

**Walking and Talking: An Observational Study of Social Dynamics Among Students
Traversing Through Campus**

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Introduction

A small public liberal arts college in a mid-Atlantic state serves as home for many, where people from diverse backgrounds coexist and interact with one another persistently throughout campus. Understanding the logistics of student engagement, whether that be verbal or nonverbal, is crucial for obtaining a cohesive community.

The topic of the study explores the dynamics and social interactions among students as they traverse through campus. A key research question within the study aims to identify what factors impact social behaviors among students as they navigate a campus while also finding a deeper understanding of how these interactions play a role in campus experiences.

Literature Review

Understanding interactions between students in a diverse ecosystem such as a college campus, allows us to discern the dynamics and patterns of student activity in a campus setting. In order to do so, it is important to note that many factors affect levels of integration amongst students.

A study conducted by Cindy Ann and Reuben Redwood (2018) is relevant to this study because they focus on the integration of international students with domestic students. They found that incorporating multicultural engagement on campus creates a higher inclusivity rate and enhances the social capital of international students. The research further identifies the powerful dynamics of international students and the educational opportunities they bring. The importance of intercultural interactions on campus is emphasized and should be viewed as opportunities instead of a problem that needs to be solved. The Redwood's (2018) conclude their

argument by identifying challenges that may arise with intercultural engagement. Not only may this cause challenges with cultural engagement, but this affects the dynamics of a group according to Gorrini et al. (2014), who focuses their study on the dynamics of pedestrian crowds. While challenges persist, there are promising outcomes and opportunities among students. As long as strategies and practices are implemented, innovation among campuses will occur. In addition to that, they found that it is crucial that college campuses value diverse student identities and work toward the liberation of educational viewpoints.

Through an interdisciplinary approach, Gorrini et al. (2014) focuses on the idea of group dynamics in pedestrian crowds. They hypothesized that groups have negative effects on walking speed. The research signifies the impact of pedestrian dynamics and its effect on safety and efficiency. As the Redwood's (2018) found, the collaboration of international and domestic students creates a strong dynamic. While having a strong group dynamic is not a negative attribute, Gorrini et al. (2014) may look at it as a possible detriment to safety. There are many key findings, one of them being the speed and productivity of crowd movement. Being in a group not only affects the spatial cohesion but it affects the speed at which individuals walk due to the effect of interactions with one or multiple people. Due to larger group interactions, it is important to consider the safety implications when thinking about large public spaces. Specifically, in the event of an emergency, whether that be a fire, threat, or natural disaster, it is important to evacuate people quickly and safely. Additionally, the reduction of congestion should be carried out in order to avoid unnecessary accidents and possible panic. Signs and other adequate forms of communication can be used to aid in proper evacuation and safety. Understanding large group dynamics will create safer group interactions and crowd management. Gorrini et al. (2014) added the conduction of a study in a controlled laboratory in which they

found that their hypothesis was correct, in which larger groups have negative effects on walking speed. While Gorrini et al. (2014) utilized a laboratory study, Cheng et al. (2014) focused their attention on a technological approach, more specifically simulations when examining the evolution of social dynamics within a group.

Cheng et al. (2014), similarly focuses on group dynamics, but more specifically from a historical context. The persistence of the study of social dynamics is recognized due to its evolving nature. After around a century of research, the research provides much valuable insight about pedestrian interaction and safety. A significant difference between early and modern-day research is the idea that pedestrian actions are not focused on traffic regulations anymore and instead they focus on the creation of pedestrian user-friendly designs. Both the Redwoods (2018) and Gorrini et al. (2014), emphasize the importance of pedestrian behavior and interactions instead of putting the focus on specific regulations. Computer technology has played a pivotal role in research. Various approaches for studying pedestrian behavior have been used, some including macroscopic and microscopic models, and computer simulations. Cheng et al. (2014), found that these models concluded that social interactions among groups influence group arrangement and walking speed. Additionally, the idea of group behavior is commonly overlooked in many flow models. These models aim to predict how individuals move and sometimes they forget to pay much attention to how groups interact with another. This research recognizes the importance of considering all aspects of group dynamics when conducting various models for pedestrian behavior. Similarly, all three authors have a central viewpoint of focusing on the individual or group themselves instead of basing their research off societal regulations.

Method

The design of my observational research involves an ethnographic study. I took a long term and engaging approach to view the dynamics of individuals and groups as they navigate across a college campus. The participants in the study involved male and female college students on campus between the times of 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. I observed the campus population two different days and felt this time frame would give me a diverse and well-rounded sample. Additionally, I took data from three different locations: in front of a fountain, at the campus entrance, and in front of the dining hall. My data collection method was strictly direct observations. I did not speak, nor did anyone know I was observing the interactions of students around me. I have identified the independent variable to be the social context, whether that is alone or in a group. On the other hand, I concluded my dependent variable to be types of interaction. Throughout my observations, I persistently wrote down what I witnessed. Some of those variables included walking speed, whether someone was by themselves or with a group, cell phone usage, where someone walked on the sidewalk, moods, and even common gathering spaces. In addition to writing what I witnessed, if I saw multiple alike variables, I would keep track of how many occurrences I observed so that later I would be able to distinguish certain patterns within the campus community. I avoided bias in my observation because my sample was random. I did not choose participants and instead just witnessed everyone interacting around me.

Observations

My qualitative observations provided me with much insightful information about social dynamics across campus. Throughout my research, I noticed many similarities, and even differences, and distinguished a correlation between some variables. Overall, the variable with the most effect was whether someone was walking by themselves or in a group. I witnessed most

individuals that were traversing by themselves to have a less expressive mood and a faster walking pace. Moreover, they tended to have a higher rate of electronic use while walking. This is relevant to Gorrini et al. (2014) research because they explain the relationship between group dynamics and a slower walking speed. Single individuals were way more efficient at navigating obstacles or crowds versus groups of people.

Group interactions amongst students provided me with various types of data. While some people showed minimal emotion, many students engaging in group activity showed very positive facial expressions and demeanors. Not only were they engaged in conversation with one another, but their speed significantly decreased, or they were stopped completely due to their engagement. I recognized a correlation among group interactions and saw a strong relationship between Greek life, sports, and other groups on campus. Not only do they seem to converse with one another, but they seem to migrate with one another as well. The Redwood's (2018) research focuses on the integration of international students, yet I found their research to be very much related to the idea of social groups on campus. Incorporating multicultural engagement is key in the relationship between international and domestic students, just like it is important for individuals of certain groups on campus to integrate with students outside of their realm. Out of the three locations I utilized, the fountain was the most common group interaction spot.

Individuals traveling by themselves seemed to walk on the right side of the sidewalk most commonly. Oppositely, if there was more than one person interacting, the spatial cohesion was affected, which in return caused more space to be covered. Most individuals, if with another person, seemed to stand around a body width away from the person next to them.

An interesting observation I made amongst a moving group was when they crossed a road. It looked as if people in groups would not cross the road until someone in the group

crossed first. From my observations, I feel like it was not a joint initiative and looked to be more like a game of following the leader. As Cheng et al. (2014) brought up in their research, the idea of social dynamics is constantly evolving. I feel like many of my observations were dependent on new societal norms and as society evolves, the idea of social demographics will too.

Discussion and Conclusions

Through detailed observation and analysis, I have identified key patterns and relationships within a variety of social interactions among students across a college campus. The findings signify the importance of social factors and its influence on dynamics. Additionally, the study provides a deeper understanding of how people, specifically on a college campus, navigate diverse social settings. A question for further study would be social dynamics among students but under diverse weather conditions whether that be rain, cold, or hot weather.

In conclusion, it is important that a college campus involves a cohesive community, specifically one that obtains multicultural involvement. Social factors shape individual doings and group dynamics. Research has shown the evolution of social dynamics over the years, and it is important to consider the progression of individual and group involvement. Comprehending the complexities of student interaction is crucial for fostering a unified campus community.

References

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