No two universities can ever be the same – the infinite variety of the student experience

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The Student Experience…

What we know about the student experience?

– Not 'the student experience' (Sabri, 2011)

• Where you study matters

– National setting – policy / student as [insert metaphor] (Budd 2018; Tight 2013)

– Social composition – identity / marginalisation (Bathmaker et al 2013; Bhopal & Pitkin 2020)

– Institutional profile – history / status / research and teaching orientation (Boliver et al 2018)

What don't we know?

The '3-D HEI'

- How can we better understand how the university mediates the student experience?

- How does the university 'feel'?
  – Who you are;
  – Your university's character;
  – Where it is, how it is laid out…

https://3dhei.wordpress.com/
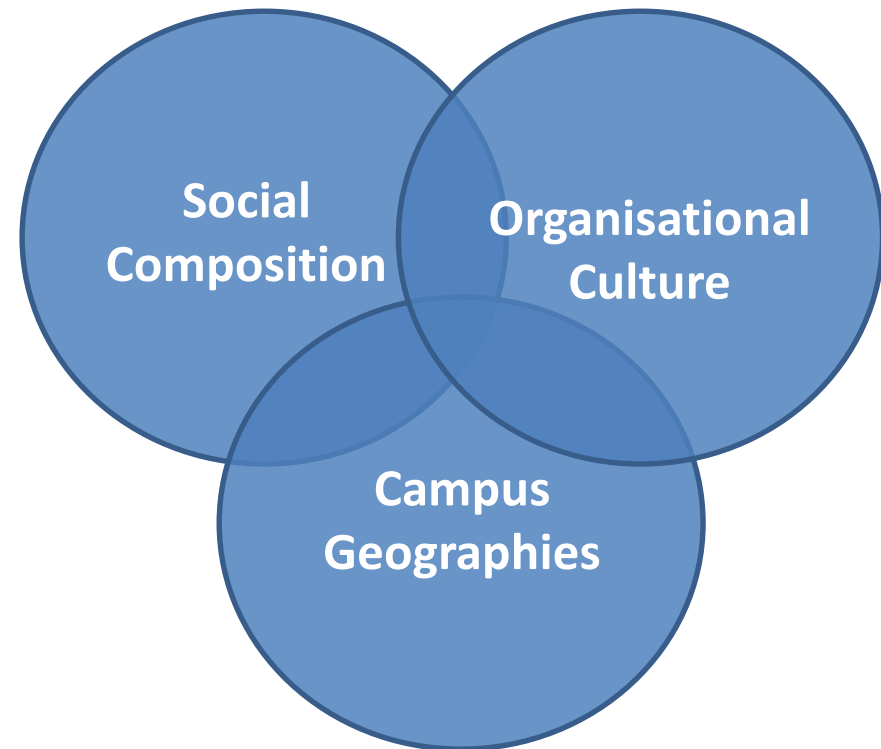
'Russel University' Focus Group Sample

Demographics	Disciplines
31 Female, 11 Male	Education: 14
29 International, 13 UK	Sociology: 9
20 UG, 22 PG	Politics: 9
Age Range: 18-35	Economics: 1
	Medicine: 1
White British: 10	Accounting: 1
British BAME: 4	Management: 1
Southeast/East Asian: 22	Engineering: 1
Continental European: 2	Nursing: 1
Middle Eastern: 2	Languages: 3
(Black) African: 2	History: 1

Themes

Dimension	Theme
Organisational Culture	Conflicting Orientations Pedagogy Status Markers Policy Issues
Social Composition	Student Characteristics Staff Characteristics Bridges and Barriers
Campus Geographies	Location, Location, Location Campus Places and Spaces Activity Mediation Character/Status

Organisational Culture [1]

- Literature
  - Combination of members' values and organisational ethos (Hofstede, 1985) and subcultures (Sinclair 1993)
  - Balance of academic freedom, procedural structures, de-/centralisation, and market forces, and status (McNay 1995; Telling 2019).
  - Collegial/market-oriented relationship with students (van der Velden 2012)
  - More/less interested in teaching/widening participation (Boliver et al. 2018)

Organisational Culture [2]

Conflicting Orientations	High Status
passionate and socially engaged traditional – modern hierarchical – egalitarian profit-oriented – socially-oriented supportive – neglectful focused on research un-/committed to teaching	entrance standards rankings, resources/size, citations famous/reputable, old, disciplinarily broad, Russell Group member Superior
Pedagogy	Policy Issues
Varied formats engaging, supportive fostering independent learning friendly / approachable - distant precariously delivered secondary to research	strikes international recruitment

Social Composition [1]

- Literature

  – Relationship between status and social selection (Budd 2017), and minority/marginalised experiences around:

    - Class (Abrahams and Ingram 2013)

    - Gender (Barnard et al. 2012)

    - International students (Madriaga and McCaig 2019)

    - Ethnicity and race (Joseph-Salisbury 2019)

    - Sexual identity and orientation (Breeze and Taylor 2018)

    - Disability (Holloway 2001)

Social Composition [2]

Students

Largely: young, white, affluent, socially progressive, hard-working, left leaning, intelligent/high attaining
Diverse and inclusive: tastes/interests, gender, accent, sexual orientation
Divided: social class/wealth, age, personal politics, discipline, language, and race

Staff

Academic/PS staff: white British/Western, left-leaning, approachable, non-hierarchical, student-oriented
Management: invisible, oriented towards finance/efficiency, promoting/protecting prestige/reputation, NOT student learning/academic working conditions

Bridges and Barriers

Bridges: Societies, sports, accommodation, social spaces, seminars/tutorials
Barriers: Staff workloads, lectures, sitting practices

Campus Geographies [1]

- Literature
  - Universities are anchored to place, grouped by architecture
  - Architectural narrative (Dober 1996)
  - Dis-/Functionality (Cranz et al. 1997; Alzeer 2018)
  - Status, character, politics (Stanton 2005; Whyte 2017)
  - Layout, syntactic flow, and change (Greene & Penn 2005; Halsband 2005)
  - Town and Gown (Brennan and Cochrane 2019)

Campus Geographies [2]

Location, Location, Location	Places and Spaces
diverse and bustling recreation and employment well-connected UK-based warmer than Scotland cheaper than London	architecturally diverse, sprawling complicated/confusing compact/self-contained beautiful/ugly, inspiring/daunting, historical/cutting-edge divided by discipline 'access only'
Activity Mediation	**Character/Status**
Range: teaching, research, study, living, socialising/eating, shopping, sports, activism, MH support, entertainment Overpriced Limited Divided	diverse: traditional / symbolic well-appointed, cutting edge STEM>AHSS

Conclusions

- Success! (ish)

  – Senses of varied and conflicting cultures

  – Positionality within a broader mapping of the population

  – Campus as container and shaper who does what, and how

- Broader questions:

  – Interrelationships between dimensions

  – Comparative utility

  – Theory

  – So what?

- The student experience will always be different because who you are and where you are – what that 'where' is like – is subject to such variety.

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