

2020

## Peer Social Support in the Classroom

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## ABSTRACT

### SOCIAL SUPPORT IN THE UNDERGRADUATE CLASSROOM

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Social support in the classroom is an under-researched area of instructional communication literature. Cutrona and Russell's five dimensions of social support were used as a framework to investigate peer social support. Those five dimensions were expected to predict engagement, classroom participation behavior, attitude towards attending class, and identification with the university. Participants (n=222) were asked to respond to measures that were developed to assess the five social support types and the four criterion variables. All the types of social support were found to be positively correlated with the criterion variables when the zero-order correlations were examined. It was also found that esteem support and recognition were the two significant predictors contributing significant unique variance when multiple regression analyses were performed for all four criterion variables.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
DEKALB, ILLINOIS

MAY 2020

PEER SOCIAL SUPPORT IN THE CLASSROOM

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIRMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE  
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

Thesis Director:

Dr. Joseph Scudder

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would have remained a dream had it not been for my advisor, Dr. Scudder. Your continuous support, guidance and insights in this project have made this an inspiring experience for me. I would also like to thank Dr. Henningsen and Dr. Bryan for serving on my committee and providing valuable insight.

## DEDICATION

Thank you to my parents, Suzanne and Steven DeBeck, for continuously supporting me throughout my education. Without you, my education and this project would not have been possible. Thank you both from the bottom of my heart.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the influence of social support tends to focus on the workplace (Guan & So, 2016; Langford, Bowsher, Maloney, & Lillis, 1997). Few studies have applied social support to a classroom. However, those have focused on younger students (Johnson & Johnson, 1983; Malecki & Demaray, 2003). This limited scope of prior research provides an opportunity to bridge the gap of social support from the workplace to the university student context. Furthermore, research regarding the classroom in the instructional communication literature has recently shifted to student-centered constructs such as peer relationships (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010; Sollito, Johnson and Myers, 2013). Student-student relationships have had minimal exposure in research, which in turn increases the importance of examining these relationships further (Myers & Bryant, 2002). It is essential to fill this gap to gain a better overall understanding of how social support may affect undergraduate students through in-class peer relationships.

This study focuses on ways different dimensions of social support among peers may affect engagement, classroom participation behavior (CPB), attitude towards attending class, and identification with the university. Peers in this study are considered both classmates and group mates. Previous research shows that peers may provide social support to others beyond the instructor (Zumbrunn, Mckim, Buhs, & Hawley, 2014), thus making them quintessential relationships that undergraduates have throughout college. The importance of social support

provided by peers will expand our knowledge on how to better support university students in the classroom. Universities could benefit by having a clearer understanding of the types of social support that need to occur more often in the classroom. The specific focus of this study is to examine student perceptions of the degree to which students receive social support from their peers in the classroom.

### **The Social Support Framework**

Cutrona and Russell's (1990) five dimensions of social support supply a theoretical framework that can be extended to the influence of peer social support on engagement, CPB, attitude towards attending class, and identification with the institution. Each type of social support (emotional, esteem, informational, instrumental, and network) provides unique insight into how a student perceives the amount of support they receive. Cobb (1976) proposed that perceived social support is the perception of being cared for and loved, being esteemed and valued, and being involved in social networks. This study extends these dimensions of social support to classroom peer relationships.

Emotional support refers to the ability to turn to others for comfort and security during times of stress, which leads to individuals feeling like they are valued (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Emotional support from peers can alleviate the stress of missing class and create a sense of encouragement or compassion that revolves around a problematic event that has occurred. Emotional support may create a better attitude towards attending class, which in turn may increase the chances of the student wanting to attend class or be a part of the academic community.

In contrast, esteem support is when feedback is given to an individual that reinforces or designates his or her competence and capabilities of completing a specified task. Esteem support is often verbal feedback that reassures the individual that she or he can accomplish a task (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Individuals will spend and sustain the more significant effort of achieving a particular behavior if they are persuaded and acknowledged by peers that they possess the skills to do so (Bandura, 1994)

On a functional level, informational support refers to an individual providing advice, guidance, or suggestions. Informational support offers individuals the opportunity to receive advice or guidance about issues (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). It may accompany other experiences of overcoming difficulties and reaching goals (Goldsmith, 2004). Peers may provide informational support to another student through stories about class, information missed because of illness, or help finding information to clarify expectations. If students perceive that they have received informational support, it may increase their ability to be engaged or participate in the class. It could also increase the positivity of their attitude towards attending class or going to class because they feel prepared for class.

Instrumental support occurs when an individual receives financial aid, material support, or tangible assistance. According to Cutrona and Russell (1990), tangible assistance includes opportunities or resources that may help the individual. Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior suggests that individuals possessing more resources or opportunities feel more inclined to participate in the desired behavior. Increasing a student's opportunities or resources through instrumental support provided by peers, such as a useful reference or tutoring, could directly affect a student's level of engagement or CPB in the class. Prior studies have found that learning

was enhanced by student interaction with each other based on the academic topics that commonly occurred through peer teaching (Lundberg, 2003; Treisman, 1992). If students feel like they have the necessary assistance, they may be inclined to have a more positive attitude towards attending class.

Finally, network support involves individuals feeling integrated with other group members who share common interests and social interactions. Such support reduces the sense of isolation. Network support provides a sense of inclusion among the members of a group that has shared interests and social interactions (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Without interpersonal relationships such as peers, students may perceive that they are socially isolated, which affects their ability to learn (Galanes & Carmack, 2013). Students may feel more inclined to participate in activities held by the academic institution if their peers are providing a sense of inclusion. Without this sense of inclusion, students might feel left out of the in-group, and in turn, it will decrease their identification with the university. Network support could also increase students' level of engagement and CPB if they perceive that they are included in the classroom in-group.

Network support was further broken down into two subdimensions. Although the network dimension as previously articulated may have met the needs of researchers when considering a full-time employment context where peer and work-group employees tend to know each other over a long duration, the university classroom context typically has a shorter life span and less developed relationships, albeit some students with the same major may see other students on repeated occasions. In a departure from prior research, two subdimensions of social network support are proposed to exist.

In the classroom context, one level of network support is that others know a student's name and some basic things about her or him. Altman and Taylor (1973) would consider this relationship at the superficial level where individuals know basic information about one another. However rudimentary, this is the foundation for more advanced relationships among peers than as it is the workplace. The recognition of others as human beings and unique individuals seems to be a precondition for many of the other outcomes considered in this study. Some undergraduate students appear to go to class without knowing many other students. They bury themselves in their social media accounts while waiting for classes without speaking to anyone. These are classroom hurdles that peer social support can surmount by getting peers to recognize each other by name and other parts of their identities.

A related area of network social support is that students become fully included and integrated into classroom groups and team projects. A student knowing that her or his contribution is important to the success of the team is one part of feeling included. This connects to the basic need of belonging and being needed that was identified as by Maslow (1943). Some classroom peers may know the names of other students in class but not feel they are included as a meaningful part of the networks of other peers. So, inclusion appears to stand as a distinct concept in contrast to recognition. Recognition seems to be a precondition for inclusion to become possible.

Recognition as a precursor to inclusion is consistent with Altman and Taylor's (1973) social penetration model and Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow's model indicates that love and belongingness precede self-actualization after fulfilling basic safety and physiological needs. Recognition would be considered the superficial layer of the relationship.

Some peer relationships may develop more breadth by getting to know one another. These relationships remain at the superficial level, but persons know more about others on that level. Esteem begins after individuals recognize a peer by name to recognize her or his contributions and accomplishments.

In contrast, personal relationships involve more depth as they penetrate the next level of interpersonal relationships. The personal level includes getting to learn others' preferences in clothes, food, music or their goals in life. At the outset of this layer is the beginning of individuals feeling the sense of being included in a group. This helps fulfill both love and belonging in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as well as continues to meet esteem needs. If someone were to reject a member of the classroom, it would increase the level of stress of that individual, and repeated rejection often leads to that group member becoming more isolated and having fewer opportunities for social growth (Hartup, 1995, 1996). The lack of inclusion has greater implications than simply being recognized. Feeling socially excluded may be perceived as an intentionally hurtful behavior. This leaves inclusion and recognition as two separate concepts, albeit closely related.

The academic implications of recognition and inclusion by peers have been studied only minimally. Research has been done that focuses on the instructor-student relationship and how students are influenced by their instructors (Ellis, 2004; Frisby & Martin, 2010; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Rocca, 2008), but few studies have looked at peer relationships within the classroom. This study helps fill the gap in social support literature by extending the understanding of recognition and inclusion in the classroom to the relational implications for students and the resulting impact on identification with the educational institution.

## **The Relational Aspects of Peer Social Support**

Peers within this study are defined as individuals with whom students have worked in group projects or as classmates in a class. When students turn to others, they build relationships. Those relationships built within a classroom setting can influence the classroom environment (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Long & Coldren, 2006; Myers, 2006; Sher, 2009). If a classmate feels socially isolated, it may affect her or his ability to learn (Galanes & Carmack, 2013). Peer relationships are essential for students to want to learn or attend class, and that relationship which influences learning is built through interaction of classmates. This introduces the idea that peers interacting with one another can influence a student's willingness to be engaged or participate in class-based discussions. Such interactions may lead to feelings of inclusion and long-term relationships. Of course, individuals likely vary in some of these preferences, as indicated in major personality traits such as the Big Five (Goldberg, 1993).

The evolution of peer relationships moves at different paces for individual dyads. Once uncertainty about classmates is reduced, students often are more successful and productive (Fassinger, 1997). Students may become more isolated or feel they are social outcasts if peers start to act selfishly or stop providing support (Galanes & Carmack, 2013). Classmate relationships can be overlooked, but they play a key role in how successful students' college careers become (Kimwelli & Richards, 1999). Furthermore, it has been found that classmates often watch their peers to understand what success in a college classroom looks like (Galanes & Carmack, 2013). So, this research has clearly identified the importance of relationships with classmates and how it affects students' ability to perform within the classroom and whether they feel included.

Moreover, inclusion may encourage students to disclose more information to their classmates (Galanes & Carmack, 2013). Altman and Taylor (1973) describe the process of self-disclosure as peeling back the layers of an onion, which bears similarities to the relationships classmates may build over a 16-week span. It was found that students are willing to self-disclose to each other more than with the teacher, but that self-disclosure may not reach intimate levels (Myers, 1998). This lack of intimate self-disclosure influences the type of relationship that classmates may have, but doesn't eliminate the possibility of the relationship developing further into a deeper friendship.

### **Social Support Impact on Other Outcomes**

Although prior social support research provides little direction, there are reasons to believe that peer social support may impact other academic outcomes. Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory suggests that individuals' actions can be influenced by observing how others perform within the context of social interaction. This happens in the classroom as students observe their peers performing.

The importance of supportive communication is shown through social support and recognized as the fundamental communicative behavior of "informing, persuading, or teaching" (Albrecht & Goldsmith, 2003, p. 263). These observations may increase the importance of social support from those peers. They could affect a student's level of engagement, CPB, attitude toward attending class, or identification with the academic institution. Many potential outcomes could result from peer social support, but this research considers only four.



**Engagement.** In education, student engagement can be operationalized as the level of curiosity, interest, and optimism that students show when being taught. This idea differs from the next variable, CPB, that often may be related to potential external rewards. Engagement has to do with more of the internal thought process and motivation of the student rather than their external actions. This is consistent with Herzberg's (1966) concept of true motivators in his two-factor theory of motivation that creates internally rewarding behavior rather than behavior based on external rewards. Previous research has found that achievement (Zumbrunn, Mckim, Buhs, & Hawley, 2014) and belongingness at school (Goodenow & Grady, 1993) are significant predictors of engagement. If a student receives esteem support in the classroom from comments on a job well done, it may increase student participation (i.e., engagement and CBP) if from the instructor (Goodboy & Myers, 2008) and potentially from peers. Highly engaged individuals are the minority across many sectors, including those employed in the workplace where perhaps only a third are interested and engaged in the work they do (see Harter, 2018). The current status of engagement of students at the university level has less research than in the world of employment.

**Classroom Participation Behaviors.** CPB in the classroom context is the act of sharing in activities (i.e., raising a hand, volunteering for activities, working with groups). Although peers may not provide the same structure as teachers, they can provide contextual affordances that support academic competence (Wentzel, 2009). Supportiveness may increase the quality of the learning climate that is essential to increased levels of participation (Rocca, 2010, p. 204). Participation is fostered when students are encouraged to participate, receive affirming comments, and their ideas are present in the discussion (Dallimore, Hertenstein, & Platt, 2004)

Also, when students interact with peers, they practice communicating, receiving feedback, resolving conflicts, and creating a set of shared academic goals (Parr, 2002). Increasing the sense of warmth among students and their peers may result in higher quality relationships (Furrer, Skinner & Pitzer, 2014) and a higher functioning classroom climate (Cabello & Terrell, 1994). This classroom climate can lead to classmates who show interest in each other, and this comfort encourages CPB and participation in class (Galanes & Carmack, 2013). Increased support from peers in the classroom may affect how much a student participates. For example, if students receive positive feedback from peers, they may be more inclined to participate as a result of feeling a sense of accomplishment and inclusion.

**Attitude Towards Attending Class.** Attitude towards attending class has not received much attention. This frame of mind captures the attitude of wanting to attend class, be in class, or be positively affected by class (i.e., mood). Understanding what contributes to a more positive attitude towards attending class could improve the quality of the classroom experience. Better peer relationships may help students feel more included in class and more likely to attend class. Social support integration into social networks could provide a sense of embeddedness in a social system that allows for students to receive feedback from others, which leads to a sense of stability, predictability, and personal control (Cohen & Syme, 1985). Without this sense of stability from peers, social isolation could impact their ability to learn (Galanes & Carmack, 2013). So, the creation of a sense of stability, social acceptance, and predictability through social support from peers may affect the level of positive attitude a student has toward attending a class or liking the class. Fostering positive attitudes toward attending class is critical to understand

because having a negative outlook and not attending class prevent social support from being extended.

**Identification with the University.** Social identity theory research has found value in individuals defining their sense of self in terms of group memberships or social categories (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A social category that students share is the university that they attend. They are part of that community. Students with a low sense of belonging have been found to still identify peers as the source of their feeling of belonging (Zumbrunn, Mckim, Buhs & Hawley, 2014). This identification may also represent the attachment that an individual may have to her or his university (Berrueta-Clement et al., 1984; Kulka et al., 1980; Rabinowitz & Hall, 1977). This sense of identification with the university may be impacted by the types of support students perceive they are getting from their peers.

Identification with the university could be seen as an individual's sense of comfort when it comes to participating in university activities. Examples of these activities in the classroom could be wearing an institution's gear on gamedays or identifying as being affiliated with their academic institution when they meet an outside person. Furthermore, students' level of engagement could be affected by the amount of social support they perceive from peers. With an increased level of network support creating a sense of inclusion, students may have a higher level of comfort identifying with their school. The importance of interactions with peers potentially leads to higher perceptions of belonging (Zumbrunn, Mckim, Buhs & Hawley, 2014), which could lead to an increase in social support. Finn (1989) identified belongingness (network support) as an internal sense that is an important part of the school community. The sense of identifying with a university likely has two different levels: the first is the school recognizing

someone (i.e., dean's list, honors, etc.); the second level is the feeling of inclusion on campus (i.e., campus influencing memories, social group inclusion, etc.).

### **Differentiating Social Support and Confirmation**

A recent article considered student confirmation behaviors (LaBelle & Johnson, 2018), but there are key differences between confirmation and social support. Methodological differences will be covered in a later section. LaBelle and Johnson (2018) refer to confirmation as the transactional process by which students communicate that they endorse, recognize and acknowledge their peers as valuable and significant individuals. Social support provides a more holistic view of peer-to-peer interactions because it extends past measuring recognition (subtopic of network support) and their version of esteem support. LaBelle and Johnson (2018) further went on to test different constructs but operationalized different types of support through definitions that varied from the prior research on social support.

Johnson and LaBelle (2016) referred to tangible support in understanding course material as both informational support and assistance. Cutrona and Russell's (1990) five dimensions would classify tangible assistance in the category of instrumental support. Other research differentiated informational and instrumental support in the classroom (Malecki & Demaray, 2003). Instrumental and informational support may be operationalized much differently in the workplace than in the classroom. Instrumental support in the employment environment refers to tangible or physical assistance that provides opportunities or resources that may help individuals and could involve using human resources employee benefits (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Examples of this within the classroom could be tutoring or assistance from classmates to help learn the material. In contrast, informational support is individuals receiving advice or guidance

about issues such as stories about class, information missed because of illness, and clarifying expectations on an assignment. The key difference between these two is that one refers to assistance being provided, while the other is providing information about the class or related events.

Esteem support is another difference of the construct of confirmation from social support. Essential differences appear in the operationalization of esteem support that will be discussed in a later section. Esteem support is defined by Cutrona and Russell (1990) as feedback given to an individual that reinforces or designates his or her competence and capabilities of completing a specified task. Johnson and LaBelle (2016) interpret confirmation as the interaction process through which individuals are made to feel valuable. They further argue that their term of confirmation is “a key” component of an individual recognizing his or her true self, but also encompasses the content of a message and the relationship between interactants. Within this study, esteem support is viewed as a precursor to what LaBelle and Johnson (2018) label confirmation. LaBelle and Johnson’s study may provide insight into peer relationships at a much deeper experiential level, but it does not provide a representation of esteem support as it has been identified by most persons researching social support

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTION**

This study contributes to previous literature on social support by extending it to the context of undergraduate classrooms. Extending social support to the classroom is the next logical step and may especially be of importance with classes moving toward the online context. In order to better understand the types of social support with college students, it is important to first focus on the in-class context. Through in-class interaction, students may be afforded different types of support, specifically in interpersonal interactions with peers.

As students interact with their peers, a sense of camaraderie or network support may emerge. Building a network of peers may further lead to types of emotional, esteem, information, and instrumental support being given as well. Receiving these different types of support from peers could influence how students view their connection with the campus and whether or not they have a positive attitude towards attending class. It may further influence their engagement and CPB within the actual classroom setting. This study focuses on how social support from peers influences student engagement, CPB, attitude towards attending class, and identification with the academic institution.

Social support is often perceived as a positive occurrence if it is present (Guan & So, 2016; Johnson & Johnson, 1983; Langford, Bowsher, Maloney, & Lillis, 1997; Malecki & Demaray, 2003). Furthermore, Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory suggests that

individuals' actions can be influenced by observing how others perform within the context of a social interaction.

When a peer provides an encouraging message or makes a student feel included there is a higher likelihood that the recipient of such encouragement will engage in the activity. If a peer provides information to a student who missed the previous class, that student may feel more prepared, which will increase his or her level of engagement in class. These dynamics lead to Hypothesis 1:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Cutrona and Russell's five dimensions of social support will have positive relationships with engagement.

Classroom participation behaviors (CPB) are defined as the act of sharing in activities (i.e., raising a hand, volunteering for activities, working with groups). These behaviors are external. They are external manifestations of internal motivations. They stand in contrast to the internal nature of engagement. Positive feedback to a student could provide students a higher sense of inclusion and confidence, which might lead them to participate in class more. Students recognized by name may become more inclined to raise their hand or participate in the future. Of course, other classroom climate variables could influence CPB. Through assistance from a peer, a student's confidence or sense of inclusion may increase, resulting in more classroom participation behaviors. From this discussion, Hypothesis 2 proposes:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Cutrona and Russell's five dimensions of social support will have positive relationships with classroom participation behaviors.

Attitude regarding attending class refers to the how positively students view going to class on any given day. Providing a peer with an encouraging message will increase the likelihood of the individual having a more positive attitude towards attending class. If a peer provides notes or assistance to a student who missed a class, the student would likely feel more prepared and have a better attitude to attend class. If a student feels a sense of inclusion or recognition from their classmates, a sense of safety will be created and increase the likelihood of a positive attitude towards attending class. These considerations regarding attitudes toward attending class lead to Hypothesis 3:

H<sub>3</sub>: Cutrona and Russell's five dimensions will have positive relationships with attitudes toward attending class.

Prior research has not considered the role of social support in fostering identification with the educational institution. This study suggests that network support enhances the likelihood that students will identify with the university because a student recognized by an educational institution or who feels included by it should have a higher likelihood of identifying with that institution. Furthermore, if a student experiences a difficult life event during her or his time at the university and peers provide support, she or he should feel a higher level of inclusion. This sense of inclusion could increase the likelihood that the student would identify more with the university. Finally, students that are provided useful information or tangible assistance (i.e., receiving a job, pursuing more education, etc.) may be more likely to identify with their university. They may post on social media about how their peers from the university or the university helped them receive this opportunity. For all of these reasons, Hypothesis 4 is offered:



H<sub>4</sub>: Cutrona and Russell's five dimensions will have positive relationships with identification with the academic institution.

In order to understand the holistic view of a peer-to-peer relationship it is important to determine what types of social support are present. This study seeks to find which of the five types of social support set forth by Cutrona and Russell (1990) are present in this type of interpersonal relationship. The following research question was posited to better understand social support within peer-to-peer relationship:

**RQ:** What forms of classroom social support are reported as frequently used by peers?

Through the previously stated research question and hypotheses, social support provided by peers in the college classroom will be better understood. This will allow for future instructors to have a better understanding of how they are able to lean on the peer-to-peer relationships in the classroom. The next chapter covers the measures used to test the hypotheses and research question.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHOD**

#### **Participants**

Participants (N=222) were recruited from lower and upper level communication courses at a mid-size, midwestern university. A total of 110 males (49.5 %), 108 females (48.6%), 2 nonbinary (.9%), and 2 who didn't identify a gender (.9%) were present in this sample. The age of students ranged from 18-36 (M=24.86, SD= 4.86). The participants were primarily Caucasian (n=113), African American (n=43), Asian American (n=14), and other or a combination of two or more ethnicities. (n=22). Of the total participants (N=222), 68 considered themselves to be commuter students. Participants reported the following distances that they lived away from the campus: on campus (n=83), only a few blocks (n=51), 1-5 miles (n=29), 6-10 miles (n=4), 11-15 miles (n=3), 16-30 miles (n=19), 31-60 miles (n=23) and 60+ miles (n=10). Participants either received extra credit or credit for participating in the study.

#### **Design**

**Predictor Variables.** Predictor variables in this study included the different types of social support defined by Cutrona and Russell (1990): emotional, esteem, informational, instrumental and network. All five types were tested to provide a more holistic view of a peer influence in a relationship with another student. The scales were developed to fit the classroom context and measured all five types of social support commonly used. Subscales were developed that divided networking social support into recognition and inclusion to provide better precision than has sometimes been the case in prior research.

**Criterion Variables.** The four criterion variables in this study included engagement, CPB, attitude towards attending class, and identification with the university. Other criterion variables may be impacted by social support that were not considered. For example, variables like academic performance could be influenced by social support, but measuring academic performance has many measurement issues. Past research on peer social support in the classroom has been minimal, so little literature exists to provide guidance about the criterion variables. To examine the influence of the different types of social support on these variables, four scales were developed to measure each criterion variable. These scales examined peer relationships within the classroom context and assessed how peer support was related to the four predictor variables.

### **Procedures**

Students were recruited through their class instructors, who provided some form of credit or extra credit for participation. The study had IRB approval. A link connected participants to a statement of informed consent that led to a Qualtrics survey if the student consented. The survey used randomized question order to decrease the likelihood of fatigue affecting questions appearing late in the survey. After indicating their informed consent, students completed items that measured the five types of social support and each of the criterion variables. Throughout the survey they were also asked demographic information and questions about what media channels they use to contact their peers. After completing the survey, participants were directed to a debriefing statement. It provided contact information if they had issues with participating in the study or further questions about the study.

## Measures

All measurements in this study were developed specifically for this study. Questions were created to measure the individual criterion and predictor variables in the context of the classroom. All scales used 7-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Every scale demonstrated acceptable reliability at .70 or greater without any questions deleted.

**Emotional Support.** A five-item scale was developed to assess emotional support received from peers in the classroom context. Items in this scale consisted of statements such as, “Group members would contact me if I missed a class a few days to check on me” or “If I were feeling down, it would not be unusual for classmates to try to make me feel better.” The scale was reliable,  $\alpha=.90$ , ( $M=4.25$ ,  $SD= 1.43$ ).

**Esteem Support.** A six-item scale measured esteem support received from peers in the classroom context. Statements included in this scale were, “Classmates have commented on good work I have done on a presentation or other assignment” or “Classmates have asked if they could study with me for the next exam because I did so well on the last one.” This scale was also reliable,  $\alpha=.83$  ( $M= 5.28$ ,  $SD= .90$ ).

**Informational Support.** A three-item scale assessed informational support received from peers in the classroom context. Items in this scale consisted of statements such as, “My classmates often provide more information when I am not understanding something in class” or “Classmates sometimes notify me of something important I missed in a class when I am ill.” The scale had acceptable reliability,  $\alpha=.75$  ( $M=5.23$ ,  $SD= 1.15$ ).

**Instrumental Support.** This six-item scale considered instrumental support received from peers in the classroom context. Items in this scale included statements such as, “I have classmates who would recommend me on LinkedIn or another site for one of my skills they observed” or “A classmate will often turn in an assignment for me when I can’t make it to class on the day it is due.” The scale was deemed reliable,  $\alpha=.79$  ( $M= 4.69$ ,  $SD= 1.06$ ).

**Network Support.** Network support was the least defined dimension of social support that Cutrona and Russell (1990) introduced. Cutrona and Russell talk about network support as how individuals feel integrated with other group members who share common interests and social interactions. Using Altman and Taylor’s (1973) social penetration model and Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, the scale further broke down network support into recognition and inclusion to understand the depth and breadth of the peer-to-peer interactions. Dividing network support into two distinct subscales permitted a better understanding of how network support influenced the criterion variables.

The subscale of recognition consisted of three items and was used to help measure how much participants felt recognized by their peers. Items in this scale included statements such as, “Current or past classmates often acknowledge me on campus when we pass by each other” or “Many classmates know my name and can identify some things about me.” The recognition subscale was reliable,  $\alpha=.77$  ( $M= 4.82$ ,  $SD= 1.33$ ). The second subscale of inclusion consisted of six items that set out to measure the level of inclusion a participant felt in class. Items in this scale included statements such as, “I feel respected by most of my classmates” or “When working in classroom groups on campus, I believe others take my contributions seriously.” This subscale was also found to be reliable,  $\alpha= .84$  ( $M= 5.08$ ,  $SD= 1.01$ ).

**Engagement.** A four-item scale measured the level in which a student was engaged in class. Items in this scale included statements such as, “I find myself applying things that I learned in my classes to things outside of my class” and “My classes engage me.” The scale was reliable,  $\alpha=.81$  ( $M= 5.11$ ,  $SD=.85$ ). This scale focused more on the interest and motivation of the student.

**Classroom Participation Behavior.** In contrast to engagement, the CPB scale was an assessment of ways student behaviors indicated participation in class. It was more focused on self-reports of specific behaviors they enacted. A four-item scale was developed to assess the level to which a student participated in class. Items in this scale included statements such as, “I give examples in class from my own experience” or “I ask for clarification in class when something is not clear.” This scale was found to be reliable,  $\alpha=.82$  ( $M=4.96$ ,  $SD= 1.16$ ). This scale stood in contrast to the next scale that focused on attitudes of attending class.

**Attitude Towards Attending Class.** A three-item scale was developed to assess students’ level of attitude towards attending class. Items in this scale included statements such as, “On most days, I look forward to going to class on campus” or “When I am in class, it usually puts me in a positive mood.” This scale was reliable,  $\alpha= .74$  ( $M= 5.11$ ,  $SD=1.16$ ). This scale was very different from the next scale measuring identification with the university.

**Identification with the Educational Institution.** This scale was more behaviorally oriented than the prior scale. A five-item scale assessed students’ level of identification with their educational institution. In this case, the items were tailored to Northern Illinois University (NIU). Items in this scale included statements such as “One of the first things I identify about

myself to a new person I meet is that I attend NIU” and “I feel proud to identify myself as an NIU student.” The scale was found to be reliable,  $\alpha=.82$  ( $M= 4.95$ ,  $SD=1.14$ ).

So, the four predictor variables all differed in their focus. Some were more attitudinally based, reflecting student’s perceived interest and motivation, and with others focusing more on concrete behaviors. This leads to the next step of analysis and results.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Preliminary Analysis

Results indicated that gender, age, ethnicity, and commuting status were not significant in the analyses of the main hypotheses but did have a few small indirect traces of influence on the variables (see Table 1). An underlying assumption was made that the criterion variables (engagement, CPB, attitude towards attending class, and identification with the university) would be rated positively in the student sample. Table 1 indicates the significant relationships among the predictor and criterion variables.

Table 1.

*Zero-Order Correlation Table*

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	-									
2	.64**	-								
3	.59**	.64**	-							
4	.69**	.75**	.72**	-						
5	.58**	.56**	.52**	.61**	-					
6	.68**	.80**	.64**	.74**	.74**	-				
7	.41**	.54**	.38**	.49**	.48**	.54**	-			
8	.38**	.47**	.36**	.44**	.53**	.50**	.57**	-		
9	.25**	.35**	.26**	.31**	.33**	.35**	.56**	.19**	-	
10	.40**	.50**	.45**	.47**	.53**	.35**	.57**	.33**	.48**	-

Note. \*\* $p < .001$ . (1) Emotional Support, (2) Esteem Support, (3) Informational Support, (4) Instrumental Support, (5) Recognition (Network Support), (6) Inclusion (Network Support), (7) Engagement, (8) Classroom Participation Behavior, (9) Attitudes Toward Attending Class, (10) Identification with the University



### Research Question

Further understanding what types of social support are in the classroom requires a holistic view of the results. The single research question focused on what types of social support were perceived as present within the classroom. When comparing the means of the different types of social support, the results indicated that there were essentially three different levels of reported social support types. It was found that esteem ( $M = 5.23$ ,  $SD = .95$ ) and informational support ( $M = 5.17$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) had moderately high reported mean use, which were significantly greater than the other four criterion variables. The moderately high reported mean use indicated that these were the first tier of perceived social support usage, whereas recognition ( $M = 4.82$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) and instrumental support ( $M = 4.70$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ) were significantly below group one variables. Both recognition and instrumental did not significantly differ from one another, which resulted in them being paired to create tier two. Both variables in tier two had significantly higher means than the final group in tier three.

The remaining types of support were inclusion ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = .87$ ) and emotional support ( $M = 4.24$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ). They were still slightly significantly above the neutral point of their scales but were significantly below the other two tiers ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, inclusion and emotional support make up the third tier of social support in the classroom. The results indicate that all types of social support were significantly above the neutral point of their scales in use according to their means, but three very distinct tiers resulted.

According to the previous linear regressions done for each individual criterion variable, there were two frequent types of support found within the sample: esteem and recognition. Of the two significant predictors, esteem support was the predictor of greater significance for

engagement and attitude towards attending class. On the other hand, recognition was the better predictor for CPB and identification with the university.

Further examination of these results was conducted by comparing the change of variance contributed that happens when changing order of the forced entry of the esteem and recognition variables. For the engagement criterion variable, esteem support outperformed the recognition variable when forced to enter second by 11% to 4%. The edge clearly goes to the esteem variable as the more potent predictor of engagement. Regarding the CPB criterion variable, the edge clearly goes again to the great predictive power of esteem over the recognition variable when forced to enter the equation second by a margin of 5% to 1% more additional variance contributed. However, for the attitude towards attending class variable, esteem only had a slight edge of 4% additional variance contributed over the 3% of recognition. The total variance contributed by both variables was only about 15% of the attitude towards attending class variable. Yet the situation was reversed with the criterion variable of identification with the university. Recognition contributed 9% more variance when it was forced to enter the equation second compared to 6% for the esteem variable. More consideration will be given in the discussion to these results and the significant zero-order correlations of all the predictor and criterion variables in this study.

### **Hypotheses Tests**

**Engagement.** The first hypothesis in the study predicted that all five types of social support (emotional, esteem, informational, instrumental, and network/recognition) would have positive relationships with engagement. The zero correlations of all types of social report were significant with engagement (see Table 1). The mean level of engagement was 5.1 ( $SD = 1.07$ ). It

was significantly greater than the 4.0 midpoint of the scale as established by the confidence interval formula. A multiple linear regression entering all forms of social support simultaneously was calculated to predict engagement based on participant's perceived emotional, esteem, informational, instrumental, and network (recognition/inclusion) support from peers. A significant multiple regression equation was found ( $F(6, 215) = 18.86, p < .001$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .35. The two significant predictors of engagement were esteem support,  $\beta = .31, t(215) = 3.02, p = .003$ , and recognition,  $\beta = .19, t(215) = 2.27, p = .025$ . Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported by the significant  $R^2$  of .35 with the significance of all forms of social support with engagement as seen in their zero-order correlations in Table 1. However, not all forms of social support contributed significant unique variance beyond esteem and recognition.

**Classroom Participation Behaviors.** The second hypothesis in the study predicted that all five types of social support (emotional, esteem, informational, instrumental and network (recognition/inclusion)) would have positive relationships with CPB. The mean level of CPB of 4.96 ( $SD = 1.16$ ) was significantly greater than the midpoint of the scale using the confidence interval formula. A multiple linear regression entering all forms of social support simultaneously was calculated to predict CPB based on their emotional, esteem, informational, instrumental and network (recognition/inclusion) support from peers. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(6, 215) = 17.14, p < .001$ ) with an  $R^2 = .32$ . The two significant predictors of CPB were recognition,  $\beta = .37, t(215) = 4.29, p = .000$ , and esteem,  $\beta = .24, t(215) = 2.26, p = .025$ . As with the variable of engagement, the two significant predictors of CPB were recognition and esteem, but in a reversed order of importance. As in the first hypothesis, not all forms of social support contributed significant unique variance beyond esteem and recognition. Again, significance of

support in the zero-order correlations was found for CPB and all forms of social support (Table 1). So, Hypothesis 2 was supported with a significant  $R^2$  of .32 for the two significant predictors of recognition and esteem.

**Attitude Towards Attending Class.** The third hypothesis in the study predicted that all five types of social support (emotional, esteem, informational, instrumental, and network [recognition/inclusion]) would have positive relationships with a student's attitude towards attending class. The mean level of attitude towards attending class was 4.64 ( $SD = 1.14$ ), which was significantly greater than the midpoint of the scale using the confidence interval formula. A multiple linear regression entering all forms of social support simultaneously was calculated to predict attitude towards attending class based on their emotional, esteem, informational, instrumental and network (recognition/inclusion) support from peers. A significant regression was found ( $F(6,215) = 6.37, p < .001$ ) with an  $R^2 = .15$ , yet none of the types of social support emerged as significant. This is an unusual finding given the zero-order correlations of all the types of social support were significant with attitude towards attending class.

An alternative method of multiple regression using the stepwise entry method was used given this unusual result. Esteem support and recognition were significant predictors of attitude towards attending class when using the stepwise method that did not include the remaining social support scales ( $F(2,219) = 19.04, p < .001$ ),  $p = .021$ . Esteem was the more potent predictor, with a  $\beta = .24, t(215) = 3.22, p = .001$ . Recognition was significant, with  $\beta = .19, t(215) = 2.55, p = .011$ . All six types of social support had significant zero-order correlations with attitudes toward attending class (Table 1). The difference of the two methods is that the stepwise procedure did not control for the effects of all other social support scales. This also slightly

changes the degrees of freedom of the regression equation. Considering all evidence, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

**Identification with the Educational Institution.** The fourth hypothesis in the study predicted that all five types of social support (emotional, esteem, informational, instrumental, and network [recognition/inclusion]) would have positive relationships with identification with the educational institution. In this case it was Northern Illinois University. The mean level of identification was 4.95 ( $SD=1.14$ ), which was significantly greater than the midpoint of the scale using the confidence interval formula. Again, the zero-order table showed all positive significant relationships between the types of support and identification with NIU (Table 1). A multiple linear regression entering all forms of social support simultaneously was calculated to predict identification with NIU based on their emotional, esteem, informational, instrumental and network (recognition/inclusion) support from peers. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(6,215) = 16.88, p < .001$ ) with an  $R^2 = .32$ . The two significant predictors of CPB were recognition,  $\beta = .33, t(215) = 3.92, p = .000$ , and esteem,  $\beta = .22, t(215) = 2.11, p = .036$ . Note the shift in the order of the importance of the predictors. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was supported with a significant  $R^2$  of .320.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The results indicated that esteem support and recognition were the two key predictors in multiple regression analyses of the four criterion variables (engagement, CPB, attitude towards attending class, and identification with the educational institution). Yet, at the level of zero-order correlations (see Table 1) all of the different types of social support had significant correlations with each of the criterion variables ( $p < .001$ ). When using the enter method of regression where all predictor variables were entered simultaneously, only esteem support and recognition provided enough unique variance to be considered significant predictors. This provides insight into their relationship and it will be further covered in the limitations of this study. Table 1 reveals zero-order correlations showing that all the different types of social support are positively correlated with each criterion variable. However, the multiple regression analyses indicated that only esteem support and recognition provided significant unique variance that was considered significant.

The unique variance provided by both recognition and esteem support occurred for all of the criterion variables. The unique variance provided by these two predictor variables indicated that they are the two most important types of peer social support. Esteem support was found to provide more unique variance through manipulating the order it was entered, with recognition for the criterion variables of engagement, CPB, and attitude towards attending class. Recognition provided more unique variance for the criterion variable of identification with the educational

institution. These findings of the regression analyses and the correlations in Table 1 provide insight that the high correlations between scales in Table 1 likely led to fewer predictor variables providing significant unique variance.

An example can be seen through the zero-order correlation of .69 between instrumental support and emotional support ( $p < .001$ ). This high correlation indicates that there may be overlap in the questions asked and which type of support they actually are. Similarly, scale-to-scale correlations were highly correlated. This raises the question of whether social support contains five dimensions on the same level or whether different conceptual levels of constructs exist. Prior research has varied in their dimensions of social support.

Social support has been studied in prior research on multiple occasions, but there are a few key factors to consider. First, consider Cutrona and Russell (1990). They provided five clear types of support. Yet they did not systematically validate the independence of these dimensions. The methodology section of the present study makes an argument for splitting network support into two separate subtopics; recognition and inclusion. This provided a deeper understanding of network support because depth of layers may occur within social support types. For example, within this study recognition would be labeled as the superficial level while inclusion would be a deeper level of network support. These different levels of social support may be further posited for the four other dimensions.

For example, esteem support may come in the form of a peer saying, “Good job,” or it can be more specific like, “Good job on completing your Algebra II class this semester.” The more specific a reassuring comment is made, the deeper the level of esteem support is given.

Overall, Cutrona and Russell provided a great conceptualization of the different identified types of social support as a basis from which to start, but it needs refinement when applied to the classroom context in contrast to the workplace.

A different perspective was taken by LaBelle and Johnson (2018; Johnson & LaBelle, 2016) who focused on peer-to-peer confirmation. LaBelle and Johnson (2018) talked about the idea of peer-to-peer confirmation as a transactional process by which students communicate that they endorse, recognize, and acknowledge their peers as valuable and significant individuals. They posit that part of confirmation involves both the content of a message and the relationship between interactants. Although the present study focuses on esteem support as a separate distinct category from recognition based upon Cutrona and Russell's (1990) typology, there is some conceptual overlap with LaBelle and Johnson (2018) regarding the concept of recognition of another peer. Yet, LaBelle and Johnson's (2018) scales do not match well with the five types of social support articulated by Cutrona and Russell.

LaBelle and Johnson (2016) departed from the extensive literature about different types of social support. Instead, they opted to use grounded theory to derive their confirmation categories. The differences of the approaches to peer social support may provide insight for further conceptual development. LaBelle and Johnson do not appear to clearly distinguish a very basic type of affirmation with a compliment like "Good job." Such a brief response has very little content behind it compared to a message that says, "You did a good job in the way you incorporated specific examples from class readings, shows you are growing as an individual." Therefore, what they label as confirmation and what this study identifies as esteem support provides a reason to consider that there are different levels of esteem support and affirmation.



Furthermore, in the LaBelle and Johnson (2018) article, all scales were found to be reliable, but there are some face validity issues of the scales when comparing the confirmation scales to the social support scales. Johnson and LaBelle (2016) define assistance as when one student asks for or provides help to another student. The issue arises of how it is possible to measure this very abstract concept. Previous research has provided clearer conceptualization of dimensions of social support (Albrecht & Goldsmith, 2003; Cobb, 1979; Cutrona & Russell, 1990). Consider, the specific situation of helping a buddy with a math problem. This would be categorized as a type of instrumental support due to it being a tangible assistance. Cutrona and Russell (1990) further expand that tangible assistance includes things such as opportunities or resources that help an individual. Receiving help from a classmate, would conceptually fall under instrumental support, but Johnson and LaBelle (2016) categorize it as a subtopic of assistance.

Furthermore, in their functional assistance examples, LaBelle & Johnson provide the following statements: “A student helped me with notes” or “I was absent on that day and it was an important handout. So that guy took an extra handout and gave it to me the next day.” Again, their label of confirmation has overlap with the dimensions of instrumental and informational social support. Even though their scale was found to be reliable, it is not clear what they were actually measuring.

This continues the issue of the number of social support dimensions truly providing the foundation of the model. Are there actually five or six dimensions underlying social support? Social support has been applied to different contexts, such as the workplace (Guan & So, 2016; Langford, Bowsher, Maloney, & Lillis, 1997) and now within the classroom. There is a common

thread that continues to occur though all of this research and that is that social support may have a small core of latent variables underlying it. Questions need to be answered about what the drivers of social support are. The high correlations in this study among the five social support dimensions identified by Cutrona and Russell open the possibility that one or more latent factors may be driving the dimensions.

For example, the development of differing levels of building esteem may further help us address the issue of latent factors behind social support. Developing layers to esteem support would allow for a better understanding on how the five different dimensions connect. Furthermore, it would provide insight into how depth in an interpersonal relationship through esteem support occurs. This aligns with Altman and Taylor's (1973) social penetration theory where there are layers to an interpersonal relationship. Moreover, it may help determine if esteem support is an outcome and what levels of the construct may be possible in a model. However, latency is a very complex issue.

Social support has been widely studied, but there are still many areas that must be clarified to advance its understanding. It is clear that social support can influence individuals in different types of relationships, but it appears that the employment context certainly differs in many ways from the university classroom context. It is possible that social support varies according to each unique context due to the duration of the relationships and what motivates individuals to act in that context. For example, within a workplace setting employees tend to work together a lot longer than students do in classroom groups. Also, the drivers in the workplace may be financial stability, connectedness, and advancement while in the classroom it could be acquiring certain competencies needed in future occupations and building network

connections. In any context, it seems evident that there are common support issues when things happen that are outside normal everyday occurrences that lead to stress. Future research could explore and provide a more comprehensive conceptual model of social support.

### **Implications for Instructors**

The findings from these results provide insight into peer-to-peer relationships within an undergraduate classroom, but they also have important implications for instructors as well. First, this study's results indicate that peers perceive they provide social support to other students. Higher education is going through drastic changes (Lechuga, 2016) marked by increases in tuition (Jones, 2010) and diversifying college educational opportunities that influence students to avoid the traditional academic experience (Rosenbaum, Stephan, & Rosenbaum, 2010). Therefore, it is essential for instructors to better understand the role of peer-to-peer social support to make a positive influence on student retention.

Second, this study provides key insights into what types of social support peers provide for the four criterion variables (engagement, CPB, attitude towards attending class and identification with the university). The two key predictors that contributed unique variance to these criterion variables were esteem support and recognition. Thus, it seems instructors would encourage esteem and recognition support among peers through a few different ways.

Instructors could provide activities that encourage students to get to know one another, such as icebreakers, group projects, or interdependent activities. Encouraging this interaction will help increase the likelihood that students will be able to recognize each other by name and even possibly engage in a deeper relationship. The opportunities for students to be able to recognize

each other may also affect whether or not a peer will provide a compliment to another student. Furthermore, an instructor can lead by example and incorporate both esteem support and recognition through their teaching styles. Easy ways by which to do this might be by learning every student's name and using it in conversation and during lecture. Creating that sense of recognition by the instructor could cause students to mirror the behavior. A prior study has found that providing in-depth feedback to students or groups could increase the likelihood of a positive class atmosphere (Kerssen-Griep, Trees, & Hess, 2008).

### **Implications for Peers**

This study provides implications to peers in the classroom who are looking to support classmates. The two key predictors that provided unique variance to the criterion variables were esteem support and recognition. Students can provide support to their peers if they understand what type to provide. When a peer provides support, he or she should focus on providing esteem and recognition support to increase the likelihood of their desired outcome.

Peers could provide insightful and deep feedback or comments about students' worth, which would elicit positive influence on the four criterion variables. If they wanted to further continue providing a fellow classmate with support, they could opt to recognize that person in passing or in the classroom. This sense of recognition will have a positive influence on a student's engagement, CPB, attitude towards attending class and identification with the university. This study has provided evidence that social support from peers is important and has important implications for student retention.

The idea of social support within a peer-to-peer relationship should continue to be studied to better understand how it may influence other variables. Instructional communication scholars

should continue to research peer relationships to help better understand the student-centered approach. Finally, this study supports the idea that peers can make a difference in a student's college experience and little things like remembering a name or providing a comment could make an influential difference.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

A limitation of this study is that the scales used were developed for the specific content and in a unique educational institution, Northern Illinois University. Just changing from a public university to a private university may change the outcomes. All of the scales used in the study had high reliability for this context, but future tests of these scales are needed to further validate the scales.

Furthermore, it will be important to understand perceived social support from other individuals in the classroom, such as the instructor or professor. Understanding what type of social support professors provide and how it influences students' behaviors is critical. Adapting the scale questions to adjust for professor support instead of peer or classmate support is possible and will help with future research on social support. Yet, some types of social support do not work with either instructor or the peer level. Understanding the relationships of peer and instructor social support will provide a more holistic view of the influence of social support in undergraduate classrooms.

A limitation of this study is that participants gave an overall view of social support they have received from peers. The participants' overall view of their college experience provided a holistic view of what types of social support students received. A future study should replicate

this study and provide a narrower time window in which to report. Similarly, a future study may want to dictate the difference between classes within a major for students compared to classes outside the major to determine if students receive equal, more, or less social support in their major.

Future research should investigate the social support desired by students at different times in their college career (i.e., Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior). New students who have left the homes of their families for the first time may have very different social support needs than seniors ready to graduate in a semester. Previously, the idea was posited that there may be layers to social support like the Altman and Taylor model (1973) about interpersonal relationships. These different levels of social support may provide different results that will most likely indicate other types of social support that could provide more unique variance than the two predictors of esteem and recognition in this study. The level of social support from peers may change the longer a student is part of a program. This change may indicate different types of social support students need as they progress in their program, allowing faculty and staff to better understand them.

Another limitation to this study was the number of different social support types tested. This study provided a more holistic view of social support in the classroom through the use of Cutrona and Russell's (1990) five dimensions. Each type of support originally was thought to be individualistic enough to measure separately. After further analysis, it became clear that only esteem support and recognition had enough unique variance to help predict the criterion variables. An issue can be seen in the zero-order correlation, where some of the scales were correlated to the .70 or above. This suggests that there is overlap in the types of social support, or

missing pieces that research has yet to discover. In order to better understand social support and the role confirmation may have in it, future research should focus on developing a model for what underlying drivers of social support might look like.

Finally, future research should consider whether Cutrona and Russell's (1990) five dimensions are adequate to get a better understanding of the holistic view of all types of social support across instructional communication. This study divided network support into recognition and inclusion, yet inclusion did not contribute unique variance in any of the four multiple regression analyses of the four criterion variables. Perhaps the class environment study did not provide an outcome where a great deal of inclusion was needed, like in an ongoing work environment. Empirical analyses of the data in this study raise many questions that have not been fully resolved. This provides the opportunity for future researchers to further explore different models of social support in the classroom.

### **Conclusion**

This study provided unique insight into how social support plays a role in peer-to-peer relationships in an undergraduate classroom setting. All the types of social support were significantly related to the criterion variables in the zero-order correlation table, but only esteem and recognition provide enough unique variance to be considered significant predictors of all the variables. This could stem from the issue that the predictor variables in the zero-order table were highly correlated and possible overlap may be occurring. Even though social support has been studied for decades, there has been a lack of research of a fully developed social support model with possible underlying factors. Therefore, it will be important to develop a richer social support model that may exist on more than one level. This will help determine what level

construct each type of social support is and provide the opportunity to determine if social support is an outcome and whether there are other drivers that push it. Furthermore, this model could provide a better understanding of how a complex public university may need to respond with more nuanced strategies to meet the very diverse needs now being seen on many campuses.



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APPENDIX

SPCCS SURVEY

## **Questionnaire Student Perceptions of Campus Classroom Support**

The following seven-point scale responses apply to the first 60 questions.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Somewhat Agree   Neutral   Somewhat Disagree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree  
Question does not Apply to Me

### **Attitude towards Attending Class**

1. On most days, I look forward to going to class on campus.
2. When I am in class, it usually puts me in a positive mood.
3. Attending classes makes my day seem brighter.
4. Going to on-campus classes gives my life structure that makes me more productive than if were just taking on-line courses.
5. If it were possible, I would take all my classes online.
6. When I am in class, I usually would rather be somewhere else.

### **Engagement**

7. I find myself applying things I learned in my classes to things outside of class.
8. What I learn in my classes often excites me.
9. I am very involved in my classes.
10. My classes engage me.

### **Identification with Educational Institution (NIU)**

11. I feel like I am part of the overall NIU community.
12. I feel proud to identify myself as an NIU student.
13. One of the first things I identify about myself to a new person I meet is I attend NIU.
14. I will likely become an active member of the NIU alumni association after I graduate.
15. If I were asked by someone to describe myself when I am away from campus, I would likely say that I attend NIU.

### **Classroom Participation Behaviors**

16. I ask my professor/instructor questions during class on a regular basis.
17. I answer questions during class regularly.
18. I give examples in class from my own experience.
19. I ask for clarification in class when something is not clear.

### **Emotional Support**

20. When I seem sad, classmates often encourage me.
21. If I missed class because of a death of someone close or my own illness, other students have provided emotional support.
22. If I were feeling down, it would not be unusual for classmates to try to make me feel better.
23. Group members would contact me if I missed a class a few days to check on me.
24. Group members provide emotional support for problematic events occurring in my life.



25. Group members express compassion when I miss a group meeting for an issue affecting me.

### **Informational Support**

26. My classmates often provide more information when I am not understanding something in class.
27. Classmates are often ready to share their notes if I miss a class.
28. Classmates sometimes notify me of something important I missed in a class when I am ill.
29. Group members will often contact me with information about a group project if I miss a group meeting.
30. Group members will provide important information on a group project if I don't understand it.
31. Group members usually will help me find information related to a team project.

### **Instrumental Support**

32. I have classmates who would recommend me on LinkedIn or another site for one of my skills they observed.
33. Some classmates have been willing to tutor me when I don't grasp how to do a part of a project.
34. A classmate will often turn in an assignment for me when I can't make it to class on the day it is due.
35. Group members would provide a positive reference of working with me if I asked.
36. Group members would usually help me with parts of a project that I cannot accomplish by myself
37. Group members would help me connect with others they know who could help me with a problem on campus.

### **Esteem Support**

38. Classmates have commented on good work I have done on a presentation or other assignment.
39. Classmates have asked if they could study with me for the next exam because I did so well on the last one.
40. Classmates have requested advice after I had success speaking at an event or some other success.
41. Group members have acknowledged my efforts during a group project.
42. Group members say that they want to work with me in future projects or classes.
43. Group members give supportive comments when I provide a good idea.

### **Network Support (Inclusion)**

44. Current or past classmates often acknowledge me on campus when we pass by each other.
45. I feel respected by most of my classmates.
46. Being in classroom creates a sense of belonging for me with other students.

47. Class members make me feel included.
48. When working in classroom groups on campus, I believe others take my contributions seriously.
49. Many classmates know my name and can identify some things about me.
50. Classroom group members provide opportunities to extend my network to others.
51. Previous group members sometimes attempt to work with me in future classes or group projects.
52. Classroom group members make me feel like I am a needed part of the group.

**Media Used:**

1. Classmates contact me through the following media (Check all that apply)
  - a. Email
  - b. Blackboard
  - c. Facebook
  - d. Twitter
  - e. Snapchat
  - f. Other: (Fill in the Blank)
2. Classmates provide support through the following media: (Check all that apply)
  - a. Email
  - b. Blackboard
  - c. Facebook
  - d. Twitter
  - e. Snapchat
  - f. Other: (Fill in the Blank)
3. Group members contact me through the following media: (Check all that apply)
  - a. Email
  - b. Blackboard
  - c. Facebook
  - d. Twitter
  - e. Snapchat
  - f. Other: (Fill in the Blank)
4. Group members provide support through the following media: (Check all that apply)
  - a. Email
  - b. Blackboard
  - c. Facebook
  - d. Twitter
  - e. Snapchat
  - f. Other: (Fill in the Blank)

**Demographic Items**

I identify myself as Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Other (includes nonbinary, transgender, no desire to affiliate, or psychological gender differing from physical gender) \_\_\_\_\_

I identify my ethnicity as Caucasian (White of European descent) \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

I identify as a commuter student. Yes No

If yes, what is the distance of your commute? Under one mile 1-15 miles 16-30 miles 31 + miles