongingness. As the barriers of language can be hard to overcome for English language learners (Engstrom and Tinto, 2008), building student confidence and creating classrooms where it is safe to take risks is integral to student success (Coelho, 2004). One method for developing NESB student success is based on Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, wherein an interlocutor helps to bridge linguistic differences through scaffolding, thus helping to lead the student to the next stages of learning. This method also links to Krashen’s (1982) Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, in which educators use materials that can be easily understood, yet also challenge students because some information is just beyond the learner’s comprehension.

Other ways to increase confidence and improve academic success for ELLs are to: “address issues related to foreign language learning anxiety” (Kim, 2006, p.487), “include intercultural elements in ... bridging programs” (Myles & Cheng, 2003, p.260), clarify important linguistic elements (Huang, 2010; Strauss, 2012), and offer “reading, writing, and assessment preparation” (Huang, 2010; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011, p.181). In addition, Terraschke and Wahid (2011) suggest that practical information should be provided to students through both “professional services” (Thomas, 2012, p.18) or other kinds of institutional programming. Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) state that this “social support, especially from one’s academic program, is essential to the welfare of international students” (p.17). Engstrom and Tinto (2008) agree, suggesting that learning communities acting “as conduits to an array of campus support services” (p.48), such as orientation workshops and counselling support, are also important for fostering student success.

2.7.3.2 Increasing Student Voice

For English language learners, recognition and support of student voice is a key element in developing confidence and success; hooks (1994) states that community building in schools must be encouraged through the “recognition of each individual voice” (p.40). However, for NESB students, having the confidence to express one’s personal thoughts is very challenging, even for graduate students (Cheng, Myles, & Curtis, 2004; Hennebry, Lo, & Macaro, 2012; Kim, 2006; Lee, 2009). Kim (2012) identifies blogging as one option for increasing student academic expression, writing: “The blog has the potential to improve
international students’ communication by resolving the issues of cultural differences, a sense of belonging to a minority, and communication apprehension” (p.543). Douglas (2010b) concurs, identifying blogging as a way to scaffold English language learning in the classroom.

However, it is also essential to foster student voice by preparing students to be able to engage in classroom discussions. Researchers studying NESB graduate students suggest that an increased focus on oral communication skills is integral to their success at English universities. A “greater emphasis on communication” (Terraschke & Wahid, 2011, p.181) is indicated as one of the most important needs for English language learners. Kim (2006) writes that “teachers need to simulate academic oral participation” (p.486), while Lee (2009) suggests that “universities must specifically address classroom discourse skills” (p.154). Offering courses that specifically focus on oral skills may be one solution (Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). Another may be to create academic cohorts that not only increase students’ comfort with peers, but also help to develop learners’ confidence in speaking and writing (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008).

2.7.3.3 Reducing Anglo-centric Practices

The English language is continually evolving, yet “institutionalised anglocentricity” (Simpson & Cook, 2010, p.71), or the privileging of dominant forms of English within universities, still regularly occurs. Anglocentricity is a form of ethnocentrism that puts a greater value on the English language and broader Anglophone culture than on other languages and cultures, with the result that Anglophone ways of knowing and being are held in higher esteem than other linguistic and cultural knowledge. For example, as identified in the Dictionary of Human Geography (2009), anglocentrism is defined as an “attitude that unreflexively assumes the superiority of knowledge produced in Anglo-American contexts” (p.28). In his research, Strauss (2012) questions the concept of one ‘standard’ English and emphasizes the difficulties that NESB students are faced with when forced to negotiate linguistic problems based on issues of anglocentricism. As McLaren (2003) identifies, these and similar issues occur because “privileged groups have occluded their own advantage by invoking the ideal of an unsituated, neutral, universal common humanity of self-formation”
(p.528), thus the question of which language structure is correct emerges. As Egbo (2009) asserts, those who speak the dominant language are more easily able to gain access to much needed ‘social capital’, such as instruction and other supports. Young (1990) too, writes that the concept of “coming into the game after the rules and standards have already been set and having to prove oneself according to those rules and standards” (p.164) is a problematic reality for many students whose first language is not English. Giroux (1996) alludes to the same issue when stating that “Educating for democracy cannot be reduced ... to forcing students ... to speak and think only in the language of dominant English” (p.25).

Egbo (2009) also identifies “accent-based discrimination” (p.22) as a widespread problem, not only for NESB students, but for those who speak various dialects of English as well. English language communication can be challenging for many, simply because they may have a different accent from those speaking a dominant regional dialect of the language. In the US context, Lippi-Green (1997) asserts that prejudice based on accent is seen by many individuals in positions of power, such as employers and educators, as acceptable. In the Canadian context, Munro (2003) highlights a similar situation. Specifically, he identifies that teachers and researchers often, perhaps unintentionally, sustain the impression that having a non-dominant accent is undesirable and a negative attribute. A broader awareness of this issue is significant for supporting students who may be marginalized by their ability to speak or be understood in English.

Not only is respecting linguistic differences important for creating a sense of belongingness, but researchers have also found that the use of the first language greatly benefits second language learning and retention (Egbo, 2009; Lightbown & Spada, 2012), thus it is also important that ‘English-only classrooms’ become more flexible to better support the language learning process of NESB students.

### 2.7.4 Relevant Experiences and Future Goals

“If we... intend to put the learner at the centre of the learning experience, our duty is to offer targeted, varied workshops that meet their individual and discipline-specific needs” (Huang, 2010, p.535).
As Huang (2010) identifies, practicing student-centred learning means offering learners materials and experiences that reflect their distinct needs and interests. This section offers two elements of good pedagogy that specifically target the needs of English language learners. The first suggests the provision of appropriate academic supports for ELLs in the form of EAP programs and other targeted linguistic foundational skills courses. The second section discusses the importance of content-based instruction that not only teaches learners useful elements of language, but also instructs through the use of discipline-centred material matching students’ interests and goals.

2.7.4.1 Academic Supports

As Egbo (2009) identifies, it is important to address the needs of non-mainstream students, thereby “fostering intellectual growth” (p.209), while also building their learning capacity within an institution. By providing academic supports, such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs that meet the linguistic needs of students, an institution demonstrates its commitment to English language learners, while also increasing feelings of belongingness (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Thomas, 2012). EAP programs can greatly benefit ELLs in higher education, because they can support the academic needs of students in areas of instruction directly relevant to their academic success (Berman & Cheng, 2001; Storch & Tapper, 2009).

For ELLs at the graduate level, EAP programs are valued for fostering student success, particularly if they provide “general academic skills, more group work, a greater focus on written English, and more speaking and writing skills” (Melles, 2009, p. 168). Thomas’ (2012) research highlights, “the importance of engagement in activities with an overt academic purpose, through high quality student-centred learning and teaching strategies” (p.17). For NESB graduate students, EAP programming that provides information and practice pertaining to frequently assigned academic coursework is also considered very helpful (Cooper and Bikowski, 2007). In addition, Cadman (2002) proposes the development of student-generated curriculum, suggesting that this restructuring of the educational framework would be more transformative and would better meet the needs of students as well.
2.7.4.2 Content-Based Instruction

Education that uses “content based instructions and tasks” (Kim, 2006, p. 487) links to Thomas’ (2012) proposition that students be “encouraged and facilitated to engage in appropriate opportunities... [that] include the provision of capacity-building modules in the core academic curriculum” (p.18). As Sloan and Porter (2010) suggest, program modules that are discipline-centred, tend to engage students, while also offering linguistic support for those learning in a variety of academic disciplines. Coelho (2004) too, writes that NESB students learn well in “language programs that connect clearly with the academic program by focusing on the language and study skills required in specific subject areas” (p.162). Engstrom and Tinto (2008) also found that integrating courses, such as a skills-based language course with an academic course, allowed NESB students to “not only learn more but to learn better” (p.49).

Sloan & Porter (2010) identify that educators support students and create belongingness in programs when the academic needs and interests of students’ are supported. As other researchers have written, when instructors “focus on the needs of the individual” (Egbo, 2009, p.209) and “familiarize themselves with evolving content classroom formats and teaching methods” (Kim, 2006, p.487), they provide two of the key elements for student success and belongingness (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008).

2.8 Concluding Remarks for Chapter 2

With the inclusion of many more NESB graduate students at universities, the question of how to address diversity in higher education is increasingly becoming a significant issue. Though the concept of belonging in schools has been identified as a powerful educational tool (Thomas, 2012), it has not yet been well-addressed in the field of ALTL (Van Houtte & Van Maele, 2012), where very little research, particularly at the graduate level, has been done. If belonging truly is as fundamental a need and motivation as Maslow (1970) and others have suggested, then integrating and fostering a sense of belongingness for ELLs in universities is the next logical step for institutions and instructors to take.
Chapter 3: Research Methods

3.1 Overview of Chapter 3

This chapter focuses on the methods used to conduct this research study. The philosophical perspectives and rationale for the study will first be outlined, followed by a detailed description of the research design, the research questions, the participants for the study, the research instruments, and the procedures used for analyzing the accrued data. Finally, the possible limitations for the study, including biases and errors that may have occurred, will be discussed.

3.2 Rationale for the Study

With changing demographics and multilingual and multicultural classrooms becoming increasingly common, how to effectively integrate students from NESB into Canadian universities is becoming a concern in many graduate programs (Kim, 2012). The concept of belongingness at universities has recently been identified as a powerful educational tool (Thomas, 2012), but has not yet been well-explored in the field of ALTL, particularly at the graduate level. If belonging truly is as fundamental a need and motivation as Maslow (1970) and others have suggested (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Kunc, 1992), then a better understanding of the implications of belongingness for graduate students from NESB is integral.

This research project consists of a mixed methods approach influenced by traditions in phenomenological hermeneutics (Creswell, 1998; Creswell, 2003; Gay, et al., 2012; Groenewald, 2004; Van Manen, 1990). Creswell and Plano Clark’s (2007) definition of mixed methods provides a strong guide for understanding the framework of this study. They write:

Mixed methods research is a research design ... [that] focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone (p. 18).
For Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), mixed methods research interweaves an inquiry approach within the structure of the research design, so that both qualitative and quantitative approaches are combined within the research process. In a single study, quantitative and qualitative data can be collected, analyzed, and mixed in order to achieve a better understanding of the research problem.

The study sought to explore answers to the overarching question: “What can be done to create a better sense of belongingness for NESB graduate students at English medium universities?” It included both an online questionnaire and in-depth interviews specifically developed to learn more about the relationship between a sense of belongingness, language acquisition, and academic success at the graduate level. As Gay, et al. (2012) write: “The purpose of mixed methods research is to build on the synergy and strength that exists between quantitative and qualitative research methods to understand a phenomenon more fully than is possible using either quantitative or qualitative methods alone” (p.481). However, as Krathwohl (1998) identifies, research also relies on the creativity of the researcher in order to be effective in answering the research question. In his words:

Research... is a creative act; don’t confine your thinking to specific approaches. Researchers creatively combine the elements of methods in any way that makes the best sense for the study they want to do. Their own limits are their own imagination and the necessity of presenting their findings convincingly. The research question to be answered really determines the method (p.27).

By studying the relationship between belongingness and ELLs in higher educational settings through the use of mixed methods research, the intent was to offer a unique insight into the nature and role of inclusive education at this level.
3.3 Research Perspective: Phenomenology

*Epistemological stance - the “theory of knowledge, which serves to decide how the social phenomena will be studied”* (Groenewald, 2004, p.7).

An important part of any research study is to decide on the philosophical or epistemological stance that will lead the way it will be conducted. As the aim of this study was to gain insight into the topic of belongingness in order to understand how best to support student success at the graduate level, it was determined that phenomenological perspectives, would be the most appropriate philosophical approach for this project.

In phenomenology, a researcher has the opportunity to “examine the meaning of experiences for individuals” (Creswell, 1998, p.86) in order to gain a deeper understanding of a particular issue or ‘phenomenon’, so this concept resonated well with the objectives of the study. Phenomenological approaches are also “based on the premise that human experience makes sense to those who live it, prior to all interpretations and theorizing” (Creswell, 1998, p.86). Thus, as the goal of the study was to represent as closely as possible the ‘situated context’ or ‘lived experience’ of the research participants by directly asking them their perceptions of belongingness, it seemed most fitting to analyze the data through a phenomenological lens.

An important aspect of using a phenomenological approach is to gather and report data in as objective a fashion as possible. The researcher’s previously held ideas on the topic must be kept separate through ‘bracketing’. *Epoche or bracketing* in phenomenology, means that the researcher must “suspend all judgements about what is real...until they are founded on a more certain basis” (Creswell, 1998, p.52). As Groenewald (2004) writes, the goal of phenomenology is to “describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts” (p.5). Therefore, a key goal for this study was to not only keep any pre-existing viewpoints separate from the process, but to provide the means for participants to share their perspectives, while documenting them as accurately as possible, in order to truly represent their lived experiences and perceptions. Through the collected information from both the online survey and the in depth interviews,
the experiences and perceptions of the participants were “treated as pure 'phenomena' and the only absolute data from where to begin” (Groenewald, 2004, p.4).

Once the findings were collected, the next step involved analyzing and translating the data for the purposes of communicating its meaning to others. This was achieved through the practice of hermeneutics, or interpretation of the data. Regarding hermeneutics, Van Manen (1990) writes, “the ‘facts’ of lived experience need to be captured in language (the human science text) and this is inevitably an interpretive process” (p.181). Van Manen (1990) further describes phenomenology as a search for the underlying essence of a participant’s lived experience; therefore, it involves the identification of the various phenomena that make up the nature and meaning of the experience, in this case the experience of belongingness for graduate students in a university setting. Thus, the final aspect of the study involved synthesizing the data in order to interpret and present the phenomena found within the study.

### 3.4 Objectives and Outcomes

#### 3.4.1 Researcher’s Intent

The focus of this research project was to gather information about the experience of belongingness for graduate students from NESB using both an online survey and in depth interviews. The topic of belongingness in a university setting was the overarching phenomenon to be studied, with the lived experiences as reported by the research participants being the focal point of the inquiry. A greater understanding of various themes related to belongingness and how it is perceived by graduate students, particularly in academic settings at the university, was the main topic explored. To triangulate the data, it was also determined that graduate students from ESB would be surveyed in order to compare any significant divergences.

#### 3.4.2 Guiding Hypothesis

For this study, it was determined that belongingness could be posited as an integral aspect of learning (Krashen, 1982; Kunc, 1992; Norton & Toohey, 2001), thus a guiding hypothesis was developed suggesting that an increased sense of belongingness would
accompany positive academic experiences and is an integral aspect of language learning. This hypothesis is presented, however, with the clear understanding that in phenomenological research the goal is to put aside researcher preconceptions in order to truly understand the participants’ ‘lived experiences’ (Creswell, 1998), thus it is considered only a guiding hypothesis for the study.

### 3.4.3 Research Questions

Based on the assumptions of the guiding hypothesis, the idea was to next develop research questions that could “operationalize the hypothesis ... [and] provide a focus for data collection” (Gay, et al., 2012, p.74). The idea of ‘operationalizing’, or putting the hypothesis into action, was the main objective for developing the research questions. Based on that aim, the overarching research questions for this study thus became:

- How can an institution create a better sense of belonging for its graduate students both from ESB and NESB?
- To what extent is a sense of belongingness influenced by English language acquisition?
- How is academic success influenced by the need to belong?
- What can be done to create a better sense of belongingness for NESB graduate students at English medium universities?
- To what extent is a sense of belongingness influenced by place and/or nature?

These research questions were chosen to “focus on participants’ understanding of meanings and social life in a particular context” (Gay, et al., 2012, p.74). In this case, the focus was to specifically target the social, physical, and academic aspects of the university, with particular attention paid to the concept of belongingness in regards to these qualities. The questions were also chosen in order to lend direction and focus to the study as a whole by providing the research perspectives from which the study was conducted.

Now that the research perspectives have been explained, a detailed description and justification for the methods used in the study will be provided. In particular the research
design, participants, research instruments, and procedures used for data collection, storage, and analysis will be explained.

3.5 Overview of the Research Methods

“The researcher selects the sample, measuring instruments, design, and procedures that will enable him or her to collect the data necessary to test the hypothesis” (Gay, et al., 2012, p.73).

3.5.1 Research Design: Mixed Methods Research Study

Once the research perspectives, such as the rationale, philosophical stance, and objectives for a qualitative research study have been determined, the next step is to design a suitable study based on those foundations (Creswell, 1998). For this study, a mixed methods approach, using both an online survey and semi-structured in-depth interviews (Gay, et al., 2012), was chosen as the research design. A mixed methods approach, such as the one used in this study, has also been employed in similar studies in the field of ALTL. In Douglas’ (2014) study, an online questionnaire was used to survey Canadian English language teachers about their perceptions of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). A specific definition of TBLT was provided in the questionnaire, which contained both closed and open-ended responses. The numerical and qualitative data were both compiled and interpreted graphically through the use of tables. These tables were then used to interpret the emergent patterns and themes in the data.

For this study, these approaches were chosen so participants would be able to openly share their perspectives through a confidential online survey, thus would be able to offer an honest assessment of their ‘lived experiences’ as graduate students at the university where they study. The inclusion of the interviews was used to triangulate the survey data, as well as to gather a deeper understanding of NESB graduate students’ perspectives.

Examining the data through the use of numerical analysis meant that the emergent patterns were easily recognizable, and could therefore provide a clear and easily validified view of the overarching perspectives and themes found within the data. Thus, in order to
present the data in as objective a way as possible, quantifying it through the use of numerical data tables was deemed an effective means of analysis for this study.

First, an online survey, developed specifically for this study, was created in order to gather demographic information, as well as both closed- and open-ended data related to belongingness and affinity with the university. The foundation for this survey lay in the guiding hypothesis and the research questions chosen for the study, and students from both ESB and NESB at PCU were recruited to take part. Also created were ten open-ended interview questions, again based on the premises in both the research questions and guiding hypothesis, to be conducted with student participants from NESB.

Once these documents had been created, it was necessary to apply to UBC’s Behavioral Research Ethics Board (BREB) for approval for the study. The research project was considered minimal risk as participants were all English speaking adults who had been admitted to the university as graduate students, having fulfilled the English Language Admissions Standard (ELAS) for PCU. Thus, after minor revisions, approval to conduct the study was obtained from the BREB on October 15, 2013. The Certificate of Approval for this study can be found in Appendix A. As part of the ethics process, the Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE) was also completed, see Appendix B.

3.5.2 Research Instruments: Online Survey and Interview Questions

The research instruments for data collection in this study consisted of two main components, an online survey for all graduate students and in-depth interview questions for interviewees from NESB. Both research instruments were reviewed by the BREB (see Appendix A), but were also checked over by colleagues, as well as by an individual from Okanagan Planning and Institutional Research, an organization that offers institutional and educational research support to staff and faculty at UBC.

The survey and research questions were also checked by the researcher for comprehensibility and readability statistics in MS Word. These statistics analyze a text for reading grade level based on average sentence length and the number of syllables. This was
done in order to ensure that all questions would be fully comprehensible to participants from NESB. Each question was maintained at a high school reading level which was considered more than adequate for all potential participants because, though some were from NESB, they were all English speaking adults who had been admitted to the university as graduate students, having previously fulfilled the English language admissions standards for PCU.

3.5.2.1 Online Survey Questions

The online survey was created using Fluid Surveys, http://fluidsurveys.com/, an online tool that allows for easy creation of online questionnaires. It is a Canadian company that also hosts all survey data on Canadian servers, an important requirement for UBC’s BREB. Once built, the survey could be found at: http://fluidsurveys.com/surveys/angela-finley/fostering-success/ (see Appendix D).

In order to house the information for consent to the study as well as the link to the online survey (see Appendix C), a Weebly website that could easily be accessed by participants, was also built. The Weebly website could be found at: http://belongingness.weebly.com. Once participants had accessed the Weebly and read the information on consent, they could then link to the survey at the bottom of the page. In this way, a separate consent form was not required as the questionnaire was completed online and the participants who chose to submit the questionnaire were deemed to have provided informed consent to take part in the study.

The survey was intended to take approximately fifteen minutes to complete; thus, it consisted of only eleven questions. At the beginning of the survey, there first appeared a definition of belongingness by Goodenow (1993) in order to contextualize the study. The statement on the survey was as follows:

Goodenow (1993) defines belongingness in education, as a “student’s sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (teacher and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class (p.25).
The survey contained five questions with a 5-point Likert scale, five open-ended questions, one check-list question, and a series of demographic questions to gather data (see Appendix D). Each question was specifically designed to better understand students’ relationships and perceptions of various aspects of belongingness on campus based on Goodenow’s definition. Demographic questions about age, gender, faculty, first language spoken, linguistic placement, and language proficiency testing concluded the survey. Those interested in receiving a summary of the findings were also invited to provide their contact information to the researcher. After final approval of the thesis by the College of Graduate Studies, all participants who had provided an email address for that purpose (n=11), were sent an online link to the thesis in UBC’s digital repository of research, cIRcle.

3.5.2.2 Interview Questions

The other research instrument used in this study was a list of open-ended interview questions for the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix I). These were developed specifically for the study, with the intent to elicit discussion on how belongingness for NESB students can best be fostered within both the academic community and at the university. As Wolcott (1995) writes, it is important to “plan interviews around a few big issues” (p.112); therefore, both the overarching research question, “What can be done to create a better sense of belongingness for NESB graduate students at English medium universities?” as well as the subsidiary research questions were the major focus in the design of the research instrument.

Wolcott (1995) also writes that it is important to “try to keep the interview open” (p.115), highlighting the importance of allowing the participant freedom to communicate their thought processes about the topic. As gaining a better understanding of students’ experiences, particularly in relationship to language acquisition and the environment on campus, was also a consideration while conducting the interviews, Wolcott’s suggestion to keep the structure of the interviews open-ended was followed. In addition, the semi-structured interview questions were designed with the intent to “gather in depth data about [the participant’s] experiences and feelings” (Gay, et al., 2012, p.386) on the topic of belongingness at PCU, therefore they were also designed to be fairly open-ended in nature.
3.5.3 Research Procedures

3.5.3.1 Recruitment

3.5.3.1.1 Recruitment for the Study: Online Survey

In the original BREB application, the recruitment processes were described such that a general email would be sent out through UBC systems, either through the established protocols of the College of Graduate Studies or the established protocols of the Graduate Students' Society, to all graduate students on campus in order to enlist interested participants in taking part in the online survey.

However, though the application had been approved by the BREB, it was determined by the College of Graduate Studies that this did not meet their mandates for the use of the university-wide listserv; thus it was necessary to go back to the BREB in order to complete Post-Approval Activity (PAA) documents that allowed for snowball sampling to be done for recruitment purposes, including the use of a recruitment poster and an email message that could be posted on social media outlets and sent out to those known to the researcher.

The survey was intended to collect data from the broadest possible range of students, therefore convenience snowball sampling techniques (Gay, et al., 2012) were chosen as the means to recruit participants from the graduate student population. This form of sampling allows existing participants to assist with recruiting other candidates until the sample size is large enough for the study.

Snowball sampling was achieved through the use of an email invitation that included a letter of introduction to the research project, information about informed consent, and a link to the online survey (see Appendix E). This email was sent to colleagues known to the researcher, namely graduate students at PCU, and provided information on informed consent and how to complete the survey. Colleagues were not asked to directly recruit any participants; however, the email could be forwarded to other students who might be interested in taking part. Presentations were also made at both a Graduate Students’
Committee meeting and a Centre for Scholarly Communications workshop to introduce the study to students and representatives from various faculties.

Social media was also used to disseminate the survey. An invitation message (see Appendix F), including the link to information on informed consent and how to complete the survey, was created and posted on sites specifically for graduate students, such as PCU Graduate Students’ Society Facebook pages and the College of Graduate Students’ announcement page. The link to the study was also posted on the College of Graduate Studies’ website, so participants could take part in the survey from that venue as well.

Finally, recruitment posters were created and distributed around campus. The posters were 8½” x 11” and contained a brief description of the study as well as a link to the information on informed consent and how to complete the survey (See Appendix G). Posters were placed on public bulletin boards in all major buildings on the PCU campus, as well as prime areas where graduate students convene, such as PCU’s Graduate Students’ Collegium, the office of the College of Graduate Studies, and the Centre for Scholarly Communications office.

3.5.3.1.2 Recruitment for the Study: Interviews

In-depth interviews for the study were designed for the purpose of gaining insights into NESB graduate students’ perceptions of issues surrounding the topic of belongingness on campus. At the end of the online survey, participants from NESB were given the option of participating further by answering the question, “If you are a graduate student from a non-English speaking background, would you be willing to discuss this topic further in an audio-recorded, 30 minute interview?” (see Appendix D). From the respondents of the online survey, five students opted to be interviewed for the study.

The original intent had been that if more than five potential participants had responded, purposive sampling techniques (Gay, et al., 2012) were to be used to determine the interview participants. Purposive sampling is described as “the process of selecting a sample that is believed to be representative of a given population” (Gay, et al., 2012, p.141); therefore, participants for the interview portion of the study were to be chosen in order to
create a sample of the broadest possible representation of graduate students from NESB on campus. However, only five applicants responded that they were interested in being interviewed, so all student volunteers were given the opportunity to participate. One student who enrolled to be interviewed did not respond back to two different emails. Another participant had to be withdrawn at a later date because the participant in question was accidentally identified as a participant in the study. In order to ensure the participant’s confidentiality, it was determined that it would be best to withdraw her responses from the study altogether. Therefore, in total, three graduate students from NESB were interviewed for this study.

3.5.3.1.3 Recruitment for the Study: Limitations and Delimitations

Participants for the study were recruited from current graduate students registered at PCU, and delimited by the researcher to include only graduate students currently enrolled, or alumni within one year of graduating in order to facilitate a better understanding of the specific needs of this population. Undergraduate students, faculty, and support staff were not invited to take part in the study. Graduate students from all disciplines at PCU, approximately 700, had the opportunity to take part in the survey; however it is likely that most were unaware of the study due to challenges with disseminating the study information. Also, the time for recruitment was very short, approximately one month.

When the survey closed, 37 out of 700 students had responded. At a later date, one participant’s responses were withdrawn; therefore, total number of respondents was 36. The response rate was fairly small, at approximately 5% of the graduate student population; however, based on the number of students who had likely seen the call for recruitment, the response rate could be considered higher. Regardless, as Creswell (2012) identifies: “Even a small return rate may not be biased and may be acceptable in survey research” (p.390).
3.5.4 Data Collection

3.5.4.1 Data Collection: Online Survey

The online survey remained open for approximately one month, with all data collection completed by January 14, 2014. As the surveys were completed, they were first divided into two categories, students from ESB or NESB. In order to make that distinction, anyone who selected Childhood Immigrant or Born in Canada was designated as having an ESB. Neither French nor First Nations’ languages were mentioned by those participating in the study; therefore, all people in those two categories were assumed to have learned English in childhood. All those who selected Adult Immigrant or Visa Student were designated as NESB students, unless English was signified as the first language spoken.

Once the categories had been created, the data for each group was analyzed both separately and together. Results for the Likert-scale questions were automatically tabulated for descriptive and graphical analysis by the online survey software. All percentages were rounded off to one decimal point.

The free-response items were then analysed for themes arising from the data using qualitative data analysis techniques identified in Creswell (1998) and Gay, et al. (2012). To determine the themes for each open-ended question, the responses were first analyzed and divided into distinct units of meaning. An electronic research database was created on Excel to house this data. The units of meaning were then coded in order to provide thematic outcomes for each question (Creswell, 1998; Gay, et al., 2012; Groenewald, 2004). Each of these was then combined to get the number of responses for each theme. Finally, the top emergent themes for each question were counted and categorized, then placed in tables in order of importance according to the number of responses per theme (see Chapter 4).

The data analysis for this study was informed by the phenomenological tradition as outlined by Creswell (1998). In his method, he describes the importance of bracketing preconceptions. Also highlighted is the need to create research questions that explore the lived experiences of study participants and to collect data from participants who have insights into the concepts under investigation. He then suggests dividing data into units of
meaning, collecting those units of meaning into thematic categorizations, and developing a
description of the experience. The descriptive analysis of the survey data was provided
through the use of numerical tables and direct quotes from the participants’ responses.

Once the results for each question were compiled, the responses from the two groups
were then compared to see if any parallels had occurred between the ESB and NESB
participants. Graphical analysis was also done by creating figures and tables to house the
data. Each of these concepts was included in the process of the data analysis in order to gain
a better understanding of how the phenomenon under investigation was experienced by the
participants.

### 3.5.4.2 Data Collection: Interviews

Formal dates and times were arranged with the three interview participants in advance
and each 30 minute interview was conducted in a quiet, private room reserved for that
purpose. Interviews were kept to 30 minutes in order to respect the participants’ time and to
ensure that the interviews did not overly tax the participants. The time limit was also
devised to encourage participation. The interviews were recorded on a small battery-
powered, hand-held recording device and notes were taken during and following the
interviews.

Before the interview began, the Interview Consent Form (see Appendix H) was
discussed with each participant and once it had been read, was signed by the interviewee.
Each individual was then asked if he or she had any questions about the study before starting
the audio-recording. Once the participant’s questions had been clarified, the recording
device was turned on and the 30 minute interview began using the questions specifically
developed for the study (see Appendix I).

The interviews were carried out using the strategies for in-depth, semi-structured
interviews found in Gay, et al. (2012) and Wolcott (1995). In conducting the interviews,
three specific goals were considered: 1) being conscious of trying to “talk less, listen more”
(Wolcott, 1995, p.111) in order to leave room for participants to respond in their own time
and way; 2) trying to stay as neutral as possible during the interviews in order to best capture
participants’ perspectives (Gay, et al., 2012, p. 387); and 3) working towards becoming a more “creative listener” (Wolcott, 1995, p.111) wherein the dynamics of the interview encourage participants to share a deeper level of insight in the interview while also ensuring they have been heard and understood. Wolcott describes a creative listener as one who is able to ask relevant and meaningful questions, to paraphrase responses for clarity, and to maintain mutual interest and engagement throughout an interview.

Once the interviews were completed, the audio-recordings were first transcribed into MS Word documents. After transcription, the documents were sent back to individual participants to be verified and checked over for any accuracy and omissions and participants were given the option of correcting or changing any data in the transcripts. When participants were satisfied with the transcribed interviews, the data analysis began.

In order to ensure that participants could offer an honest assessment of their experiences as graduate students, it was determined that a confidentiality protocol would be put into place for this study. This study followed Gay, et al.’s (2012) conception of confidentiality and informed consent in educational research which states that “any information or data that are collected, either from or about a person, should be strictly confidential, especially if it is personal” (p.21). Since there was a possibility that study participants could reveal personal information or share opinions regarding the university they attend, it was determined that all names and emails would be kept confidential for the purposes of this study. Pseudonyms were also chosen to preserve the confidentiality of the interview participants and to avoid the possibility of violating participants’ right to privacy. Confidentiality, under these circumstances, was an aspect of the informed consent process that contributes to protecting participants from possible future harm, so it was for this reason as well that the institutional name of the research site was changed to PCU.
3.5.5 Data Analysis

“In phenomenology, the researcher first details the individual statements of informants about experiences with the phenomenon before moving to meanings and clusters of meanings. This inductive approach to developing the qualitative narrative shows that the process is one of an emerging design” (Creswell, 1998, p. 77).

In order to address the hypothesis and operationalize the concept of academic success and its relationship with belongingness from the point of view of the participants, a qualitative analysis with reference to phenomenological traditions was carried out with the interview data through the use of hermeneutics (Van Manen, 1990). Similar to how the survey responses were compiled onto Excel files, the interview data was organized in much the same way. The transcripts were coded for important information and relevant themes by separating out the units of meaning. Coding software was not used. Rather, coding was carried out manually by the researcher. This was done by carefully going through each transcribed interview and colour highlighting the major points being made for each question. In addition, the data was examined for any recurring themes, either from within the interview, from other interviews, or from the survey data. Each theme was then noted using the comments feature in Word, with relevant information and links documented that way. Once coded, the data was transcribed onto Excel files for closer analysis and comparison with the other interviews.

Finally, once the comparisons had been made, clusters were formed using the units of meaning as the basis for creating relationships among the data. By analyzing these clusters, meaning could be extracted from the data and graphical analyses could be created through tables and graphs in order to clarify the data. These analytical procedures were informed by phenomenology in that the goal was to better comprehend the “essential, invariant structure (or essence) of the experience” (Creswell, 1998, p.55). The study is considered a mixed methods design in that it uses qualitative approaches for interpreting both quantitative and qualitative data for the purposes of uncovering a deeper understanding of belongingness for the graduate student participants in the study.
3.5.6 Security of Data

Participants in the study did not know the identities of other participants in the study, and other than email addresses provided voluntarily by participants, no personally identifying data was collected in the online questionnaire. Participants were able to voluntarily provide email addresses if they wished to participate in the study further or receive a summary report of the findings. However, once the study was complete and summaries sent out, all personally identifying information, including email addresses, was deleted from the records as well as the researcher’s computer.

All online data was gathered through Fluid Surveys with Canadian servers, so Canadian privacy standards were met and the data secured in Canada. Computer generated research IDs were also used for individual data sets and all electronically stored data and email addresses were kept confidential. The identity of participants was anonymized and after completion of the interview data collection, that information was also coded anonymously for subsequent analyses. All participants were assigned new names and identifying information was kept separate from the interview data in a locked filing cabinet at UBC. Original data will be held confidentially for a period of five years after the study has been published or otherwise presented, at which point hard copies of the original data will be shredded and recorded interview data will be deleted.

3.5.7 Data Storing Methods

All data for this study is stored securely on a UBC, password protected computer, as well as backed up on a password protected portable hard drive and kept in a locked filing cabinet in UBC’s Faculty of Education, Okanagan Campus. The signed interview consent forms, transcripts, and printed copies of the survey responses are also stored in the locked cabinet for safekeeping. Only the Principal Investigator and co-investigator have access to this data.
3.6 Limitations and Assumptions

Despite all precautions taken to ensure a strong study, it is inevitable that there will be some shortcomings in any research design. This section addresses some of the limitations and assumptions for this research project. First of all, this study had only a small number of participants and all participants involved were from only one university; therefore, findings in this study are not suitable for generalization, as the data set was very limited. Though the information gathered from this research project will likely generate many valuable insights, it would be difficult to make any generalizations from it due to the restrictions of collecting such a small sample in only one location (Gay, et al., 2012; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). However, as Gay, et al. (2012) remind us, the goal of qualitative research is not as a rule “the generalizability of data” (p.397), but rather, what its significance is to those interested in the field. So, though the findings of this research study may not be useful for generalizing, it is hoped that the gathered data may be able to serve as an indicator for possible areas of interest of further study in other institutions or with more participants.

In order to determine the linguistic background of participants, some key assumptions had to be made. For example, because neither the French language nor any First Nations’ languages were mentioned by participants in the study, it was assumed that all participants who selected Childhood Immigrant or Born in Canada could be designated as having had an ESB, alongside any other childhood languages learned. Unless English was signified as the first language spoken, all those who selected Adult Immigrant or Visa Student were assumed to have come from NESB, and were designated as such.

Another limitation to the project may have been participants’ comprehension of the study. As some participants were students from NESB, there is the possibility that language barriers could have limited full understanding of the research questions. As all students were adults who had been accepted into PCU’s graduate programs, having previously met the ELAS, and all research instruments were vetted for comprehensibility and readability to a high school level, the likelihood of this is low, however, it is always an important consideration in the field of ALTL (Gay, et al., 2012; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Lightbown and Spada (2013) also suggest that individual learning differences such as ethnic
affiliation, age, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (p.88-92) are all factors that could affect findings as well, thus must also be considered when analyzing this kind of data. Therefore, the fact that participants in this study have come from many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds may also have had an influence on the validity of the findings.

Due to limitations with recruitment in the study, for example it was not possible to send out an informational email to all students enrolled at PCU, it is likely that many graduate students were not aware of the study, so only those who heard about it, could participate. The length of time for the data collection was also very short, just over one month, which may also have influenced the number and type of participants who took part (Gay, et al., 2012, p.115). The data collection time was limited to approximately one month in order to provide potential participants with ample time to read the information on informed consent and consider whether or not to take part, without leaving the participation in the study open-ended, thus possibly resulting in potential participants putting participation off indefinitely. As well, the online survey did not specifically ask whether or not students were studying part-time or full-time, nor at what stage they were in their programs, so the lack of this information may also affect the findings in some way.

Finally, in order to interpret and report findings in this data, some assumptions had to be made. As participation in the online survey was both anonymous and public, it was necessary to operate on the assumption that participants were in fact PCU graduate students who had completed the questionnaire only once. Also, it was necessary to assume that those taking part were able to share an honest assessment and express “their true attitudes, interests, values, or personalities” (Gay, et al., 2012, p.159) rather than what was deemed “the most socially acceptable” (p.159) responses to their experiences about belongingness on campus. It was hoped that the anonymity of the survey would aid in correcting that bias (Gay, et al., 2012, p.159), however there is the possibility this issue could have arisen in both the survey and the interview process.
3.7 Bias and Error

As an educator and researcher whose philosophical outlook is based in inclusive education principles with a strong interest in the topic of belongingness and education, it is possible that not only the structure of how the study was developed, but also the way that interviews were conducted, may have been influenced by that bias. Furthermore, biases from working as a teaching professional with many years of English language teaching experience, as well as a personal interest in sustainability and nature, may have also impacted the research. Though the goal of a phenomenological researcher is to be as objective as possible in the gathering and interpreting of the data (Creswell, 1998; Gay, et al., 2012), as a researcher, my lens or philosophical perspective may have biased the way that the data was analyzed and interpreted (Van Manen, 1990). As a fellow graduate student, I also brought to the research my own perspectives on the topic of belongingness on campus. Again, those perspectives may have been areas of potential researcher bias. However, maintaining awareness of these biases while conducting the study was an important component for objectivity in the study (Van Manen, 1990), thus was consciously observed at all times.

In qualitative research, it is also important to be cognizant of the fact that the nature of a research topic may draw only certain people to take part, thus the sample of participants who chose to complete the survey or be interviewed may also have been biased. It is unknown if the sample, those respondents who chose to complete the survey, can be considered representative of the population, all graduate students at PCU, because, as Gay, et al. (2012) state, those who choose not to reply to surveys may be significantly different from those who do. For example, it is possible that only those who had a strong affinity, or perhaps strong aversion to the topic, belongingness, may have responded to the study. Based on this possibility, again it is difficult to make generalizations about the data, but rather it is integral that all conclusions be stated as results based only on findings about the participants who actually took part in the research project.
3.8 Validity

*Validity* - “the degree to which qualitative data accurately gauge what we are trying to measure” (Gay, et al., 2012, p.397)

The validity of the study was also something considered in the research design. In order to ensure as much validity as possible, triangulation, or the “process of using multiple ...data collection strategies” (Gay, et al., 2012, p.393) to inform the research, was used. Triangulation was achieved by employing the two research instruments, the online survey and the in depth interviews, as well as by comparing the data from all 36 questionnaire responses and the 3 interviews in order to gain as much insight as possible on the topic (Creswell, 1998). By also comparing the results of the data collection with theoretical views from academic scholars on the topic (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Beck & Malley, 2003; Kunc, 1992; Maslow, 1970; Osterman, 2000; Thomas, 2012) the goal was to present the topic with the most accuracy possible.

Each of the research instruments was also examined by one peer, in order to provide an external check. In addition, they were vetted through the BREB at UBC as well as by an individual from Okanagan Planning and Institutional Research, which offers institutional and educational research support to staff and faculty at UBC.

As it was an anonymous survey, it is hoped that participants were able to respond truthfully to the questionnaire (Gay, et al., 2012). In terms of the interview data, member checks (Creswell, 1998; Gay, et al., 2012) of the interview transcriptions were completed before the analysis process began by asking each participant to view and confirm the collected data for accuracy. Only after all participants had been given enough time to respond to the checks, two weeks, did data analysis of the interviews begin.

Despite all these precautions, the fact that the study was conducted at only one institution means that the validity of the study is much less, thus the findings are not generalizable. Further research would be necessary to confirm the results, and research at other institutions would add much more depth to the study.
3.9 Trustworthiness

“Qualitative researchers can establish the trustworthiness of their research by addressing the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of their studies and findings” (Gay, et al., 2012, p.392)

Trustworthiness for this study was addressed in several integral ways. First, detailed procedural information was provided in order to clearly explain how the study was conducted, what the setting for the study was, and who the participants were. Awareness of potential researcher bias through the use of phenomenological bracketing or “epoche” (Creswell, 1998, p.52) was also maintained throughout the study in order to provide as much objectivity as possible.

Factual accuracy of the data was also upheld in many ways. Survey data was gathered through an anonymous online questionnaire and all survey results were printed and documented. The interviews were also transcribed word for word and the transcripts verified by emailing them to each of the participants, thus making the data gathering process more transparent. All quotes were taken directly from the survey and interview responses, and though interpretations were based on researcher perspectives (Van Manen, 1990), well-documented, qualitative methods were used (Creswell, 1998; Gay, et al., 2012), with particular attention paid to phenomenological processes (Creswell, 1998; Groenewald, 2004). In the data analysis, triangulation of both the survey and the interview responses ensured that the consistency of the findings were tested and cross-checked (Gay, et al., 2012).

All participants in the study could be considered insider informants (Banks, 2006), thus were able speak knowledgably on the topics given. As all were volunteers, it is unknown what their individual motivations for participating were, but possible ideas may include the desire to make a contribution to research, to better their own or colleagues’ circumstances, or to improve graduate programs on campus. Finally, as there is always a chance that there will be bias in any study, it is important to reiterate that findings cannot be generalized to the larger population, but rather must be viewed as “context-bound” (Gay, et al., 2012, p.392) within the constraints of a particular time, location, and circumstance.
3.10 Reliability

Reliability - “the degree to which study data consistently measure whatever they measure” (Gay, et al., 2012, p.395).

The protocols for this study have been outlined in great detail within the data gathering process section of this chapter. Inherent bias was recognized as a possible factor in the study, so as a control, participants were explicitly told of the researcher’s position as both a graduate student, as well as a researcher for the study.

It is hoped that other researchers would be able to replicate the study with accuracy based on the descriptions given, however, in terms of reliability, it is not known if results would be the same or if the findings report phenomena that exist only on this campus. Future studies would be necessary to further examine these phenomena in other locations or with different participants.

3.11 Concluding Remarks for Chapter 3

This research study was designed to analyze perceptions of belongingness for graduate students at PCU and to identify whether or not there is a relationship between academic success and a sense of belongingness. The research methods consisted of a mixed methods approach grounded in phenomenological perspectives. The research instruments included both an online survey and in-depth interviews specifically developed for the project. The phenomenological perspective comes from inquiring into the experience of belongingness from the perspective of the study participants, while also exploring the meaning of these experiences for the participants (Gay, et al., 2012). For Creswell (1998) the centre point for a phenomenological study is about understanding a phenomenon, such as belongingness, thus in this study, there was a conscious decision to examine the meaning of belongingness for participants through their lived experience as graduate students. This study was oriented on the assumption that the participants’ understandings of their experiences make sense to them because they have lived and experienced them.
As a researcher influenced by phenomenological approaches, these methods were chosen in order to gain insight into the lived experience of the participants without making pre-judgements or assumptions about the research outcomes. A guiding hypothesis and research questions were created in order to direct the focus of the study, but the approach was left intentionally open-ended in order to be able to examine the emergent themes arising directly from the participants’ points of view.

This study offers some insight into perceptions of belongingness for graduate students from one Canadian university and may also provide a basis for further investigation in other contexts. The next chapter, Chapter 4, will introduce the results and findings of the research study based on the means of analysis described here, in Chapter 3 – Research Methods.
Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Overview of Chapter 4

This chapter, Chapter 4, outlines the results and findings of the research study, *Fostering Success: The Question of Belongingness at the Graduate Level*. In this study, graduate students at PCU were surveyed and interviewed in order to collect their perceptions of belongingness at the university. The results of both the survey data and the interviews can be found in this chapter. They are presented in two sections. First, the demographic information and findings for the survey are explained and next, the findings from the interviews are discussed. Graphical representations and quoted responses are used in both sections to represent data.

4.2 Survey Data

4.2.1 Population, Sample, and Participants

Participants for the survey consisted of graduate students from both ESB and NESB at PCU. There were 37 participants in total who responded to the survey: 30 ESB participants and 7 NESB participants. One NESB participant had to be withdrawn, thus the total number of participants was 36. As it was an anonymous survey, the identity of participants was unknown unless personal information was provided in the form of an email address in the appropriate section of the survey. In this section, the demographic information collected from the survey is presented, followed by the data collected for each question in the survey. As not all participants answered every question, the number of ESB and NESB respondents is noted on each table.

4.2.2 Survey Demographics

Survey participants were asked a number of demographic questions including: age, gender, faculty, first language learned, citizenship status, linguistic background, and language proficiency tests. Detailed information about the survey demographics follows.
4.2.2.1 Age

The first demographic question in the survey asked the age of survey participants. In both the ESB and NESB categories, over 50% of respondents were in the 25-34 age range. For ESB participants 50% of respondents were aged 25-34. For NESB participants, the same age range included 80% of respondents. There were no respondents over the age of 65 or under 18 in this study. Table 4.1 summarizes the age ranges of the participants.

Table 4.1

*Participant ages (n=33)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>ESB (n=28)</th>
<th>NESB (n=5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2.2 Gender

The second demographic question asked about the gender of survey participants. The majority of ESB respondents were female (67.9%), whereas NESB respondents were mainly male (80%). Table 4.2 summarizes the gender distribution of the participants.

Table 4.2

*Gender distribution (n=33)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>ESB (n=28)</th>
<th>NESB (n=5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.2.3 Faculty

In the third demographic question, survey participants were asked to state their faculty. Respondents came from a wide variety of faculties, with the top four for both groups being Education, Engineering, Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies (IGS), and Biological Sciences. Participant faculties of study are summarized in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

*Participant faculties of study (n=33)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>ESB (n=28)</th>
<th>NESB (n=5)</th>
<th>Total (n=33)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology/Biochemistry/Science</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGS</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Social Development</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2.4 First Language Learned

Survey participants were next asked, “What is the language you first learned?” The majority (74.3%) responded that English was their first language, while 25.7% of participants chose Other Language. Other first languages provided by participants included: German, Persian, Cantonese, Body Language, Spanish, Malay, and Kurdish. Results are summarized in Table 4.4.

---

4 The term faculty here rather refers to the field of study of the participant. At the research site for this study, many graduate students are not actually enrolled in just one faculty. A better descriptor rather than faculty would be academic discipline or degree program.
Table 4.4

Participan first languages learned \((n=36)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Language*</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*German (n=2), Persian (n=2), Cantonese (n=1), Body Language (n=1), Spanish (n=1), Malay (n=1), Kurdish (n=1), Unknown (n=1)

4.2.2.5 Citizenship Status

The next question asked participants to select the phrase they felt best described them. The four choices were: Born in Canada, Childhood Immigrant, Adult Immigrant, and Visa Student. Of the 28 ESB participants who answered this question, 22 (78.6%) were born in Canada, 3 (10.7%) were Childhood Immigrants, and 3 (10.7%) were Visa Students. Of the 5 NESB responses, 1 (20%) was an Adult Immigrant, while 4 (80%) were Visa Students. Participant citizenship status is summarized in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>ESB (n=28)</th>
<th>NESB (n=5)</th>
<th>Total (n=33)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Born in Canada</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visa Student</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood Immigrant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Immigrant</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Body language is not typically considered a first language, but is included in the data, as submitted by the participant. As this participant also responded as being born in Canada, he/she was designated as being from an English speaking background (ESB) in the next section.
4.2.2.6 Linguistic Background

In order to determine the linguistic background of participants in the study, data from both Table 4.4 and 4.5 were combined. Those who stated English as their first language were first put into the ESB category (72.2%). As neither French nor any First Nations’ languages were mentioned by participants, for the sake of this study, the assumption was made that those who selected Born in Canada or Childhood Immigrant (11.1%) from the previous question could also be designated as being from an ESB. Altogether 30 survey participants (83.3%) were designated as being from an ESB.

Unless English was signified as the first language spoken, all those who selected Other Language, as well as either Adult Immigrant or Visa Student (16.7%), were designated as being from an NESB. The linguistic backgrounds mentioned by NESB participants included Persian (n=2), Spanish, Malay, and Kurdish. These designations are summarized in Table 4.6. One participant confirmed being from an NESB at a later date.

Table 4.6

*Participant linguistic background (n=36)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linguistic Designation</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Language + (Born in Canada or Childhood Immigrant)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total ESB</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total NESB = Other Language + (Adult Immigrant or Visa Student)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.2.7 Language Proficiency Tests

Finally, in order to better understand English levels of respondents in the study, participants were asked to share the types of language proficiency tests they had taken, as well as their most recent scores. In this study, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) were the most popular language proficiency tests, each taken by three participants (42.8%) of those who
responded to this question. The Language Proficiency Index (LPI) was taken by 14.4% of respondents. Reported Language proficiency test results are summarized in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7

*Reported language proficiency test results (n=8)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Proficiency Test</th>
<th>ESB (n=2)</th>
<th>NESB (n=5)</th>
<th>Total (n=7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>1 (score 7.5)</td>
<td>2 (score 6.5 x 2)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 (range 93-104)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPI</td>
<td>1 (score 5/6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Survey Questions

The next section presents the results for the eleven survey questions (see Appendix D). In terms of the context for the questions, a definition of belongingness in education was provided to participants at the beginning of the survey. As mentioned previously, the definition given was as follows:

Goodenow (1993) defines belongingness in education, as a “student’s sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (teacher and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class” (p.25).

The survey itself consisted of five Likert-scale questions, five open-ended questions, and one check-list question. The data for each question were tabulated into two categories in order to compare the responses of ESB and NESB participants. For the Likert-scale questions, participants were given five options: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree to rate their responses. The results for each can be found in the table following each question. The open-ended questions were analyzed, coded into units of meaning, and also presented on tables for easier examination. Representative quotes from the open-ended questions are cited in this section as well. All representative quotes have been double-checked by the researcher to ensure they are quoted exactly as found in the
survey data. No corrections were made to this data with the exception of anonymizing the name of the study university to PCU. Participants #6, #11, #21, #22, #31, and #35 were all designated as from a NESB. All other participants were designated as from an ESB. Throughout the reporting of these data, tables and charts have been employed to provide an underlying structure for the interpretive analysis of the data. A detailed exploration of the results for the survey follows.

4.3.1 Survey Question 1: Belongingness at PCU

The first question of the survey asked participants to use the Likert scale to rate their responses to the statement: “I feel a sense of belongingness at PCU”. There were 36 responses to this question. When divided into linguistic categories, 63.3% of ESB participants agreed or strongly agreed and 83.3% NESB participants agreed. Figure 4.1 summarizes the responses to survey question 1 and compares the percentage responses between ESB and NESB participants.

Figure 4.1: Percentage responses to feeling a sense of belonging on campus (n=36)

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6 As mentioned previously, the name of the research site has been changed for confidentiality purposes. However, all other aspects of the reported questions reflect what participants stated in the survey.
4.3.2 Survey Question 2: Satisfaction at PCU

Question 2 asked participants to rate their responses to the statement, “I am satisfied with my experience as a graduate student at PCU.” For both ESB and NESB participants, 66.7% agreed or strongly agreed. Figure 4.2 summarizes the responses to survey question 2 and compares the percentage responses between ESB and NESB participants.

![Figure 4.2: Percentage responses to feeling a sense of satisfaction on campus (n=36)](image)

4.3.3 Survey Question 3: Satisfaction and Belongingness

Question 3 asked participants to rate their responses to the statement: “My satisfaction level with being a graduate student is connected to my sense of belongingness at PCU.” The percentage for ESB participants who agreed or strongly agreed was 56.7%. For NESB participants, it was 83.4%. Figure 4.3 summarizes the responses to this question and compares the percentage responses between ESB and NESB participants.

![Figure 4.3: Comparison of percentage responses between ESB (n=30) and NESB (n=6)](image)
Figure 4.3: Percentage responses to the connection between satisfaction and belongingness (n=36)

4.3.4 Survey Question 4: Reasons for Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction at PCU

Question 4 of the survey was an open-ended question in which participants were asked to provide one or more reasons for their answer to Question 3: “My satisfaction level with being a graduate student is connected to my sense of belongingness at PCU.” Tables 4.8 and 4.9 summarize the positive, negative, and neutral thematic codes that arose in the data.
Table 4.8

*Positive themes - satisfaction at PCU and belongingness (All n=28; ESB n=24; NESB n=4)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>ESB Units of Meaning</th>
<th>NESB Units of Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships with students</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling valued/supported</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of connection</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships with faculty/staff</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with courses/academic content</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with elite nature of the university</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good student services</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive campus environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Units of Meaning</strong></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.9

Negative and neutral themes-satisfaction at PCU and belongingness (All n=28; ESB n=24; NESB n=4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>ESB Units of Meaning</th>
<th>NESB Units of Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of graduate community/space</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative relationships with faculty/staff</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction with courses/content</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of racism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative campus experiences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of academic activities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of social activities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative relationships with other students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of student voice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial problems</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority to undergrads</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neutral Themes</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction not related to belongingness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Units of Meaning</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the data, it can be seen that a number of positive themes are associated with this question. The two most common themes for ESB participants were positive relationships with other students and feeling valued/supported, with 10 responses each. Feelings of connection was the next theme, with 7 responses. For example ESB Participant #19 stated, “Particularly in the Education Faculty, the professors, supervisors, support staff and other graduate level students all foster a strong sense of 'being part of the team'.” ESB Participant #8 wrote: “I feel as though my opinion matters and professors are open and flexible, as well as understanding of personal circumstances where necessary.” ESB Participant #9 agreed, writing:
Being able to turn to fellow graduate students who are going through the same ups and downs of graduate school as you is comforting. Also being able to gain other peoples perspective about your project allows to you think about your project in different ways. Having a supportive network at school, and feeling like I belong and am accepted in that network is the reason I am very satisfied with being a graduate student at PCU.

For NESB participants, the top three themes relating to satisfaction as a graduate student and feeling a sense of belongingness were feeling valued/supported, good student services, and elitism with one response each. For example, NESB Participant #22 maintained that satisfaction could be related to attending a respected university, writing: “getting a doctorate degree from top notch university like PCU is a attribute for my career as an academician.”

In addition to the positive themes, some negative or neutral themes also arose in response to the question of graduate student satisfaction levels and a feeling of belongingness on campus. For ESB participants, the top negative themes were lack of graduate community/space (6) and negative relationships with faculty/staff (4). For example, in relationship to the graduate community, ESB Participant #28 wrote, “While I am connected to my cohort and peers, there is very little that connects/ties my to PCU itself. Highly blended programs and a lack of graduate community equates to disconnect between myself and the campus.” ESB Participant #15 wrote, “While I feel supported by my teachers and peers, I have been dissatisfied with the opportunities to engage with other students and faculty in both a social and academic way. Beyond course work and the yearly meet n’ greet there has been little interaction in my department.”

Some students also identified issues of racism and/or condescension in their dealings at PCU. Regarding relationships to faculty and staff on campus, ESB Participant #23 wrote: “Sometimes I felt alienated in my classes by the invisibility and marginalization of Aboriginal content. I brought it up and experienced hostility from faculty because of it. Then I started avoiding coming to campus because of the negativity of that experience. It left a bad taste in my mouth that has yet to dissipate.” ESB Participant #37 wrote, “My lack of
satisfaction has to do with the level of disorganization in the Faculty of Graduate Studies. Information is difficult to obtain, and when someone can provide the information, it is provided with a clear tone of condescension.”

In contrast, ESB Participant #29 wrote that faculty was supportive, but found that a sense of belongingness from the institutional standpoint was lacking. He stated:

I think my satisfaction rate as a graduate student was primarily because I had a great supervisor and committee. As an institution PCU does not create a sense of belongingness, therefore I think belongingness was constructed by faculty. -I did my undergraduate at UBC Vancouver and I found PCU to create a more inclusive campus. However, this is not because the institution creates belongingness, but because you can have more intimate relationships with students and faculty. - PCU had an interdisciplinary program that incorporates many diverse themes and students. You do not feel like you belong with any of the other graduate students because everyone is in a different field of study. Although you may have some similarities everyone has their own speciality and there is no room to share ideas. - PCU does not create a good graduate atmosphere. No real graduate space.

Two ESB participants offered neutral responses to this question. ESB Participant #6 stated: “I am pursuing graduate studies in order to obtain a graduate degree. My sense of belongingness does not bear much weight in my satisfaction level associated with being a graduate student.” Similarly, ESB Participant #25 wrote, “I have never really had the feeling that I do not belong, so I have never considered whether my satisfaction with my graduate studies program is associated with my feelings of belongingness. Therefore my response is neutral.”

Similarly, two NESB respondents also identified the fact that their satisfaction was not related to belongingness at the university. For example, NESB Participant #31 stated: “I feel a sense of belongingness at PCU and I am satisfied as a graduate student. But, I do not think my satisfaction as a graduate student is connected to belongingness.” NESB
Participant #35 felt that belongingness was not emphasized at the graduate level and provided four reasons for this:

- Mine and other graduate student feeling is that the graduate student belongingness is not very important for the university and the first priority goes to the Undergrad students. It seems that the University cares about the money and as an undergrad pays more, then their belongingness are at priority.  
- Most of the graduate student are suffering from the financial problems and nobody cares about them.  
- The environment for the graduate student especially at the School of engineering is really unfair, it seems that we do not have a voice and we have to tolerate the unfair situations and keep it silent.  
- Many evidences of racism

NESB Participant #34’s feeling was that more time was needed as a graduate student on campus before articulating an opinion on this issue. This participant wrote, “The reason for why I didn't go for ‘Strongly Agree’ because I am a new grad student and I need more time to go to that level (at least one more term). But, surely PCU deserves ‘Strong Agree’.”

### 4.3.5 Survey Question 5: Academic Success and Belongingness

The next question in the survey was another Likert-scale question. Participants were asked about the relationship between perceptions of academic success and a sense of belongingness by responding to the statement: “My academic success is influenced by a sense of belongingness at PCU.” 50% of ESB participants agreed or strongly agreed, whereas 100% of NESB participants agreed or strongly agreed. Figure 4.4 summarizes the results and compares the percentage responses between ESB and NESB participants.
4.3.6 Survey Question 6: Definitions of Academic Success

Question 6 was another open-ended question. It asked participants to “Briefly describe what academic success means to you.” The top four themes that arose for participants from ESB in terms of definitions of academic success include: Progress in research/publications/conferences (9), Good grades (8), Accomplishing academic goals/academic satisfaction (6), and Obtaining scholarships/funding/recognition (5). For NESB participants the top four were: Accomplishing academic goals/academic satisfaction (5), Progress in research/publications/conferences (3), Intellectual self-fulfillment/personal satisfaction (2), and Building professional relationships (3). Table 4.10 provides a summary of the top thematic codes that arose in response to this question. Examples of representative quotes from the survey follow.
Table 4.10

*Top themes related to definitions of academic success (All n=30; ESB n=24; NESB n=6)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>ESB Units of Meaning</th>
<th>NESB Units of Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Progress in research/publications/conferences</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good grades</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishing academic goals/academic satisfaction</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining scholarships/funding/recognition</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion of knowledge/contributing to the field</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual self-fulfillment/personal satisfaction</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in one's field</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building professional relationships</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Units of Meaning</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the ESB respondents, ESB Participant #6 wrote, “I measure my academic success by the level of research I perform and the results from that research.” The “ability to teach undergraduates and peek their interest in biological topics”, as well as “successfully writing and publishing journal articles and presenting exciting research findings in lectures and at conferences” were also mentioned by this participant as further definitions of academic success. Similarly, ESB Participant #16 suggested that academic success meant: “Achieving high grades while also being able to publish and conduct informative research.” Additionally, ESB Participant #25 wrote, “Academic success to me means receiving funding and therefore recognition for my research, as well as publishing papers in high impact journals.”
The NESB participants had similar responses to this question. NESB Participant #35’s five definitions of academic success included: “Being productive in... research”, “Getting A+ at the courses”, “Publications”, “Being connected to the leading scholars and industry in the field of research”, and “Being active at other aspects of life, sport, fun, social life.” Similarly, NESB Participant #31 wrote, “Academic success means making progress in my research, learning new concepts, [and] making connections and relationships with professionals in my field.” In contrast, NESB Participant #22 suggested that academic success was about personal satisfaction, writing: “Academic success to me is defined by you knowing that you tried your best and the grade you received is truly as good as you can do. If you have to make excuses or find reason for yourself then you weren't successful.” Alternatively, NESB Participant #11 offered a comment about academic success that has to do with a relationship to society, writing: “Indirectly, being part of the community contributes to my well-being and therefore can influence my academic success.”

Other themes also arose for this question. ESB Participant #33 spoke of one of the benefits of belonging for academic success, stating that “A feeling of belongingness has helped me feel more comfortable seeking help when struggling academically.” ESB Participant #23 emphasized the importance of student voice as an aspect of academic success, writing: “At the graduate level it means being able to contribute to your field in a meaningful way. I felt silenced and as a result I contributed less.” ESB Participant #10 highlighted the importance of communication and indicated that group work, particularly for grades, is not a form of belongingness, writing: “Success means that you can clearly articulate a reasoned oral and written defense of your beliefs about an issue. Belongingness DOES NOT mean group work, especially group work for marks.”

Another theme that arose in this question was the importance of finding lifestyle balance. ESB Participant #36 wrote:

To me, academic success means achieving good marks and gaining something worthwhile from the experience. Good marks would be at least an 80% (A-) average at the university level. Something worthwhile might be a degree, a credential, or a transformative experience of having improved oneself. It
would also be important to have maintained balance in other areas of your life during your academic studies. For example, achieving high honours while neglecting your health or personal relationships to a detriment would not be worthwhile.

4.3.7 Survey Question 7: Belongingness and Nature

In Question 7, another Likert-scale question, participants were given the definition of ‘nature’ by Louv (2008), as “natural wildness: biodiversity, abundance” (p.8). Participants were then asked to respond to the statement: “My sense of belongingness is influenced by having access to nature.” Of the ESB participants, 43.4% agreed or strongly agreed, while 83.3% of NESB participants agreed or strongly agreed. Figure 4.5 summarizes the results for this question and compares the percentage responses between ESB and NESB participants.

Figure 4.5: Percentage responses to the connection between belongingness and nature (n=36)
4.3.8 Survey Question 8: Definitions of Belongingness

In Question 8, participants were asked to identify, from a list of 12 concepts, the ones which represented belongingness to them. Specifically they were asked, “Which of the following concepts, if any, represent belongingness to you? (Choose all that apply).” The choices offered were as follows:

- Understanding the cultural rules
- Having strong social connections
- Having a strong connection to the community
- Feeling comfortable
- Feeling valued and supported
- Ability to converse well in the language
- Having academic success
- Having a physical space to work/socialize
- Being part of a group
- Having connections to the natural world
- Being the same as others
- Other (please specify)

For ESB participants, the top 4 concepts that represented belongingness included: Feeling comfortable (85.7%), Feeling valued and supported (78.6%), Having strong social connections (78.6%), and Having a physical space to work/socialize (71.4%). For NESB participants, 100% chose Feeling valued and supported, 83.3% chose Having a physical space to work/socialize, 83.3% chose Being part of a group, and 83.3% chose Having a strong connection to the community.

Participants also had the opportunity to specify another concept that represented belongingness to them. Three ESB participants responded. ESB Participant #3 included, “solving problems in peaceful ways”, ESB Participant #6 added, “inner peace”, and ESB Participant #37 wrote, “being part of a ‘cohort’” and continued by stating, “I see this
differently than as part of a ‘group’ – group has social connotations, whereas cohort is an academic belonging.”

Of the NESB participants, two chose to add another concept that represented belongingness to them. NESB Participant #31 suggested “Arts activities” and NESB Participant #11 added, “Feeling that the university cares about me.”

Table 4.11 summarizes participant responses to concepts of belongingness and Figure 4.6 provides a graphical representation of the data.

Table 4.11

*Percentage responses to the concepts representing belongingness (All n=34; ESB n=28; NESB n=6)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts representing belongingness</th>
<th>ESB</th>
<th>NESB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the cultural rules</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having strong social connections</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a strong connection to the community</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling comfortable</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling valued and supported</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to converse well in the language</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having academic success</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a physical space to work/socialize</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being part of a group</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>83.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having connections to the natural world</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being the same as others</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.9 Survey Question 9: Creating Belongingness

Question 9 was another open-ended question. It asked, “What could be done to create a greater sense of belongingness for graduate students at PCU?” The top thematic code that emerged for both ESB and NESB participants suggested that more social events were desired. Some ideas included formal dances, faculty/student events, multicultural events, and arts events.

Other themes for ESB participants that emerged on the topic of creating belongingness included cross-disciplinary academic events (4) and office space for grad students (2). Three participants stated that nothing else was necessary. For NESB participants, the two other top themes included providing more support for international students (3) and providing more funding opportunities/financial support (3).

Table 4.12 summarizes the top thematic codes for this question.
Table 4.12

Creating belongingness for graduate students (All n=24; ESB n=19; NESB n=5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>ESB Units of Meaning</th>
<th>NESB Units of Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More social events/groups</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More academic events (particularly cross-disciplinary)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More flexibility in terms of course delivery/creating programs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing else necessary</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office space for grad students</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better PhD support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce racism and support alternative perspectives</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritize grad students (over undergrads)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better support/mentorship for international students</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art studios/activities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More funding opportunities/ TA/GRA opportunities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider families in provision of services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create more positive, team feeling on campus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Units of Meaning

26
13
Some participants felt that nothing else was necessary in terms of belongingness. For example, ESB Participant #14 wrote, “I am content with my level of belongingness at the university. I feel fulfilled in my relationship and would not have more time to dedicate.” However, many participants did have suggestions for creating a greater sense of belongingness on campus. ESB Participant #15 recommended an increase of both social and academic events, suggesting, “More opportunities to interact in both social and academic settings” and “Lecture series or informal talks on a regular schedule so that students can plan on them.” This participant also stated: “While there are opportunities presently to attend talks they are usually 'one-offs' so it is difficult to plan. If things happened regularly, such as weekly, then people can remember to show up!” ESB Participant #36 too, identified the desire for graduate student events, indicating the desire for “More frequent social and professional development events for grad students”, and adding:

It would be helpful to have a broader variety of events, not just a pub night or a wine and cheese. Professional development events are always helpful and provide an opportunity to meet like-minded students. A sports league, board game nights, hiking, or cooking ethnic food together could be cost-conscious ways to bring students together around something constructive rather than just drinking for the fun of it. Provide funding for grad students within a particular field to hold a social event early in their program and keep meeting periodically. During my undergrad, I found that I was most successful academically when I found a cohort of students to belong to.

ESB Participant #33 concurred, writing: “More courses/seminars that bring graduate students from all disciplines together.” “Better office space for all graduate students” was also suggested by this participant. ESB Participant #5 identified the need for office space as well, writing:

I think that it is important for graduate students to have their own personal, dedicated space on campus. I am one of the lucky students with an office (although small, and shared), which gives me a place to settle in and call my own. When I need to talk to someone about a challenge I am facing in my
work, I can just turn around in my chair and talk to my office mates, who are in the same field as I am. This really helps with feelings of isolation.

Similarly, ESB Participant #29 identified the need for graduate space beyond individual faculties. Some suggestions included: “Create a physical space for graduate students to socialize, share ideas, help each other out and network” and “Have a better organization of graduate programs”, remarking that, “in particular interdisciplinary program was very disorganized.”

Many NESB participants also suggested that a greater focus on graduate social life on campus would increase belongingness, for example the arts were identified by two respondents. NESB Participant #31 wrote, “As a person who interested in arts, I found arts activities is lacking on campus. (Or I could not find one because there are no announcements for them) I think building communities by doing arts could help to create a sense of belongingness specially for ESL students who have language barriers. They can express themselves through arts and art can be a common language among students with different background. It is also a good opportunity to know diverse students and different cultures.”

As well as social opportunities, NESB Participant #11 also recommended more supports for students, particularly for those with families, by suggesting that the university could “Encourage [student] progression through their programs so their success make them feel better. Provide funding opportunities or good access to TA and GA. Produce social events. Consider students with families in the provision of services.” NESB Participant #34 had many similar ideas, writing:

There are so many things can be done in every section to improve current systems and sense of belongings is not an exceptional. 1). Especially, every international student comes with their own dream and goal. So, we should make sure they get whatever they want (not the only academic goals but also non-academic as well). Personally, I feel we must improve our welcome orientation. 2). Secondly, we can assign mentors professor or senior grad student for every new international student. (To make sure he is on the right
way or he gets everything non academic life as well like sports, connection to
the local community or local cultural rules). I mean, usually it seems that grad
students don’t take any involvement in non-academic life and hear they feel
less sense of belongingness.

In a previous question NESB Participant #35 had identified a number of
issues, such as lack of priority to grad students, lack of student voice, financial
problems, and unfairness and racism, particularly in the Engineering department and
suggested that to improve belongingness, the university should: “try to solve the
problems explained here.” Finally, NESB Participant #22 suggested three ways to
improve belonging by comparing it to goals for effective teamwork, writing: “Highly
effective teams and associations maintain a high sense of belonging because they set
boundaries, share common goals and are engaging.”

4.3.10 Survey Question 10: Benefits of Improving Belongingness

Question 10 was another open-ended question. It asked participants to respond to the
question, “What would be some benefits of improving a sense of belongingness on campus?”
The top three themes that emerged for both ESB and NESB participants included improved
student experience, increased academic success and productivity, and increased allegiance or
loyalty to the university. Further results for this question are summarized in Table 4.13
Table 4.13

Benefits of improving a sense of belongingness on campus (All n=25; ESB n=20; NESB n=5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>ESB Units of Meaning</th>
<th>NESB Units of Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved student experience</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased academic success/productivity</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased fidelity to university/ pride in being PCU student</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More positive campus atmosphere/better community life</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student development – help students grow</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased desire to contribute to the academic community</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional networks</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student recruitment and retention</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Units of Meaning</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both ESB and NESB participants shared similar ideas about the benefits of improving a sense of belongingness. ESB Participant #15 suggested that increased belongingness would create a “[m]ore positive atmosphere; more individual level success; support from other grad students in dealing with issues, concerns, TA duties, etc.” ESB Participant #29 agreed, writing:

One of the greatest benefits of improving a sense of belongingness on campus is the ability to live a healthier life. By this I mean social, intellectual and eventually economic. By feeling a sense of belongingness you will be able to
network with people and create friendships and connections for future endeavors. You will also grow as a person because you want to help the community you live in develop and grow. Belonging is a feeling that makes one person want to help others, in this case would make a group of graduate students prosper.

ESB Participant #7 suggested that other benefits would be an increased sense of connection to the campus, as well as a better academic community, writing: “It seems that there are many faculties which have little to no presence of graduate students on campus. Perhaps improving belongingness would foster more physical connection to the place and improve the quality of academic interactions and collaborations across disciplines.” ESB Participant #36 also discussed this topic, writing:

The university stands to gain greatly from graduate students feeling a sense of belongingness. During and after their studies, grad students are often asked “What was PCU like?” or “How did you find it there?” A poor reputation could spread quickly while a good reputation would attract students here, and more of the best and the brightest. While the students are here, a greater sense of belongingness would improve retention and contribute to students doing well academically and forming social relationships while they are here. The social relationships are an important support network during and after our studies and greatly influence our career, social and academic success.

NESB participants also shared similar ideas. NESB Participant #34 identified why belonging is so important, writing:

Belongingness is the human emotional need and humans have an inherent desire to belong and be an important part of something greater than themselves. Doesn’t matter in friends, family, local community, etc.. I would say belongingness is a basic need for every human as it brings security, happiness, safety, comforts, awareness and all these factors play increasingly important role for any success or achievement.
NESB Participant #35 suggested that some benefits would include: “1- Improving the life of graduate students 2- Improving the academic achievement for them and for the University 3- Improving the level of satisfaction among the Grad students.” NESB Participant #11 concurred, stating, “Better students make better universities. A better community life.” NESB Participant #31 also shared similar ideas by identifying six benefits: “Feeling happy/ feeling satisfied/ making progress in academic work/ having a positive influence on others/ building healthy communities/ being useful to the community.”

NESB Participant #22 suggested that a benefit of belongingness at the university would increase students’ fidelity or allegiance, writing “The more they are involved…the more they get in return. Associations will create a much greater sense of belonging by increasing the input to output ratio.”

4.3.11 Survey Question 11: Further Thoughts on Belongingness

The final question of the survey asked participants to “Please share any further thoughts you may have about belongingness/non-belongingness and graduate students at PCU.” Eight ESB participants responded to this question and one NESB participant responded. A variety of themes emerged for this question. The results are summarized in Table 4.14. Representational quotes follow.
Table 4.14

Further thoughts on belongingness (All n=9; ESB n=8; NESB n=1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>ESB Units of Meaning</th>
<th>NESB Units of Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive experience at PCU</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCU less supportive, less ‘rich’, than other grad experiences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of being ‘unwanted’ at PCU because of poor services and high costs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More social activities needed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belongingness is not institutional, comes from within</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad students are not interested in social aspects of university</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student societies increase belongingness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrelationships help us understand others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Units of Meaning</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the final question, ESB Participant #29 spoke of positive experiences had at the university, writing:

I had a great experience at the PCU campus. I think the smaller campus provides a more intimate relationship with faculty, staff, and other students. Within this campus you find micro groups that you can belong too. For example I found friendships among other Latin Americans. I made friends from other people from Vancouver. I made friends through other activities. So there are many avenues that can be explored through this term. - I am Alumni. I graduated in MAY 2013. - Currently I am working at PCU.
ESB Participant #30 also remarked positively about the university, writing: “Wonderful campus and support throughout departments!” Conversely, ESB Participant #15 had this to say:

This is my second experience as a graduate student. The best way I can describe my previous experience is that it was richer because of the incredible sense of belonging. Submission of major assignments, meeting milestones, overcoming stressful situations all meant more because we could celebrate the triumphs together. That just doesn't happen here.

ESB Participant #17 also had some complaints, writing: “With little financial support for graduate students, poor bus systems, exorbitant parking rates, exorbitant bicycle parking rates, and one road to campus, I think the school's message to students is pretty clear: we don't want you here.”

ESB Participant #14 discussed a desire to improve belongingness on campus, writing: “I felt belongingness was an important aspect of graduate student life. Therefore, I was the founder and chair of the Biology Graduate Student Society to connect graduate student within the department. This was success in strengthening the sense of community and garnered recognition by the department.”

ESB Participant #6 suggested that belongingness was a personal matter, writing: “Belongingness is a matter of perception. Two people could be offered the same affection and opportunities from their peers and have two very different senses of belongingness. A sense of belongingness comes from within.” ESB Participant #18 felt that belongingness was not that important to grad students, writing: “I think that graduate students are more interested in academics, and less focused on the social aspects of university.” In contrast, ESB Participant #20 had many ideas for creating more belongingness on campus, suggesting:

Social events during the week like: - Soup & Sandwich day once a week for lunch? bring a loonie (any budget for this?) - Cookies and Milk at 4pm Mon-Thurs? bring a loonie - regular use of the Collegium - post notices for social events, post encouraging notes from professors/deans/each other, post bios of
students so we get to know each other better - Fireside chats with invited professors to talk about their journey so far (on Soup days??) so we have 2 reasons to participate! - Wings and beer with professors at Four Points Hotel once a month, open invitation but students sign up to make sure we have more than 1 or 2 people show up - do we have access to an email list for each other, can we sign up for such a list?

There was only one NESB participant response to this question. NESB Participant #22 discussed how gaining insight into others can help us develop a better understanding of ourselves and various cultural traditions, writing: “As we develop, our need for acceptance expands into greater circles of interrelationship with other people. Through maturity, we further develop understandings of cultural variations and recognize what is shared in-common between greater variations of cultural practices.”

4.3.12 Summary of Survey Data

Some of the major themes that arose in the survey data included the fact that perceptions of belongingness at the campus were stronger for NESB participants than for ESB participants. In terms of how to create belongingness, NESB participants indicated that more support for international students and more funding opportunities/financial support would help to increase their sense of belongingness. In contrast, ESB participants identified that cross-disciplinary academic events and office space for grad students were desirable. The top thematic code that emerged for increasing a sense of belongingness for both ESB and NESB participants was an increase in social events for graduate students. In addition, participants from both ESB and NESB chose feelings of being valued and supported as the most significant aspect of their sense of belongingness at the university.

4.4 Interview Data

4.4.1 Population, Sample, and Participants

Within the online survey, participants were asked the question, “If you are a graduate student from a non-English speaking background, would you be willing to discuss this topic
further in an audio-recorded, 30 minute interview?” (see Appendix D). Five participants responded affirmatively to this question. To determine who would be interviewed, the initial intent was to use purposive sampling (Gay, et al., 2012) to select the participants. However, as there were only five applicants, all volunteers were given the opportunity to participate. One participant, who initially agreed to be interviewed, did not respond back to two emails, and one participant had to withdraw at a later date. Altogether, three graduate students from NESB were interviewed for this study, thus creating a sample of convenience (Gay, et al., 2012).

4.4.2 Demographics for Interview Participants

The interview sample included: 2 males, 1 female; 1 Master’s student, 2 PhD students; 1 Education student, 1 Engineering student, and 1 Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies (IGS) student. All the participants were full-time graduate students in their first year at PCU at the time of the interview. The volunteers were also from three different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, which included: Malaysian-Malay; Chilean-Spanish; and Iranian-Kurdish; thus the sample provided a broad representation of NESB graduate students at PCU. Table 4.15 summarizes information about the participants.

Table 4.15

Demographic information for interview participants (n=3)\(^7\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Level of Study</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leon</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Full-Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Full-Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aran</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Full-Time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first participant interviewed was a full-time Visa Student who is doing his PhD. He had been studying at PCU for approximately four months at the time of the interview.

\(^7\) In this section, personally identifying information was removed from the quotes for confidentiality purposes.
For this study, we will call him Leon. The next participant was a full-time PhD student. He was a Visa Student who at the time of the interview, had been studying at PCU for approximately four months. In the study, we will call this participant Omar. The final participant was a full time Master’s student. She had been studying at PCU for approximately one year at the time of the interview and is a Permanent Resident. We will call her Aran in the study.

4.4.3 Interview Questions

The open-ended questions used to conduct the interviews inquired into participants’ definitions of belongingness and as well as their perceptions of belongingness at the research site campus (see Appendix I). Other questions included whether or not there was a perceived relationship between academic success and belongingness, how a sense of belongingness could be increased or created, perceptions related to belongingness and English language ability, and the relationship between belongingness and academic success. The interview also asked participants’ opinions on what could be done to improve a sense of belongingness on campus or in classrooms. Other questions touched on the relationship between belongingness and a sense of place, as well as how much time participants were able to spend in nature, which also led to questions concerning the connection between nature and a sense of belongingness. Finally, the last interview question invited participants to examine if they felt belongingness was connected to the ability to communicate in English. As this was an open-ended, semi-structured interview process (Gay, et al., 2012), not all questions were asked of every participant, depending on how the interview proceeded.

4.4.4 Interview Topics

4.4.4.1 Definitions of Belongingness

In order to gather information about how graduate students from NESB perceive belonging, I first asked the interview participants how they would define belongingness. The top two categories included Positive emotional connections between people/community and

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8 Except for information that could identify participants, the representational interview quotes were quoted as stated by the participants. Ellipses were used to indicate a pause while the participant was speaking.
Positive emotional connections to place. The responses to this topic are further summarized in Table 4.16 with representative quotes following.

Table 4.16

*Definitions of belongingness: Interviews (n=3)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Omar</th>
<th>Aran</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive emotional connections between</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people/community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive emotional connections to place</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride in being part of something greater</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>than you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal relationship to studies/career</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Units of Meaning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In relationship to the definition of belongingness, some representative quotes from the interviews are as follows. Leon suggested that belongingness to him meant “a sense of pride to belong to some group or some entity.” He added that generally it would mean “to feel that you are part of something greater than you” and that “it should imply some sort of positive feeling about the place or things that you belong to.”

Omar described belongingness as the way a “person attached to the community or a society around them”. He continued by stating that it has an effect on “how the community accept him and vice versa.” He added: “If the society did not accept him very well that might be, like have effect on his social development like in terms of how he manages anger or something like that, and how he manages social relationship between other community members. So, it plays important roles.” Omar’s statements suggest that, for him, belonging is also connected to personal relationships. He indicated its importance in social connections and an individual’s emotional well-being.

Aran too felt that belongingness was “something related to peoples and relationships”. She also made a connection between belongingness and physical space. She
stated that belonging is something “relating to space - physical space and natural space.” She also suggested that there is a connection to academic and work life. In her words, belongingness is “related to me and what I’m doing in my studies and in my career.”

4.4.4.2 Perceptions of Belongingness on Campus

The second topic in the interviews was about the participants’ perceptions of belongingness at PCU. The most striking positive theme that emerged in the data was having positive relationships with faculty and students, with all three participants mentioning it. For negative themes, the most common one was the lack of social activities on campus, again with all three participants mentioning it in the interviews. Table 4.17 summarizes all the themes that emerged for this topic.
Table 4.17

*Perceptions of belongingness at PCU (n=3)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Omar</th>
<th>Aran</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships with faculty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships with students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of connection to the campus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with campus infrastructure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative rather than competitive academic environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group activities/projects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Units of Meaning</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of perceptions of belonging on campus, Leon stated, “I feel connected with the campus and the individuality of the campus”, continuing that he felt “happy of the conditions we have and the general infrastructure”. He also spoke about his relationships to both his faculty advisor and fellow students, saying “the way we relate with students is the major aspect of belongingness, so we create a community. It’s not only the way you relate with your advisor, which in my case is really good. And we have a small lab that is working quite well.”
However, Leon did mention some issues with his specific program, Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies (IGS). In the interview, he said, “there is something missing in IGS, in the field of belonging to that program”. He continued by stating, “I am kind of no man’s land. I guess many people in IGS feel like that.” He concluded by saying that in his program the feelings of belonging are, “a little bit ephemeral.”

Similarly, Omar stated that his experience at PCU had been very positive as far as meeting other people. He stated, “within a week ... I feel like it’s my second home from my country.” In regards to his previous experience studying in the US, he also said, “I feel here, I’m quickly adapted, and before the US, because peoples are very polite, very nice, and very friendly. We can see a lot of friendly faces, so I feel that, by myself, I feel like I’m more comfortable with them.” He added, “It’s more competitive [in the US]. Like everyone to be more competitive, right? So like, of course if you need some, to ask about assignments and everything, everyone they will look you as a competitor.”

Omar also commented on the difficulties of connecting with others at larger universities. He stated, it is important “to gain their trust in order to get into their club, their student community.” In comparison, he found it was easier to connect at PCU, stating: “But over here people are, they are very polite or very friendly faces. If I have any doubt on the assignments or anything, they treat me as one of their friends. They share everything.” Despite this support, Omar spoke of the lack of graduate social activities at PCU, and how he had to attend undergraduate events in order to socialize. In comparison to his own culture, he found that strange. He also explained why attending events was so important for gaining a sense of belonging. In his words:

[I]t’s kind of weird, like a PhD student getting into undergraduate society activities. But in terms of that, this is how you develop that sense of belonging. It’s no matter what is your degree level. It’s the matter how you interact with the people and how the people interact with you. That is the important thing.
Omar also spoke about his relationship with his faculty advisor, which extends beyond just an academic role. He said, “My supervisor, he is a very good person here in PCU. When first I met him when I came here, he asked me about, ‘Do I need to do anything for your residence or...?’ Everything is taken care of.” Omar added “rather than he [just] keep asking about what is my progress, he asking about my welfare.”

Aran also spoke of her positive relationships with her faculty members in terms of belongingness at PCU. She said, “the most important thing, I think [is] the relationship between students and the faculty members.” In addition, she spoke about the sense of place that she has in her office which helps create a sense of belonging. She said, “In our faculty, I have this special space for myself. I spend five, six, seven hours a day there, and I see peoples around me and say hi, and we have a quick chat with each other.” She added that this graduate space helped to build community for her, stating: “We talk to each other. We know each other and we have some activities together.”

In contrast to that, she mentioned that being in her faculty was different from being on the rest of the campus. She said, “I feel belong in our faculty, but in other spaces, it’s not the same. I try to feel belong, but it’s not real actually.” She suggested that part of the problem had to do with the lack of social activities, stating: “There are no activities that I can involve in... or meet people. There’s some events like Global Fest, but it’s just one in a year.”

Finally, she spoke of the challenges of having language barriers on campus, but said that she felt supported across the campus in terms of communication. In her words:

It’s hard to be a second language speaker in a different culture, but the behaviors of people, I found it good everywhere, even in our faculty or different... other places. They try to communicate and they try to be patient. And I found it very good.... and I think it gave me a sense of belonging and being in a community. It’s a good feeling.
4.4.4.3 Definitions of Academic Success

The next topic asked participants about their definitions of academic success. The most common theme that emerged was Productivity or Contributions in one’s field. Connections with others was also emphasized in the interviews. The units of meaning for this topic are further summarized in Table 4.18. Representative quotes about this topic follow.

Table 4.18

Definitions of academic success (n=3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Omar</th>
<th>Aran</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Productivity/Contributions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections with others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing your best</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress at a good pace</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to influence environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning new concepts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Units of Meaning</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To define academic success, Leon spoke of the importance of grades, but also productivity. In his words, he said academic success means to “to have a good GPA, but also to be productive in some situation where academic life should be, like applications, meetings, presentations, and the other areas where we can contribute.” He also stated that it means to “have a good pace and progress”, adding that “producing academic products” was important. Finally he suggested that social relationships were also a part of academic success, saying that academic success means to also be “generating some relations in your academic life”, particularly in terms of the “connections you make.”

Omar also mentioned that academic success was not just about “papers, grades, and percentages”, but about the connections made and the work put in to gain success. He stated:
“Anyone can buy [a] paper or grade. People can cheat to get that academic success. But for me, [it is] how you treat the people and how you try to get the achievement through the academic success.” He concluded by indicating the importance of doing your best, stating, if “the effort that I put for that and the outcome of the effort is similar, I am content.”

Similar to Leon, Aran highlighted productivity as a key component of academic success. She stated that “a big part of it comes back to me and my productivity and my achievements during my study period.” She also added that “a part of it, it goes back to my influence on my environment, on people.” She added: “I try to be aware of my environment, and how can I influence my environment.” So for her, academic success was about both her productivity and her ability to influence her environment.

4.4.4.4 Belongingness and Academic Success

In the next interview topic, the participants were asked if they thought there was a relationship between having a sense of belongingness and having academic success. All three participants agreed that there was. As to why they thought that, the top theme that emerged from this question was Feeling comfortable, which was a common element for all three participants. Table 4.19 summarizes the results for this question. Representative quotes from the interview follow.
Table 4.19

*Relationship between belongingness and academic success (n=3)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Omar</th>
<th>Aran</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive Response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling comfortable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling a sense of belonging</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling valued and supported</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships with students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling motivated to do your work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the infrastructure to do your work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride in what you are doing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Units of Meaning</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of the relationship between belongingness and academic success, all three interview participants agreed that there was a relationship, but differed about the particulars of what was most important. Leon agreed that there is a relationship between academic success and belongingness, stating, “I would say yes. I don’t know what research says about it, but my feeling is yes.” He continued by saying, “As long as you feel proud of where you are and what you are doing, it helps you move forward and be more creative, more engaged.” He also spoke about other needs for academic success, saying that: “As long as we feel that we belong to something that is shared by the relationship we have with that something.” He added: “it means we have the means to do our research, the conditions, the environment, the academic life.” He concluded by stating, “They share some common variables, belongingness and success. I don’t know if belongingness will explain a big amount of success, but I guess in some proportion it will.”

From Omar’s perspective, the relationship between a sense of belonging and academic success is also connected. He stated, “Yes. It’s interrelated. If you don’t feel that sense of belongingness in the student environment, university environment, I don’t think ... that you can achieve more academic success.” He continued by highlighting the importance
of connecting with peers. In his words, “You need to have interaction with other students. Gain some knowledge. Share some knowledge. Then you can achieve academic success at your level.” He concluded by emphasizing the importance of being comfortable, both socially and academically, stating, “For example, you’re not very good with other students, you’re not very good with the knowledges, you’re not very good with the supervisors, but you expect that you are the top of the game? I don’t think so.”

Aran also agreed that there was a connection between academic success and a sense of belonging. She stated, “Yeah absolutely. I think it’s a direct relationship.” She added that spending more time at the university helps her to create this connection. She said, “I try to stay most of my time here because of that, because I want to feel a belongingness. I think it helps me to feel more confidence and comfortable, and then I can be relaxed and concentrate on my studies.” Finally, she mentioned the relationship between being on campus, as opposed to studying by distance, and how the sense of belonging that creates is important to her academic success. In her words: “Yeah, I think it’s a direct relationship between them. If not, I could do it online. Why did I register as a full time student in PCU? I could do it online anywhere.”

4.4.4.5 Importance of Belongingness

The next interview topic asked participants about the importance of belongingness from their perspectives. All three participants agreed that the most important aspect of belongingness was about building relationships with the community. Further information about this topic is summarized in Table 4.20 and in the representative quotes that follow.
In trying to conceptualize his ideas about belongingness, Leon used the French word ‘appartenance’, which in English can be translated as membership (Google Translate, n.d.). He spoke about how this sense of membership connects to being a part of the broader community. In his words:

For me it’s kind of a sense of pride and of to belong to some group or some entity. I don’t want to use the word belong, but I don’t have another word... *appartenance*. So in general terms, it would be that, like to feel that you are part of something greater than you.

Omar also spoke of the fact that belongingness implied a sense of reciprocity. He said, “I feel that every student in academia, must have a sense of belonging rather than just achieving ... in their academic [life]. But they should have achieve more towards to the community.” He added, “when you doing something over there, you feel good and at the same time you feel like you are part of family in the community.”

Aran spoke of the importance of belongingness in terms of her future, professional life, particularly as she is both a new immigrant and an English language learner. She spoke about its importance, stating that if she were a Canadian-born student it would be different. She adds: “But now I am as a second language student, I need to make relationships. I need to have friends, I need to know people. It help me, maybe my future, professional life, having networks of people in the same field.” Later in the interview, she added, “next year when I will have graduated, then I will have all these connections, all these relationships for
my whole life. I can contact them, email them, see them, phone them. I can help them, they can help me, and we can stay connected.”

4.4.4.6 Improving Belongingness on Campus

The next topic asked students what could be done to improve a sense of belongingness on campus. The top three suggestions included more social activities for graduate students, more collaborative group activities (cross-disciplinary), and providing speaking/writing courses. Table 4.21 summarizes the main units of meaning for this topic. Representative quotes follow.

Table 4.21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Omar</th>
<th>Aran</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More social activities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More collaborative group activities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking/Writing Courses</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic learning communities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement graduate social spaces</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better English language support</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Units of Meaning</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*policies that support families, improved sports facilities, reduced parking fees, prevention of bullying, plan infrastructure around belongingness

In asking participants how a sense of belongingness on campus could be improved, Leon responded with many suggestions. His first suggestion was, “a better academic life,” stating that “the way we relate with students is the major aspect of belongingness, so we create a community.” In terms of socializing, Leon recognized that “it’s the element that is less developed” on campus. He emphasized the need for “more communication, more
experiences. Like having conversation groups, more academic conversation groups, where you share, diverge.” He also suggested these groups should be “a combination of more convivial and academic.”

In terms of student space, Leon identified some issues with the Graduate Collegium on campus. He said there is “something missing with the appealing of the space.” Related to that, he suggested that “announcing that space” and “improving the usage or the ‘get to know’ events or spaces” could make a positive difference in the use of the space.

He also identified issues with the sports facilities on campus, stating, “I love sports, and I’m not using the spaces. I would like to have a pool, a swimming pool, or a climbing wall, and those infrastructures are not there, so I have to look somewhere else.” In the same context, he continued, “I bike to campus and we don’t have a good biking route, and that doesn’t help to be proud of a campus that is supposed to be connected to nature and healthy ways of living. So we lack some sports infrastructure and also biking infrastructure too.” He concluded by stating: “There’s work to be done in connection of the campus with the city and with the environment. The surrounding environment is kind of isolated for now.” He also added that perhaps the future planning of the campus should “consider the element of connection and belongingness.” Finally he recommended that families be considered in provision of services, and issues around expensive parking be addressed and suggested that the university re-evaluate these elements so that students could more easily come to the university “to participate in events or just to meet here.”

Omar spoke about the importance of building relationships with classmates. He said, “I would like to develop a sense of belonging among my classmates. If let’s say I’m helping them and they’re helping me. I share what I know with them and they will share the knowledge they have. It’s very important for your academic standing.” He added: “If I don’t have a sense of belonging inside my class members and they didn’t accept me as a member of the class, I might loss, like the interaction between them. So as a student, particularly as a PhD student, it is important to have a sense of awareness and belongingness among your colleagues to develop in terms of your social skills and your academic skills.”
He also spoke about the issue of bullying, particularly in regards to English language ability. He said that on campus, some students: “make fun of [other’s English]”, adding that “if they try to reduce it, I think they can improve the sense of belonging among ourselves.” He concluded by saying, “If we can reduce it and have awareness among the students, it’s important.” In relationship to that, he added that there is a difference between knowing the language and having knowledge, but that was not always clear to other students. He said, “It’s just a language. It’s not knowledge. So that’s my, how we can improve sense of belonging.”

Like the other participants, Omar also suggested an increase in social activities for graduate students. In his words, “try to gather round all the students to come into the society. And try to create a family environment among them”. He added that, activities such as Global Fest and student leadership conferences can really “broaden up our sense of belonging.” He concluded by saying, “if they can maintain this kind of activities around the campus, I assure you they can answer the cause on how to increase the sense of belonging.”

Aran suggested providing specific supports for students from NESB. She said what was needed was “a centre for, maybe for second language, English as a Second Language students to get together. I think it’s a lacking.” She also added that intercultural communication was important, saying, “when I talked to another student who came to our faculty, she’s from another country, but when we talked together ... and we shared our experiences from different cultures, I think it helps.” I asked her if the International Collegium could provide an answer to these issues, but she said no. In her words: “It is like other spaces. Nothing happen there.” She felt that more cross-disciplinary events would be helpful, saying she’d like to see “activities across campus with different kinds of people from different faculties.” She added that: “if some activities maybe are the cultural activities, I think it helps.”

Finally, she emphasized the importance of connecting to the physical space, particularly natural spaces, on campus. She said, “We don’t have outdoor activities. When I talk about space, belonging space, I mean physical space and natural space. So being out in natural space, which is good in our campus, may help.”
4.4.4.7 Improving Belongingness in Classrooms

The next topic asked participants how belongingness could be improved in classrooms. The top themes included Positive relationships with faculty, Positive relationships with students, ESL support/consideration, and Student-centered learning. Table 4.22 summarizes these findings. Representative quotes from the interviews follow.

Table 4.22

*How to improve belongingness in classrooms (n=3)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Omar</th>
<th>Aran</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships with faculty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships with students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL support/consideration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student centered learning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Units of Meaning</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*professional atmosphere, academic/social activities, challenging coursework

In asking participants how a sense of belongingness could be improved in a classroom setting, Leon suggested that having professional relationships was important. He said, “if the relationship is professional, is good, is challenging, you feel well.” He also mentioned “the quality of the classroom infrastructure, the instructor, the professor, the type of relationships that we develop with the other students.”

In terms of content of courses, he said, “methodology courses should be more IGS oriented and not field specific.” He also added that it “doesn’t help when you have undergrad and grad students combined. The ambiance or the class quality is not as good you would like.”

To improve a sense of belongingness in classrooms, Omar highlighted the importance of “student and instructor interaction”, particularly by providing equal opportunities for
students to speak in class. He said, “Most of the lecturers, what I see here in PCU, is very
good because the instructor give everyone an opportunity, the same opportunity to give the
answers, to give their feedbacks, their opinions.”

He emphasized the importance of instructors being aware of class dynamics, as it can
affect student motivation. In his words: “When one student, he keep answering the question,
sometimes we feel that ... we are not important people in the class. That’s the moment we
feel deeply loss focus towards the academic content inside the class.” He continued, “But if
the instructor and the student plays an important role, and everyone should participate, we
can bring up in our academie [have academic success].”

Another issue Omar mentioned was the problem of the professor’s use of difficult
language in the classroom. He said, “When some lecturers try to describe with high deep
vocabulary, some students do not understand that.” Omar tempered this by saying, however,
that if there is a sense of belonging in the class, students can get the needed language support
from their classmates, stating, “If the student feels that he is inside the class and treat as a
family, at the moment, the student can directly ask for some meaning of the word.” Finally,
Omar suggested that “student centred learning” was a good technique for classroom
belonging. He said, “That’s a really good way to increase this particular manner.” He added,
“We feel we are all for one and one for all. That’s the thing. So that particular model or
teaching technique could increase that sense of belonging.”

Aran suggested that activities that extended off campus and into the outdoors were
good for promoting belongingness. She said, “going out with our cohort and involved with
different outdoor activities and hanging out and have fun together and talk together, I think it
help to bring us close together and we could make good connections.” Added to this were,
“Activities beyond the classroom. For example, having potlucks after each course, I think it’s
great to know people more, to talk to people, to have food, to even take recipes, making
connections.”

When speaking of the expectations of her instructors, she also highlighted some
issues. She said that when completing writing assignments, faculty members “expect us to
write like an English speaker.” What was helpful for her, however, was getting descriptive comments about her writing. She said, “I like to get feedback from them. This semester [name omitted] edited all my papers, not only for her criteria of the course, but for my grammar mistakes, for my vocabulary mistakes. And yeah, I appreciate that feedback.”

In terms of classroom support, Aran had this to say: “I found it good. Because yeah, they considered me as a non-speaker student.” She added, “I speak slow, but they tried to be patient and listen and let me take my time.” She also spoke of the importance of discussing culture in class. She said, “When the topic is a cultural thing, with all the people talking about the same cultural thing, they ask me ‘Ok, what does it look like in your culture?’ I think people appreciate when they share something of my culture, and I like it.” Finally, she spoke of getting support from other students and faculty. She said, “The most important part was other people who came to me and asked me questions and tried to make me connect.”

4.4.4.8 Belongingness and Connection to Place

The next topic asked participants about the relationship between belongingness and a connection to place. Two out of three participants said there was a connection, and one participant said there was not. Further findings on this topic are summarized in Table 4.23. Representative quotes from the interviews follow.
Table 4.23

*Belongingness and connection to place (n=3)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Omar</th>
<th>Aran</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus infrastructure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Personal work space</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere/Materials of the campus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural setting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere of the faculty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to adapt to a place</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in ability to communicate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Units of Meaning</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I asked participants about the relationship between belongingness and a connection to place. Leon’s opinion was definitely that there is a relationship between them. He stated that “We cannot disconnect from place or those entities to which we belong. When they are physical entities I guess, like university, it comes with everything else.” As cited previously, he also mentioned the importance of the campus and community infrastructure, as well as space to work and to socialize, stating that he uses the Graduate Collegium often, as well as having “a small lab that is working quite well.”

On the other hand, Omar stated that he did not feel there is a relationship between belongingness and a sense of place. He said, “I don’t think there is a connection,” adding that: “You can adapt to the society or the community as long as your mentality, the way you’re thinking, can adapt to that society.” He added, “It’s all about from yourself. I’m sorry, you cannot blame for others. It’s all from yourself.”
He continued by explaining his experiences and how they connect to a sense of belonging, stating: “When I came here, I have a low confidence in how I interact in English.” He suggested that his issues had more to do with confidence levels in speaking than in the ability to communicate. He said, “It’s not a matter of English the language or something like that.” He added: “As long you can feel that you are, can communicate with them and everything, that’s all. It’s a part of like confidence.”

In contrast, Aran suggested that there is a relationship between sense of place and belonging. She said, “It has micro level and macro level. For example in small level, when I have space for myself, a cozy space and a desk, I can keep my stuff there and I feel comfortable when I have that space, the physical space.” She added, “The next level is the faculty. It’s not the physical space. I don’t like the physical space of our faculty. It’s not an open space. It’s just like an office building. But people, and maybe behaviors in that space, make it comfortable for me.” Finally, she spoke of the campus, saying, “the next level is the whole campus. It’s a small campus, but I think it’s good. I have found anything that I needed, so I haven’t had any problems with physical space. And the natural space is great. I love it, especially in spring and summer when I worked and spent my time in the Learning Garden and around the campus. I really enjoyed it.”

4.4.4.9 Belongingness and Nature

The next question asked participants about the relationship between connection to nature and belonging. As presented earlier, the definition of nature used in this study comes from Louv (2008) as “natural wildness: biodiversity, abundance (p.8). Units of meaning relating to this question are summarized in Table 4.24 and representative quotes follow.
Table 4.24

*Relationship between belongingness and nature (n=3)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Omar</th>
<th>Aran</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time spent in nature</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature builds friendships/connections</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature creates a sense of belonging</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Units of Meaning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In asking about the relationship between a sense of belongingness and a connection to nature, I first asked participants if they spent a lot of time out in nature in Kelowna. Leon responded, “As much as we can”, adding that it is an important aspect of his daily life. In his words, “That’s something I value, yes.”

Omar agreed. He said, “That kind of place in nature place is how you develop, get to meet each other, how we make friends, rather than we just have the environment in university.” He continued, stating:

If you bring our friends to the outside, how their, the social relation, how they react, is totally different. When at the university, we feel we will see them as a classmate, as a colleague, as a working colleague, or research colleague, that’s all. But when we go out, and let’s say we go for climbing, we go for swimming, and something like that, it’s totally different. We don’t see them as a colleague. We will see them as more than that.

Omar also pointed out the importance of connecting with others on this more personal level, rather than just solely at a professional level. He said, “When other people ask me to play badminton, or something like that, so they treat us more than a working colleague. So that’s a sense of belonging.”
Aran agreed that she spent a lot of time in nature, saying “Yeah. It’s part of my lifestyle.” I asked her if spending time outdoors helped her sense of belonging as a new immigrant, and her response was, “Yeah. Absolutely.”

4.4.4.10 Belongingness and English Ability

The next question asked participants about the relationship between a sense of belongingness and their English speaking abilities. Two of the three participants agreed that there was a relationship between English ability and a sense of belonging. The other participant disagreed. The units of meaning for this topic are summarized in Table 4.25 with representative quotes following.

Table 4.25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Omar</th>
<th>Aran</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good level of English needed to connect on campus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in communicating when first arrived</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to speak in class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needed speaking/writing practice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belongingness not affected by English ability if you have friends/colleagues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English barriers help others to connect to you</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Units of Meaning: 2 2 7 11

In terms of whether or not a sense of belongingness is influenced by ability to communicate in English, Leon had this to say:
Absolutely. Yeah, I’m lucky. I speak three languages, so I can manage to enlarge my contacts. But yes, our main communication language is English. It’s paramount. So, you have to have a very good level of English if you want to be connected and enjoy all the possibilities of life in and around campus.

Omar disagreed, stating, “I don’t think so the language affect me more on the sense of belonging among the class members.” He continued by saying, “if he already develop a sense of belonging inside the class, I mean, for example, I don’t think so that a lack of communication between... among them, will affect that interaction between the classmates or the community.”

When I asked Aran her thoughts about the relationship between belongingness and English language ability, she spoke about some of the difficulties she had. She said, “It was hard at first, and the first course I had, it was the hardest one.” She added: “Language barriers and speaking problems I had didn’t allow me to talk to people and know them.” In addition, she spoke about the difficulties of her first year, stating, “I had more language barriers. So now, in compared to last year, I’m better now. So I can communicate easier and I’m a little bit confident now in my language because I wrote four or five, six papers and I talk to people. I have friends now. I make relationships during one year. I know faculty members. They know me.”

Improvement in her English has also influenced her ability to communicate in other ways, particularly by enabling her to help other NESB students. Aran said, “Now I feel that I can support new students.” She added, “When a new student come to our faculty then I feel that, ‘Ok, I can support her.’ I know the environment. I know the people. I can support her. I know her problems as a new international student, so I can share my experiences.”

Finally, in terms of communicating in English, Aran spoke of some of the issues arising from having a NESB. She said, “I think it has two sides. One side is I can make the connections. If I speak [my language] here with all people who speak [that language], then I make more connections. But now, [speaking English only], I have less connections and less
relationships. But the other side is, because of my English barriers, people try to make me connect and maybe pay more attention to me as a non-English speaker.”

4.4.4.11 Graduate Writing Course

In the course of the interviews, one participant discussed a graduate writing course that had been offered earlier in the year, which he had taken. Some of his thoughts about this course are summarized in Table 4.26.

Table 4.26

Graduate writing course (n=1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Omar</th>
<th>Aran</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good to feel cared about linguistically</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful for linguistic support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Units of Meaning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of the graduate writing course, he acknowledged his appreciation for it, stating, “It’s good to feel that the university care for us.” He continued by saying that it “was a good thing to feel loved, I would say.” When I asked him if he felt supported linguistically on campus, he agreed, saying: “I feel there is support for me.” However, he also added that there were still needs to be filled, particularly in terms of social and conversational opportunities.

4.4.4.12 Graduate Speaking Course

After speaking about the graduate writing course, the topic of a graduate speaking course arose. Of the two participants who were asked about this topic, both of them agreed that it would be a beneficial course to offer students from NESB. The two top needs identified included Informal speaking opportunities, such as discussion groups, particularly on multicultural and cultural topics, and Formal, speaking-oriented curricula. The emergent themes for this topic are summarized in Table 4.27 with representative quotes following.
Table 4.27

*Graduate speaking course (n=2)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Omar</th>
<th>Aran</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal speaking opportunities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion groups, particularly on</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>multicultural/cultural topics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal, speaking-oriented curricula</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation/Conference skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminars/open presentations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Benefits**

- Build confidence in speaking: 1
- Attract students to PCU: 1
- Develop sense of belongingness: 1

**Total Units of Meaning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Omar</th>
<th>Aran</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of the representative quotes that arose from participants regarding the topic of a graduate speaking course are as follows.

Leon suggested that the university could provide “seminars, open presentations” to help address the need for more speaking practice. He suggested that it could even be quite casual, saying, “maybe not a formal class, but activities where we chat, we talk.” He also added that it “would be helpful to have a more speaking oriented curricula around our formal curricula.”

Another element that he mentioned was the need for better cultural understanding. In his words: “it is taken for granted that we understand the culture and the way of living, but that is not always the case.” He also highlighted the need for better orientation to the community, stating: “Sometimes we just have the wrong pictures of cultural life, of what is
valued here. So maybe some introductory or thematic activities relating to cultural life or cultural aspects of community life would improve our connection to our living here.”

He suggested a course that provided both cultural elements as well as presentation skills would be very useful, stating it should “combine elements. Like having presentation and cultural issues, or combining academic discussions, [so] we may have a kind of academic perspective on cultural issues, [while] at the same time learning how culture, or cultural tissue, is made here.”

Leon also pointed out the importance of gaining an understanding of the local culture by identifying the fact that not knowing enough about a new place can emphasize the negative. He said, “very often when we don’t know the place, the main elements that arise are the bad elements, or the confrontational elements.” He concluded by saying, “bad experiences could be avoided by a good introduction.”

Omar, too, spoke of the benefits of a speaking course. He said, “I just wondering why they do not have this because it’s really helpful for the graduate students.” He stated: “It’s a very good thing. It’s how you can attract more people and of course it will develop your sense of belongingness.” He added that it would help his confidence as well, saying that a course like that would help him be “more confident, like a confident speaker.”

He suggested that a speaking course combined with information about presenting at conferences would be useful, saying, “as a graduate student, we have to go for a lot of conferences, seminars” adding that “if we have that particular course, it will help.” He also said that even international students fluent in English would benefit, stating that even for “a fluent English speaker from non-English speaking country that really helps actually.” His reasoning was that despite having fluency in English, the presentation and conference styles can be quite different depending on the country. He said that in his country, they use presentation styles specific to that place, adding that “some English speaking country people do not understand that. So this English speaking introductory course, it will make... help graduate student to understand more better how you do a presentation and how you deliver that speech.”
4.4.4.13 Issues around Sustainability

The last topic that arose from the interviews was the topic of sustainability. Two of the participants brought it up in the course of the interviews. One spoke about environmental sustainability and the other spoke of social sustainability in relationship to belongingness. Table 4.28 summarizes this data with the representative quotes following.

Table 4.28

Issues around sustainability (n=2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Leon</th>
<th>Omar</th>
<th>Aran</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental sustainability</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social sustainability</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Units of Meaning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In analyzing the data from the interviews, two participants also mentioned issues related to sustainability: one regarding environmental sustainability and the other social sustainability. Leon spoke on the topic of environmental sustainability and how it affected his sense of belongingness to the campus. He said, “There are some elements that sometimes I don’t like and that makes me feel not proud of it.” He added: “The energy policy of the campus is not in line with the policy that we are supposed to be. We are supposed to be a very sustainable campus and sometimes it is just not the way we behave. If we want to project one image, we should be more careful about our actions. Sometimes it’s not very good in terms of being proud.”

Aran also spoke of the relationship between sustainability and a sense of belonging, this time in terms of social sustainability and its relationship to future goals. She said, “I think belongingness is not just about now and during my study period. It’s about, as I said before, it’s about, forever.” She added, “I think, when we were talking about sustainability and belongingness, I think it’s not all about the natural sustainability. It’s about the
sustainable relationships. When I feel belonging, I can have these relationships for my whole life.”

### 4.4.4.14 Summary of Interview Data

The three interview participants shared similar views on many topics about belongingness. They identified the importance of the relationships between faculty and students, as well as the integral need for social connections and social activities, in order to maintain their academic success. The importance of experiencing learner success and the relevance of their learning experiences were also highlighted. They identified that a graduate speaking course that also teaches presentation and conference skills would be beneficial, not only for students from non-English speaking backgrounds but also for other students as well. Their views also indicate that having a sense of belongingness and access to nature is another area of importance.

### 4.4.4.15 Summary of both Survey and Interview Data

Overall, both ESB and NESB study participants defined belongingness in two ways, as positive emotional connections to people and positive emotional connections to place. In terms of people, they identified their relationships to their peers and to the faculty and staff of the university as key to their sense of belonging. Regarding place: graduate space, the overall campus, and access to nature were all identified as important components. The feeling of being valued and supported was indicated as the strongest factor in how students from both categories perceived belongingness.

### 4.5 Concluding Remarks for Chapter 4

Chapter 4 outlined the results and findings of the research study, *Fostering Success: The Question of Belongingness at the Graduate Level*. In this study, 36 graduate students from both ESB and NESB were surveyed and 3 NESB students were interviewed in order to collect data about their perceptions of belongingness at PCU. In this chapter, the results of the study were presented in two sections: Online Survey Results, and Interview Results.
Graphical representations through tables and figures, as well as examples from the data through representational quotes, were presented to show the findings in as detailed a way as possible.

In the following chapter, Chapter 5 – Discussion, the interpretations and implications of this data will be discussed in order to present the findings of the study in terms of the research questions and the guiding hypothesis, as well how they relate to theory, praxis, future research, and educational practices that promote belongingness at higher education institutions. Chapter 5 will also discuss the justifications and limitations of the study’s findings, and present conclusions about the findings of the study.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Overview of the Study

This study focused on belongingness in education for graduate students from NESB. In order to triangulate the data, ESB graduate student perspectives were also included. Theoretical perspectives indicate that a sense of belongingness plays a major role in academic success (Beck & Malley, 2003; Kunc, 1992; Osterman, 2000; Thomas, 2012; Van Houtte & Van Maele, 2012), but belongingness in the field of Additional Language Teaching and Learning, particularly at the graduate level, needs more examination.

The theoretical framework of this project combined Maslow’s (1970) human motivation theory of belongingness with Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist ideas that students learn best when collaborating with more capable peers. By applying these concepts to approaches in higher education, this study recognizes that belongingness is an essential aspect of the language learning process, as it not only facilitates positive interactions, but can also help students to develop the linguistic skills necessary for successful academic outcomes.

The purpose of this study was to better understand how to foster academic success in the university environment for graduate students from NESB by asking students about their perceptions of belongingness using both an online survey and semi-structured interviews.

The research questions for this project asked:

- How can an institution create a better sense of belonging for its graduate students both from ESB and NESB?
- To what extent is a sense of belongingness influenced by English language acquisition?
- How is academic success influenced by the need to belong?
- What can be done to create a better sense of belongingness for NESB graduate students at English medium universities?
- To what extent is a sense of belongingness influenced by place and/or nature?
The research hypothesis guiding this study posited that an increased sense of belongingness would accompany positive academic experiences and is an integral aspect of language learning for NESB graduate students. In both the survey and the interview data, the perceptions of the participants were able to justify this hypothesis. This finding suggests that a better understanding of this topic may have benefits not only for ELLs at the graduate level, but also institutions, instructors, other students, and university support staff.

The research methods employed for this project consisted of a mixed methods study that included an online questionnaire surveying 36 graduate students from both ESB and NESB at PCU. It also included in-depth, semi-structured interviews with three graduate students from NESB. Qualitative approaches informed by phenomenology (Creswell, 1998; Gay, et al., 2012; Groenewald, 2004) were used to identify themes found in the data. This research approach was influenced by phenomenology in that it focused on understanding the phenomenon of belongingness through the lived experiences of the research participants. The end goal of this study was to create a better understanding of the essential structure of belongingness for the participants by recognizing their understanding of the experience (Creswell, 1998).

The findings suggest that an increased sense of belongingness for graduate students from both ESB and NESB at PCU would increase academic success, increase a sense of happiness and satisfaction with the university, and would foster a greater sense of connection to the university and in the community. For most of the participants in the study, belongingness was considered an important element of success at the graduate level for both their academic and social well-being at the university. Though not everyone in the study agreed about the implications and level of importance of belongingness to their academic experience, the results indicate that it is an overarching factor among those who took part in this study. Participants from NESB identified belongingness as being particularly relevant.

To understand the results more fully, the intent of this chapter is to interpret, analyze and clarify the implications of some of these findings. This chapter will examine some major themes that arose in the data, as well as identify the limitations and biases that may have occurred in the study. Chapter 5 begins with a summary of the findings as well as an
interpretation and explanation of conclusions offered for each of the results. A summary statement and implications for further research, practice, and prevailing theoretical perspectives in the field follow.

5.2 Summary and Discussion of Results

This section summarizes and discusses all data collected in both the online survey and the interviews. The results have been arranged into seven main topics that relate to the research hypothesis and the research questions.

There were many research topics in this research study. Perceptions of belongingness as well as the benefits of belongingness were examined through the lens of both ESB and NESB graduate students. Participants were also asked about belongingness specifically in relationship to the university where the study was conducted. This topic ties into the research question: How can an institution create a better sense of belonging for its graduate students both from ESB and NESB? The relationship between belongingness and English language learners was also examined, connecting to the research question: To what extent is a sense of belongingness influenced by English language acquisition? In addition, the relationship between belongingness and academic success was also studied. The research question for this question was: How is academic success influenced by the need to belong? A further research question asked: What can be done to create a better sense of belongingness for NESB graduate students at English medium universities? Finally, the relationship between belongingness and place/nature was also studied. The research question for this topic was: To what extent is a sense of belongingness influenced by place and/or nature? The research hypothesis suggested that an increased sense of belongingness will accompany positive academic experiences and is an integral aspect of language learning.
5.2.1 Perceptions of Belongingness

In this study, participants defined belongingness in two key ways, as positive emotional connections to people and as positive emotional connections to places. Those two ideas had implications for feelings of pride, connection, personal relationships, and physical and natural space, and linked to overall feelings of being valued and/or supported by the university (see Figure 5.1).

![Figure 5.1 Perceptions of belongingness]

Both the ESB and NESB groups identified the concept of feeling valued and supported as one of the strongest indicators of having a sense of belonging. The idea of feeling valued and supported, aligns well with Goodenow’s (1993) definition of belonging in education, as a “student’s sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (teacher and peers) in the academic classroom setting” (p.25), but may also connect to both the physical and natural space on campus, and be influenced by institutional policies in the academic environment that can affect student success within that environment (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008).

Regarding emotional connections to people, for both sets of participants, relationships with faculty and relationships with other students appeared to play the strongest roles in having a sense of belongingness. These findings are supported not only by Vygotsky’s
(1978) social constructivist theories, but also by Thomas’ (2012) study which identified the importance of peer relations and student relationships with faculty as key elements of belongingness in higher education.

Within the classroom, a top NESB participant response for fostering belongingness included building positive relationships with faculty. This finding is supported by Van Houtte and Van Maele (2012) who identified that belongingness for students is closely tied to positive relationships with instructors and also connects with both Thomas’ (2012) and Noddings’ (2012) supposition that relationships of care and trust between teacher and students is a valuable way to nurture academic success, while also building a sense of belongingness for students. This also links to Bingham and Sidorkin’s (2004) concepts of “relational pedagogy” (p.1), in which the assumption is made that good pedagogy relies on building strong relationships between students and subject matter. The development of professional networks was also highlighted by study participants.

The importance of positive relationships with other students and the building of friendships and personal connections were also highlighted in the study’s data. This finding is supported not only by Thomas’ (2012) study, but also by Engstrom and Tinto (2008), Melles (2009), and Rochecouste, Oliver, and Mulligan (2012), who found that increased peer interaction and socializing correlated with positive academic outcomes for English language learners. However, as one participant in the study identified, belongingness is not automatic. Simply putting students into groups for group projects may not create a sense of belongingness. Belongingness needs to be carefully structured and supported within the pedagogy of the classroom and within the institution as a whole.

Emotional connections to place also arose in the study. The identification of the need for physical space to work/socialize was significant in how participants defined belongingness, and reveals the importance of learning spaces for students. Research done by Harris (2011) and Freiberg (1999) speaks about the impacts that physical spaces have in education and identifies the need for healthy school environments to support learning. In this study, graduate students highly valued their office and work spaces as being key elements of
feeling a sense of belongingness, and the need for more communal graduate space was significant in regards to improving feelings of belongingness at PCU campus.

As the budgeting of institutional space is an administrative concern in higher education (Harris, 2011); this finding is noteworthy for acknowledging the importance of delegating graduate offices and graduate communal space on campuses. However, as noted by participants in the study, simply providing rooms, such as the Graduate Collegium, is not enough to create a sense of belongingness. The study participants also identified the necessity of actively increasing student engagement by offering structured activities and events in those spaces. Other elements of space indicated the desire for better campus infrastructure in terms of physical activity. A climbing wall, a pool, a bike route, and organized outdoor activities were all indicated as other ways to support belongingness through physical space on campus.

Another interesting finding relates to belongingness and access to nature. The research question for this topic asked to what extent a sense of belongingness is influenced by access to nature. Only 43.4% of the ESB participants agreed that they found a relationship between having access to nature and having a sense of belongingness; however, 83.3% of the NESB participants felt there was a connection. Access to nature on campus was mentioned several times in the NESB participant interviews, and was identified as important for creating a sense of belongingness and for helping to foster friendships and connections. Outdoor activities were also identified by each of the interview participants as being desirable for increasing feelings of belongingness. These findings link to Louv’s (2008) suppositions that access to nature builds connections between people and, particularly for adults, helps to create a sense of belonging.

This finding also has significance in terms of increasing environmental awareness and sustainability on campus. Louv (2008) states that those who know the language of a place will have more respect and stewardship for it (see Figure 5.2).
Opportunities provided for students to learn about the local environment could foster an increased sense of belongingness for students, particularly for those from NESB. Greater knowledge of the environment may also help to increase feelings of stewardship for the local ecology and aid in promoting awareness and consciousness about issues of local environmental sustainability. For an institution that promotes ecological sustainability as one of its primary mandates (Place and Promise, 2014), addressing this finding by fostering greater environmental awareness for NESB students may be of interest to campus administration.

5.2.2 Benefits of Belongingness

In the study, participants were asked to identify the benefits of increasing a sense of belongingness for students. Some of the key benefits identified in the study can be seen in Figure 5.3.
Some of the key findings for improving a sense of belongingness included: increased feelings of connection, increased feelings of safety, reduced negative interactions, and feeling a sense of pride towards an institution. These and other elements are all connected to economic, academic, and social benefits for students. Institutional benefits of improving belongingness also emerged in the study. These benefits can be seen in Figure 5.4.

![Institutional benefits of improving belongingness for students](image)

*Figure 5.4 Institutional benefits of improving belongingness for students*

Some of the key institutional benefits for improving belongingness included: increased student satisfaction, increased engagement with the university, and increased academic success for students. These findings link to economic, social, academic, and political benefits that can connect to long-term sustainability for institutions.

### 5.2.3 Belongingness at PCU

A key question in the study was to understand how an institution can create a better sense of belonging for both ESB and NESB graduate students. Overall, the majority of
students surveyed indicated feeling a sense of belongingness at PCU; however, interestingly, the NESB students felt a much greater sense of belongingness than the ESB students. Only 63.3% of ESB students compared to 83.3% of NESB participants said they felt a sense of belongingness on campus. This ratio suggests that PCU has created a positive environment for the NESB graduate students who took part in the study, but may indicate that, in terms of belongingness, more work may be needed to support the ESB students. This finding is particularly poignant, because institutions may assume that domestic students do not need extra supports, thus are expected to navigate graduate life on their own. However, this result suggests that graduate school may be challenging for many students, not just those from NESB.

The top reasons for dissatisfaction perceived by ESB participants included lack of graduate community/graduate space, unproductive working relationships with faculty/staff, and issues with courses/content, such as concerns about highly-blended programs. These topics match Thomas’ (2012) findings that highlight the need for supportive learning communities, productive relationships with faculty/staff, and relevant academic experiences that connect to student goals. For NESB participants, racism, lack of student voice, financial problems, and priority of undergrads were all identified as reasons for dissatisfaction at PCU. A lack of social activities for graduate students and negative campus experiences, such as peer to peer bullying, were also issues associated with this question. These topic areas identify issues to address for increasing graduate student satisfaction and promoting a greater sense of belongingness at the university.

Two ESB participants and one NESB participant provided neutral responses to this question, identifying that belongingness was not related to their satisfaction with the university. One participant stated that belongingness comes from within rather than externally, while another posited that graduate students were more interested in the academic rather than social aspects of the university. While these findings may be true for those students, the majority of respondents in the study, 66.7% from an ESB and 83.3% from a NESB, felt that there was a connection between having a sense of belonging and satisfaction at the university.
5.2.4 Belongingness and English Language Learners

In terms of academic success, the next research question asked to what extent a sense of belongingness is influenced by English language acquisition. The findings in this study suggest that for NESB participants there is a relationship between an increased sense of belongingness, improvement in language and other skills, and an increase in confidence. Two of the three interview participants suggested that their sense of belongingness is related to English ability and said that a good level of English was needed to feel connected. One participant felt that a sense of belongingness was not connected to English ability, but did identify that improved English ability was related to increased feelings of confidence. As this participant described, by increasing a sense of belongingness, language and other skills increase, which allows confidence to increase, which in turn improves a sense of belongingness. This cycle can also be reversed (see Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5 Academic sustainability through belongingness

Feeling comfortable was a top finding from the interview, so combining these three elements may help to create feelings of success, confidence, and therefore more satisfaction at the university for NESB students. This also links to Thomas’ (2012) study, which identified that a greater sense of belongingness is created when students have experiences as successful learners. This finding also links to Bingham and Sidorkin’s (2004) pedagogy of relations and is connected to studies which suggest that collaborative work helps foster academic success for ELLs (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Norton & Toohey, 2001). These
findings also help confirm the research hypothesis for this study which states that belongingness is an integral aspect of language learning for NESB graduate students.

5.2.5 Belongingness and Academic Success

The next research question asked how academic success is influenced by the need to belong. For both ESB and NESB participants, the top two definitions of academic success included progress in research/publications/conferences and accomplishing academic goals/academic satisfaction. However, unlike ESB participants who also highlighted good grades and academic recognition, for NESB survey participants, an important theme that arose in relationship to academic success was the building of professional relationships. In terms of academic success, this finding shows that the NESB participants prioritized not only the academic elements in graduate school, but the social as well. The NESB students felt much more strongly about the importance of belongingness for their academic success than the ESB participants did. In fact, 100% of the NESB participants agreed or strongly agreed that there was a relationship between their academic success and a sense of belongingness, whereas only 50% of ESB participants made that connection.

Belongingness appears to be a vital component of academic success for the NESB participants in the study, because, as was mentioned in the interviews, stronger interrelationships enabled participants to understand others better, particularly from a cross-cultural perspective and in regards to connecting with others on a professional level. An increased sense of belongingness was described as a way that students could build stronger social networks that had the potential to lead to reciprocal, long-term, and therefore sustainable relationships for the future (see Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6 Social sustainability for NESB students

All three interview participants gave very similar responses about the importance of social connectedness, identifying that having a sense of belongingness was integral for building reciprocal relationships with the broader community.
This theme is of particular interest, not only in terms of pedagogical methods for teaching graduate NESB students, but also regarding institutional provisions that could be put in place to support these students. For these students, social sustainability may be based on having an increased sense of belonging and stronger social networks. Thus, the promotion of belongingness for graduate students could be an essential investment required for students to reach their full potential beyond graduate school.

As NESB students are often arriving from other places to attend universities without previous professional connections, fostering a sense of belongingness by providing them with the supports and opportunities to build those relationships may be a key element in ensuring their academic success and also their satisfaction with graduate programs. In terms of sustainability for educational institutions, this finding also links to Thomas’ (2012) study which identified the importance of universities providing experiences relevant to students’ goals, in order to foster a greater sense of belongingness, thereby increasing student success, satisfaction, and retention.

5.2.6 Improving Belongingness for NESB Students

In terms of identifying what could be done to create a better sense of belongingness for graduate students at English medium universities, both ESB and NESB participants acknowledged the need for more social and academic-oriented events on campus to improve a sense of belongingness. Some ideas included: arts activities, potlucks, collaborative group activities, multicultural events, formal and informal meetings with peers and faculty, and outdoor activities. NESB participants also suggested that more English language support and mentorship for international students would be helpful. Two of the NESB interview participants discussed the graduate writing course that had been offered for PCU students, and agreed that it was a positive experience both for supporting their academic work and for creating a sense of belongingness on campus.

Two of the three interview participants also identified that a graduate speaking course that included group discussions about cultural topics, as well as formal speaking-oriented curricula, such as presentation and conference skills, would be useful for NESB students. In
relationship to this topic, both Egbo (2009) and Coelho (2004) discuss the importance of providing instruction to ELLs that can provide students with social and cultural capital. These findings are supported by Kim’s (2012) study, which identified that linguistic and cultural knowledge is needed by NESB graduate students. This finding also links to Thomas’ (2012) study which highlighted the importance of universities providing experiences related to both the interests and long-term goals of students.

Participants in the study also identified a relationship between feelings of belongingness and institutional dissonance, where what is said in policies, documents, and other artifacts representing the campus, were perceived as different from what is being done. One example included the lack of a bike route to campus, despite PCU’s policies on sustainability. This dissonance was identified as causing lack of pride and a negative view of PCU for students, which can then lead to decreased feelings of belongingness (see Figure 5.7).

![Figure 5.7 Belongingness and institutional dissonance](image)

As part of the development of the campus community, the findings suggest that maintaining institutional integrity through policy enactment and shared responsibility is something worth addressing on an ongoing basis. This issue has implications for student satisfaction, retention, academic success, and the overall academic community and atmosphere of the university (Kunc, 1992; Osterman, 2000). On a wider scale, the relationship between institutional dissonance and decreased feelings of belongingness may also have implications not only for educational institutions, but for the broader community as well, such as corporate and political institutions.

5.3 Summary Statement

The findings from this study suggest that belongingness is not only an important aspect of academic success for students, but is also an integral factor for building academic
communities that can bridge the academic, linguistic and cultural differences that divide people (Anderson, 2014), while also helping to create a more cohesive structure at the graduate level. Academic communities are comprised of students, faculty, and staff members, so inclusive practices that support all members to work at their highest level, while also building community could be of great help in strengthening the entire institution. In this study, both ESB and NESB participants agreed that an increased sense of belongingness would accompany positive academic experiences. NESB participants also indicated that belongingness is an integral aspect of language learning, thus confirming the research hypothesis for this study. Figure 5.8 identifies some of the key findings from the study. Many connect well to Thomas’s (2012) study of institutional belongingness. In addition, Positive connections to place and/or nature was also identified as a factor in belongingness for NESB participants.
From these findings, both ESB and NESB participants also identified three benefits of improving a sense of belongingness. They included: improved student experience, increased academic success, and increased feelings of institutional allegiance (see Figure 5.9).

![Benefits of Belongingness](image)

**Figure 5.9 Benefits of belongingness**

Each of these findings connects well to Thomas’ (2012) study on belongingness in higher education, and highlight how improving belongingness, not only benefits students, but also the institutions in which they work and study.

### 5.4 Applications of Research

This research has applications, not only for educators working with NESB students, but also on policy enactment for the campus as a whole. Building stronger academic and institutional communities through policies that foster belongingness for students can serve to create a more cohesive whole that incorporates vision, connection, and shared values campus-wide. Having a better understanding of how to successfully integrate NESB students into the university and involving all in the working of this enactment is essential for developing these goals. Belongingness is not something that is simply ‘fixed’ by an institution, nor can it ever be wholly achieved. Rather, building inclusive environments that support all learners requires continual attention and ongoing effort. However, advocating for and implementing practices that support belongingness is a major component of this goal.

With the globalization of education fast becoming a reality, university campuses are becoming meeting points for international perspectives on key topics facing the world today. For institutions truly trying to lead the way in inclusive educational practices, building a sense of belongingness from within is a good first start. The amalgamation of different
perspectives can serve to build stronger research projects, create a broader vision for good educational models and practices, and lead the way towards more harmonious and productive academic societies.

Though this study was limited in its scope, it has the potential to be used as a model for studies with students from other non-mainstream groups at educational institutions such as Aboriginal students, students with disabilities, even students who already fit well into the mainstream system, as evidenced by the lower sense of belongingness reported by the ESB participants in the study. Similar studies could also be applied to businesses, corporations, non-profit organizations, and governmental organizations.

5.5 Implications for Practice and Recommendations

With an increase in international students expected at Canadian universities (ISI, 2014), having a clearer understanding of how best to support these students will be of great value. The findings of this research project suggest that an institutional focus on belongingness could have positive implications not only for NESB graduate students, but likely for many other students as well. The concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Rose & Meyer, 2002) identifies that what is beneficial for one group can also be beneficial for many others. For example, a sidewalk ramp not only aids people using wheelchairs, but also helps those pushing strollers, riding bicycles, or pulling dollies (Brownlie & Schnellert, 2009). The same principle holds true in education. Brownlie and Schnellert (2009) suggest that “the accommodations that we put into place for students with specific needs can benefit many other students’ learning” (p.42), thus this logic implies that enhancing English language acquisition for NESB students through pedagogy and policies that incorporate belongingness would also hold significant value for the rest of the institution as well.

For example, increasing the number of cross-disciplinary social and academic events available for graduate students would not only benefit NESB students, but other students too. These events could include skills workshops, invited speakers, arts activities, music, dances, lunches, meet and greets with faculty, as well as community-building activities, such as student networking opportunities, student societies, and collaborative group projects.
Activities such as these would increase the potential for building both personal and professional relationships for students, while also providing students with opportunities to develop friendships and supportive connections with peers and faculty, both key elements in enhancing belongingness in higher education.

Providing a broader range of academic supports available to graduate students, such as more speaking and writing courses that focus on both academic and linguistic knowledge, as well as social and cultural discussions that could help with the transition and acculturation into graduate life at PCU is another important recommendation. These supports would not have to be solely for NESB students, but could also be extended to other students who may benefit from them as well, thus creating more inclusive and engaging cross-cultural environments for learning these important skills.

In terms of space, providing more graduate office and community spaces for students would be another way to increase a sense of belongingness across campus. However, it is important to acknowledge that these spaces would have to be active places that promote belongingness, rather than just empty rooms provided for students. The activities mentioned above are all ideas for events that could be held in these spaces to promote a sense of purpose and belonging in them. As the findings in both the survey and the interviews suggest, there also appears also to be a relationship between a sense of belongingness and nature for NESB graduate students. Structured outdoor activities may be a way to promote belongingness for students by providing direct connections to nature; therefore, active promotion of the preservation, maintenance, and use of natural spaces on campus would not only enhance the natural beauty of PCU, but could also increase feelings of belongingness for students. By examining space on campus from a more holistic perspective and considering it as an important aspect of students’ sense of connectedness, the physical aspects of the campus would then be integrated with the broader learning experiences of students, thus further creating a greater sense of belonging.

As indicated in the findings, the need for more anti-bullying, anti-racism, and multicultural training for both students and staff is also essential. Providing skills training to increase awareness and understanding of these issues on campus would not only enhance the
knowledge base of NESB students, but would also provide cross-cultural opportunities for
domestic students and staff to gain insight into global perspectives on these and other related
topics. As Lippi-Green (1997) asserts, accent-based or linguistic discrimination is seen by
many as acceptable; therefore, a broader awareness of this issue may be significant for
supporting students marginalized by English. Reviewing policies connected to sustainability
and addressing areas of institutional dissonance would also help augment institutional pride,
thereby increasing feelings of belongingness at PCU.

As to professional development implications for instructors and supervisors working
with graduate students, training in student-centered learning, multicultural education, and
teaching strategies that support English language learning would be beneficial. Professional
development that provides instructors with support for promoting classroom belongingness
for diverse students through inclusive educational practices would also be helpful.

5.6 Limitations

By asking a wide variety of questions on the topic of belongingness at a higher
educational institution, this research project inquired about a topic of intrinsic psychological
and educational value within institutions. As there are few other studies with which to
compare the results, it is not known if the findings of this study are typical or atypical.

In order to gain a broader understanding of the topic, triangulation, through the use of
two research instruments, an online survey and in-depth interviews, was used. The study was
also triangulated with survey data from both ESB and NESB students, so the differences
could be compared between the groups. The results were also compared with theoretical
views from academic scholars on the topic (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Beck & Malley,

However, as this study had a small number of participants and was conducted at only
one institution, with such a limited data set, findings are not suitable for generalization. In
addition, the online survey could only be disseminated to small group of students, thus the
ability to capture a wide range of students’ perspectives was limited. In order to be able to
generalize results, in-depth studies on a broader scale and further research would be
necessary to confirm the results. Research at other institutions and other methods, such as the inclusion of focus groups, would also add much more depth to the findings.

Finally, as an educator and researcher whose philosophical outlook is based in inclusive education principles with a strong interest in the topic of belongingness and education, it is possible that the study may have been influenced by that bias. It is hoped that other researchers would be able to replicate the study with accuracy; however, it is not known if results would be the same. Future studies would be necessary to further examine this topic in other locations or with different participants.

Despite these limitations, even with such a small sample, a broad range of NESB students were interviewed, representing a wide sample of NESB students on campus. Though not suitable for generalizing, the research methods used may be of interest to other researchers in the field and may provide a foundation for future research in this area.

5.7 Recommendations for Future Studies

This study would have been better with more participants. In future studies, a similar project would benefit from having a longer data collection period and full access to an email listserv, so the study could be disseminated more effectively. A similar study would also benefit from longer interviews with participants in order to gain a broader view of the research topic from each participant’s perspective. Focus groups added to the data collection process would also help to triangulate the data further. In addition, future studies might also benefit from access to and the use of a data coding software, such as NVivo, in order to triangulate the researcher’s findings with themes arising from the software.

5.8 Summary and Conclusion

This research addresses an often overlooked area of education, belongingness at the graduate level. With thousands of international graduate students expected to enter Canadian universities over the next few years, how best to support NESB students is becoming a topic of significance for both academic administrations and educators. As it is the responsibility of institutions to provide the supports necessary for students to succeed, a shift in thinking about
ways to support NESB graduate students is integral. Creating educational environments that increase academic success for students, particularly for those coming from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, is an important aspect of building strong academic communities; thus, fostering a greater sense of belongingness within academic communities may be one significant way of increasing the academic success of these students, and perhaps all students.

The research hypothesis for this study suggested that an increased sense of belongingness would accompany positive academic experiences for NESB students and is an essential aspect of language learning. As the findings of this study indicate, belongingness was not only considered an important aspect of academic success for the participants in the study, but the results suggest that it may also be a key element for institutional success. A pedagogy of belongingness in the classroom and on campus connects many of the issues found in the literature regarding the needs of NESB graduate students and has the potential to influence academic success, as well as increase student satisfaction and happiness. Bridging these issues through the use of pedagogical and institutional policies that support student success through belongingness, such as creating supportive learning communities, building positive peer to peer and student to faculty relationships, providing active graduate spaces, as well as experiences and content that support student goals and interests, and meeting the needs of students in relevant ways, may all be ways to build positive structures for graduate programming at the university level and could also have long-term positive outcomes for institutional sustainability.

These findings highlight the necessity of actively practicing and advocating for belongingness in our educational system by directly addressing the underlying values that make up school environments. If it is indeed true that academic achievement and engagement are connected to belongingness in schools (Shapiro, 2012; Van Houtte & Van Maele, 2012), and, as Baumeister and Leary (1995) identify, that the integral nature of belongingness is underappreciated, then the importance of educational institutions fostering belongingness for students cannot be overstated.
As the field of English as an Additional Language continues to grow, particularly at the graduate level, research projects such as this one will become more important for understanding how to foster academic success for graduate English language learners. The findings of this study, though not suitable for generalization, may still offer some insight into how educators and institutions can support graduate students from all backgrounds. To better understand the influence that belongingness has on English language learners at the graduate level, more research in this area is essential, with further research being of significant value to students, instructors, and educational institutions.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Behavioral Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - MINIMAL RISK

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Scott Douglas
INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT: UBC/UBC Okanagan, Faculty of Education, Department of Psychology
UBC BREB NUMBER: H13-02576

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:

<table>
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<th>Institution</th>
<th>Site</th>
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<tr>
<td>UBC</td>
<td>Okanagan</td>
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CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):
Angela M. Finley

SPONSORING AGENCIES:
N/A

PROJECT TITLE:
Fostering Success: The Question of Belongingness at the Graduate Level

CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: October 15, 2014

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:

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<tr>
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<td>September 30, 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consent Forms:</td>
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<td>Fostering Success Interview Consent Form</td>
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The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board Okanagan and signed electronically by:

Dr. Carolyn Szostak, Chair

Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics

Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Angela Finley

has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement:
Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)

Date of Issue: 14 April, 2013
Appendix C: Letter of Initial Contact and Consent Cover Letter for Website

Dear PCU Graduate Student,

I am a Master of Arts student in the Faculty of Education and am researching the topic of belongingness in education. In partial fulfillment of my Master’s thesis, I am conducting a survey about perceptions of belongingness for graduate students at PCU.

As a graduate student, I would greatly value your participation in this project and would like to invite you to take a short online questionnaire. This questionnaire consists of only 11 questions and should take a maximum of 15 minutes of your time.

Your participation will help me gain a greater understanding of belongingness at the graduate level. Other benefits may include results that could be used to provide better program development and on-campus support for graduate students in the future.

Thank you so much for taking the time to consider participating in my study. Please see below for more information about the study and details about providing consent for participation.

The survey link can be found at the end of this email. It will be accessible until December 31, 2013.

If the questionnaire is completed, it will be assumed that consent has been given.

Best regards,

Angela Finley, MA in progress

Scott Roy Douglas, PhD, Graduate Supervisor

Faculty of Education, Okanagan Campus
University of British Columbia
Information about Consent

What is the title of this study?
Fostering Success: The Question of Belongingness at the Graduate Level

Who is doing the study? (In partial fulfillment of Master of Arts, Education)
Angela Finley, MA in progress, Faculty of Education, UBC Okanagan, (250) 801 0980
angela.finley@ubc.ca
As a Graduate student, Angela Finley is the Co-Investigator of this study.

Who is Angela Finley’s Graduate Supervisor?
Scott Roy Douglas, PhD, Faculty of Education, UBC Okanagan, (250) 807 9277
scott.douglas@ubc.ca
As the Graduate Supervisor for this study, Dr. Douglas is the Principal Investigator.

Who is funding this study?
There is currently no funding for this study.

Why take part in this study?
This study is open to all graduate students at PCU. The purpose of this study is to learn more about issues surrounding belongingness for graduate students at PCU. This information will be used to create a theoretical framework of belongingness for graduate students in order to better understand the implications of this topic. This survey will also form the basis for a Master’s thesis. The hope is that information gathered from this study will someday be used to make recommendations for improving programs and campus life for graduate students.

What happens if you say “yes”? 
Participating in this study will require approximately 15 minutes of your time and involves completing a short online questionnaire. The questionnaire asks 11 questions on the topic of belongingness for graduate students at PCU. Once you start the questionnaire, you are free to not answer any question(s) you do not feel comfortable answering.

The collected information will be held anonymously through Canadian servers, and the online survey software is provided by a Canadian company called Fluid Surveys. This information will form the research data for the Co-Investigator’s Master’s thesis and may be used in aggregate form. Examples provided may also be used for educational purposes in scholarly publications, conference presentations, professional development workshops, and other instructional settings.
At the end of the survey, graduate students from non-English speaking backgrounds will be given the option of participating further by answering the question, “Would you be willing to discuss this topic in a 30 minute interview? If so, please provide your email address.” If you would like to participate in this study further, you can choose to provide your contact information. All names and email addresses provided will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this study. You will have the opportunity to review and sign a consent form concerning the interview phase of the study before deciding to participate in an interview and you may withdraw at any time without negative impact.

How will you know the results of the study?
Participants who would like to be informed of the results of this study will be contacted via email. A short summary of the findings will be sent to all students who provide their email address. The results of the study may be reported in presentations and journals and will constitute the main focus of the Co-Investigator’s Master’s thesis which, upon completion, will be a public document available online through UBC’s Circle.

What are the risks of participating in the study?
There are no risks associated with participating in this study. There is nothing in this study that is deemed to be able to harm you or affect you negatively. You may decline to participate in the study by not completing the questionnaire. Once you start the questionnaire, you may quit at any time by not submitting your responses.

What are the benefits of participating in the study?
One benefit is the possibility that this study will help future graduate students who may gain from the findings of this study. You will also have the chance to explore the question of belongingness in your graduate studies and to reflect on your graduate school experiences from another perspective.

How will your identity be protected?
The researchers will not know who is participating in this survey unless you choose to provide your name and email to be contacted. If you do so, confidentiality of your personal information will be maintained. Questionnaire data will be gathered through a Canadian online survey company with servers in Canada.

All collected data will be kept by the Principal Investigator in a locked cabinet in the office of the Principal Investigator at UBC’s Okanagan campus for five years, after which it will be destroyed. Only the Principal Investigator and the Co-Investigator will have access to this data.
Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?
If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact one of the researchers. Their names, telephone numbers, and email addresses are listed in this email.

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?
If you have any complaints about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line. The phone number for the UBC Office of Research Services is 1-877-822-8598. You may also contact the UBC O Research Services Office at 250-807-8832.

Participant Consent for the Survey
Taking part in this study is entirely up to you and you have the right to refuse to participate. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time by not completing the questionnaire. You do not have to give a reason. By reading this information and clicking the link to complete the questionnaire, you agree to participate in this study. Your signature is not required, and you will not be required to submit a copy of this email. If the questionnaire is submitted, it will be assumed that consent has been given. You may print out a copy of this email to keep for your records.

If you would like to take part in this study, please begin by clicking on the following link:

http://fluidsurveys.com/surveys/angela-finley/fostering-success/
Appendix D: Online Survey Questions

Fostering Success: The Question of Belongingness at the Graduate Level

This questionnaire is to study perceptions of belongingness for both English and non-English speaking background graduate students at PCU.

Definition of Belongingness

Goodenow (1993) defines belongingness in education, as a “student’s sense of being accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others (teacher and peers) in the academic classroom setting and of feeling oneself to be an important part of the life and activity of the class” (p.25).


To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

**Question 1**

I feel a sense of belongingness at PCU.

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree

**Question 2**

I am satisfied with my experience as a graduate student at PCU.

Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neutral
Agree
Strongly Agree
Question 3

My satisfaction level with being a graduate student is connected to my sense of belongingness at PCU.

  Strongly Disagree
  Disagree
  Neutral
  Agree
  Strongly Agree

Question 4

Please provide one or more reasons for your answer:

Question 5

My academic success is influenced by a sense of belongingness at PCU.

  Strongly Disagree
  Disagree
  Neutral
  Agree
  Strongly Agree

Question 6

Briefly describe what academic success means to you.
Question 7

Louv (2008) defines the term ‘nature’ as “natural wildness: biodiversity, abundance” (p.8).
My sense of belongingness is influenced by having access to nature.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Question 8

Which of the following concepts, if any, represent belongingness to you? (Choose all that apply)

- Understanding the cultural rules
- Having strong social connections
- Having a strong connection to the community
- Feeling comfortable
- Feeling valued and supported
- Ability to converse well in the language
- Having academic success
- Having a physical space to work/socialize
- Being part of a group
- Having connections to the natural world
- Being the same as others
- Other (please specify) ______________________

Question 9

What could be done to create a greater sense of belongingness for graduate students at PCU?
Question 10

What would be some benefits of improving a sense of belongingness on campus?

Question 11

Please share any further thoughts you may have about belongingness/non belongingness and graduate students at PCU.

If you are a graduate student from a non-English speaking background, would you be willing to discuss this topic further in an audio-recorded, 30 minute interview?

If yes, please provide your email address here so we may contact you._________________

Note: Participants will be chosen to provide the widest possible representation of the population of non-English speaking background graduate students at PCU. At least five students will be selected for interviews.

Demographics

Age
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- Over 65

Gender
- Female
- Male

Faculty ____________

What is the language you first spoke?
- English
- French
- Other (please specify)
Please choose the phrase that best describes you:

- Born in Canada
- Childhood Immigrant
- Adult Immigrant
- Visa Student

If you have taken a language proficiency test (TOEFL, IELTS, CELPIP, LPI, etc), what was the score on your most recent test?

Name of Test: __________
Score: ________________

Thank you very much for completing this survey on belongingness.

If you would like to receive a summary of the findings of this study, please provide your email address below or send a message to angela.finley@ubc.ca.
Appendix E: Script for Emails to Colleagues Known to the Researcher

Fostering Success: The Question of Belongingness at the Graduate Level

Dear [insert name of colleague],

Below is a link and information about informed consent to a survey that I am doing for graduate students on belongingness at PCU. This is a UBC study in which participants will complete a short online questionnaire on the topic of belongingness in graduate education. The questionnaire should take a maximum of 15 minutes of a participant’s time.

http://belongingness.weebly.com/

Please forward this to PCU graduate students who may be interested in taking part in the survey.

Best regards,

Angela

Name of Study: Fostering Success: The Question of Belongingness at the Graduate Level

Co-Investigator: Angela Finley, Masters Student, Faculty of Education, angela.finley@ubc.ca

Principal Investigator: Dr. Scott Douglas, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, scott.douglas@ubc.ca
Appendix F: Script for Posting a Message on Social Media Sites

Fostering Success: The Question of Belongingness at the Graduate Level

Below is a link and information about informed consent to a questionnaire that Angela Finley is doing for graduate students on belongingness at PCU. This is a UBC study in which participants will complete a short online questionnaire on the topic of belongingness in graduate education. The questionnaire should take a maximum of 15 minutes of a participant’s time.

Survey Link:  http://belongingness.weebly.com/

Thank you for considering being part of this Master’s thesis project study.

Co-Investigator: Angela Finley, Masters Student, Faculty of Education,
angela.finley@ubc.ca

Principal Investigator: Dr. Scott Douglas, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education,
scott.douglas@ubc.ca
Appendix G: Recruitment Poster

Fostering Success: The Question of Belongingness at the Graduate Level

Are you a graduate student at PACIFIC COAST UNIVERSITY?

Would you like to participate in a study on the topic of belongingness for graduate students?

This is an invitation to take part in a research project the topic of belongingness / not belongingness in graduate education. Graduate students from non-English speaking backgrounds are particularly welcome to participate, but all responses to the survey are much appreciated. Participation consists of completing a short online questionnaire. The questionnaire should take a maximum of 15 minutes of your time. Participation is welcome until December 31, 2013.

Information on informed consent as well as information on how to participate can be found at this link: [http://belongingness.weebly.com/](http://belongingness.weebly.com/)

This is a UBC master’s thesis project study, conducted by Ms. Angela Finley, a graduate student in the Faculty of Education on UBC’s Okanagan campus. Ms. Finley’s graduate supervisor is Dr. Scott Douglas, an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at UBC’s Okanagan Campus. As the graduate supervisor for this study, Dr. Douglas is the principle investigator. He may be reached at scott.douglas@ubc.ca if you have any questions. Thank you for considering taking part in this study.
Appendix H: Interview Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

What is the title of this study?
Fostering Success: The Question of Belongingness at the Graduate Level

Who is doing the study? (In partial fulfillment of Master of Arts, Education)
Angela Finley, MA in progress, Faculty of Education, UBC O, (250) 801 0980
angela.finley@ubc.ca
As a Graduate Student, Angela Finley is the Co-Investigator of this study.

Who is Angela Finley’s Graduate Supervisor?
Scott Roy Douglas, PhD, Faculty of Education, UBC O, (250) 807 9277
scott.douglas@ubc.ca
As the Graduate Supervisor for this study, Scott Douglas is the Principal Investigator.

Who is funding this study?
There is currently no funding for this study.

Why take part in this study?
Your participation will help the researchers gain a greater understanding of belongingness at the graduate level. This study is open to all graduate students from non-English speaking backgrounds at PCU. The purpose of this study is to learn more about issues surrounding belongingness for graduate students at PCU. This information will be used to create a theoretical framework of belongingness for graduate students in order to better understand the implications of this topic. This research will also form the basis for a Master’s thesis. The hope is that information gathered from this study will someday be used to make recommendations for improving programs and campus life for graduate students.

What happens if you say “yes”?
Once you have completed the online survey, participating in this study will require approximately 30 minutes of your time and, with your consent, will involve an audio-recorded interview on the topic of belongingness for graduate students from non-English speaking backgrounds at PCU. After the interview has been completed, an email of the findings will be sent to you to confirm its accuracy.
**How will you know the results of the study?**
If you would like to be informed of the final results of this study, you will be contacted via email. A short summary of the findings will be sent to those who provide their email address. The results of the study may be reported in presentations and journals and will constitute the main focus of the Co-Investigator’s Master’s thesis, which upon completion, will become a public document available online through UBC’s Circle.

**What are the risks of participating in the study?**
There are no risks associated with participating in this study. There is nothing in this study that is deemed to be able to harm you or affect you negatively. You may decline to participate in the study at any time with no negative consequences.

**What are the benefits of participating in the study?**
One benefit is the possibility that this study will benefit future graduate students who may gain from the findings of this study. You will also have the chance to explore how belongingness and success in your graduate studies are related and have a chance to think about your graduate school experiences from another perspective.

**How will your identity be protected?**
Your name and email address will only be used for the purposes of contacting you in regards to this study and will be kept confidential and separate from your interview responses. During the interview, you will have the opportunity to choose a pseudonym (fictitious name).

Recordings and notes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and all electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer. This information will also be backed up on a password protected external hard drive. The Principal Investigator will keep a copy of the data for a minimum of five years and this will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at UBC’s Okanagan campus. After five years, all data related to this study will be deleted or destroyed.

**Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?**
If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact one of the researchers. Their names, telephone numbers, and email addresses are listed at the top of the first page of this form.

**Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?**
If you have any complaints about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line. The phone number for the UBC Office of Research Services is 1-877-822-8598. You may also contact the UBC O Research Services Office at 250-807-8832.
Participant Consent and Signature

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact. By consenting to this study, you have not waived any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.

- Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.
- Your signature indicates that you say “yes” to participating in this study.
- Your signature indicates that you say “yes” to being audio-recorded during the interview.

☐ YES

Participant Signature______________________________________________

Date ___________________________

Printed Name of the Participant
______________________________________________________________

Email address of the Participant
______________________________________________________________
(Optional for participants who wish to be informed of the results of the study)
Appendix I: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Fostering Success: The Question of Belongingness at the Graduate Level

In-Depth Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. How do you define belongingness?

2. Tell me about your perceptions of belongingness on campus.

3. How do you define academic success? Do you think your studies are going well? Why do you think that is?

4. Do you think there is a relationship between your sense of belongingness and academic success? Why or why not?

5. Is a sense of belongingness important to you? Why or why not?

6. What could be done to improve a sense of belongingness on campus or in classrooms?

7. Do you think there is a relationship between a sense of belongingness and connection to a place? Why or why not?

8. Do you spend a lot of time out in nature in Kelowna? Explain.

9. In your opinion, is there a relationship between a connection to nature and one’s sense of belongingness?

10. Do you think your sense of belongingness at PCU is influenced by the ability/lack of ability to communicate using the English language?