

## Finding My Place; Experiences of Sense of Belonging in Lunchrooms During Clinical Placements

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This study explores how biomedical laboratory science (BLS) students at UCL University College (UCL) experience social groupings in lunchrooms during their clinical placements at Odense University Hospital (OUH) and how these interactions influence their sense of belonging. The study was designed by a mixed-method approach, including a survey and individual semi-structured interviews. The survey included students from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> semester, and 6 interviews were conducted with students from 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> semester. Empirical data has been interpreted using the concepts of humans' need for groups and concepts regarding humans' sense of belonging. It is evident that social dynamics and groupings within the lunchroom impact students. Being included and feeling like they belong influence students' perception of the department as well as the perception of their own performance. The experiences in the lunchroom could either enhance or diminish a student's learning.

**Keywords:** Mixed-method, Clinical placements, Sense of belonging, Social dynamics, Groupings

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## Introduction

Clinical placements (CP) are an essential part of the biomedical laboratory science (BLS) education program in Denmark. BLS students studying at UCL University College have five mandatory periods of CP throughout their three-and-a-half-year-long education. All placements are of varying lengths, ranging from three to twenty weeks of CP. Altogether, students participate in a total of fifty-one weeks of CP. The rest of the education is spent on campus with theoretical and practical teachings. Each CP can take place at one of seven different departments at Odense University Hospital (OUH). During the CP the students conduct clinical analyses according to the department's specialty and learn the department's theoretical basis.

Sense of belonging is a fundamental human emotional need and can be described as a unique and subjective experience that relates to the longing, desire, and need to have and maintain relationships with other people.<sup>1</sup> Maslow argues its importance, as humans aim to gain it and a lack of it can have dire consequences, such as loneliness and mental distress.<sup>2</sup> Achieving a sense of belonging is a fundamental human need affected by other people's actions and behaviors, which can either enhance or diminish it.<sup>1,3</sup> Earlier studies have shown that students' sense of belonging is one of the most important factors for students' ability to learn during CP.<sup>4-8</sup> Thus, the lack of sense of belonging is thereby correlated with weak learning experiences, and it is furthermore shown that a positive sense of belonging contributes to the students' feeling of successfulness in learning environments during CP.<sup>4,9</sup> Therefore, it is essential for students to experience successful CP, as it gives them the best opportunities to foster their knowledge and practical skills.

Getting to experience CP allows the students to become familiar with different specialties and different social groups. Furthermore, earlier studies indicate that a sense of belonging can be easier to achieve in

environments where there are fewer employees, as it becomes easier to communicate with each other, thus making it easier to create interpersonal relationships.<sup>10,11</sup>

Studies have shown that gaining interpersonal relationships with the staff is crucial to the development of students' sense of belonging.<sup>3,5,12</sup> Socialization with the staff often happens during breaks in their day-to-day work, and it can prove to be significant for students as it can establish a sense of belonging.<sup>3,5,12-14</sup> Alienation of students and not allowing them the opportunity to engage in informal socialization, on the other hand, increases students' feelings of exclusion from the department.<sup>5,12</sup>

As the study group experienced the lunchrooms and the shift from one lunchroom to the other, the shifts played a larger role for students than first anticipated. Students must relate to new people, new norms, and new habits in every department they are placed in. This emphasizes the interest in investigating the environments that students experience when entering the departments' respective lunchrooms.

Investigating this topic is particularly interesting regarding the BLS education, as existing studies and literature primarily focus on research conducted within the nursing profession. Thus, this study explores how BLS students at UCL experience the lunchrooms during their CP's at OUH, and how these experiences affect their sense of belonging during their CP's.

## Method

### Design

The study utilizes a mixed-method approach that includes a quantitative questionnaire followed by qualitative semi-structured individual interviews. The combination of data from quantitative and qualitative methods enables a deeper understanding of the social phenomena. This study explored the students' experiences in the lunchrooms during their CP's.

## **Participants and data collection**

### ***Sample and study population***

The study took place in the spring of 2023 and included BLS students from UCL and OUH. The BLS bachelor program in Denmark is seven semesters long. The program includes various lengths of theoretical terms at UCL, combined with CP's at OUH. By including students from both UCL and OUH, the study includes students who were currently in CP's and students who were not. Due to the first-semester students' lack of clinical experience, only students from the second semester to the seventh semester were eligible to participate in the questionnaire in this study. The questionnaire was distributed to 126 students. Inclusion criteria for the interviews required that students be in the fourth to seventh semester of the educational program. Six students who met the criteria volunteered for individual semi-structured interviews.

### ***Questionnaire***

The questionnaire was developed by using the online software SurveyXact and pre-tested before distribution. Four individuals selected from the study group's network answered the questionnaire and gave feedback on each question. The questionnaire was adjusted based on the feedback, which was mainly regarding comprehensibility. To increase the possibility of a significant response rate, the length of the questionnaire consisted of nineteen questions. Six demographic questions, nine yes/no questions, and four questions consisted of response options by a Likert scale of 1 to 5, representing: 1 *very high extent*, 2 *high extent*, 3 *some extent*, 4 *low extent*, and 5 *very low extent*. All the questions were mandatory for the students to answer.

Students were required to answer questions regarding experiences in the lunchrooms during their CP's. The questionnaire was distributed via the online learning management system ItsLearning. To encourage students to participate in the study, the students were addressed during their CP at UCL and OUH. A reminder was sent ten days after the first distribution to increase the response rate.

## **Interview**

An interview guide was developed that focused on the objective of the study and comprehensibility of the questions. Prior to the six interviews, the interview guide was tested by four individuals selected from the study group's network who gave their feedback on the comprehensibility of the questions. The interview guide was adjusted based on feedback. The questions in the guide consisted of open-ended questions. The 20 to 45-minute-long interviews were audio-recorded and fully transcribed. A character system was designed and used during the transcription that included abbreviations for the interviewer and co-interviewer. Additionally, the students were assigned a pseudonym consisting of an arbitrary letter. Finally, the atmosphere during the interview, the student's tone of voice, and pauses were noted.

## **Ethical considerations**

The study followed the ethical codes of the Helsinki Declaration of Volunteering. All participants were informed orally and in written format of their rights and the aim of the study. The students responses to the questionnaire were anonymized, and students from the interview were registered with an alias. Students agreed to participate by completing the questionnaire, while the students for the interview consented to participate before it was initiated. All the participants were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time.

## **Data analysis**

### ***Questionnaire***

The response rate was calculated, and data was cross tabulated in SurveyXact and evaluated with descriptive statistics using Microsoft Excel. The students based their answers on a department of their choice when completing the questionnaire. Departments were defined by the number of employees, minor departments equaled less than 100 employees and major departments equaled more than 100 employees. Data was then

stratified according to minor or major departments.

### Interviews

The transcribed data was thoroughly reviewed employing a phenomenological approach. Themes were identified by open coding and relevant statements categorized under the themes. Relevant quotes were identified and integrated into the themes.

## Results

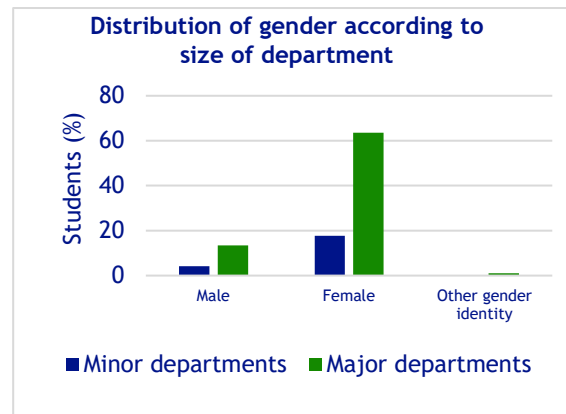
### Quantitative findings

#### Baseline characteristics

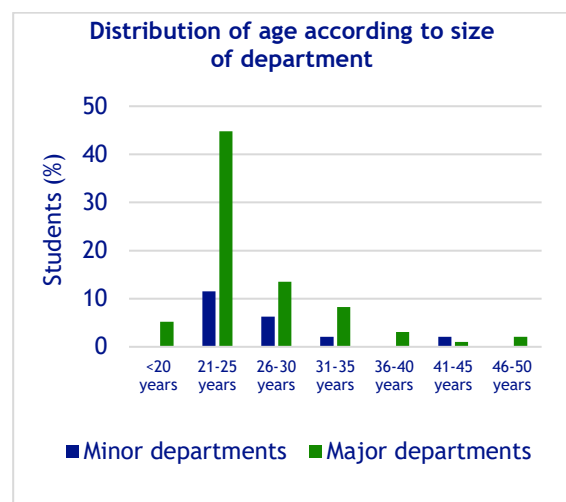
The response rate was 75% with 96 out of 126 students completing the questionnaire. The baseline characteristics of students are presented in Table 1. Figure 1, 2, 3 and 4 show that the baseline characteristics of the students did not differ remarkably for minor and major departments respectively.

**Table 1.** Distribution of data on gender, age, students' current semester at the time of answering, size of the department students based their response on and number of clinical placements at OUH.

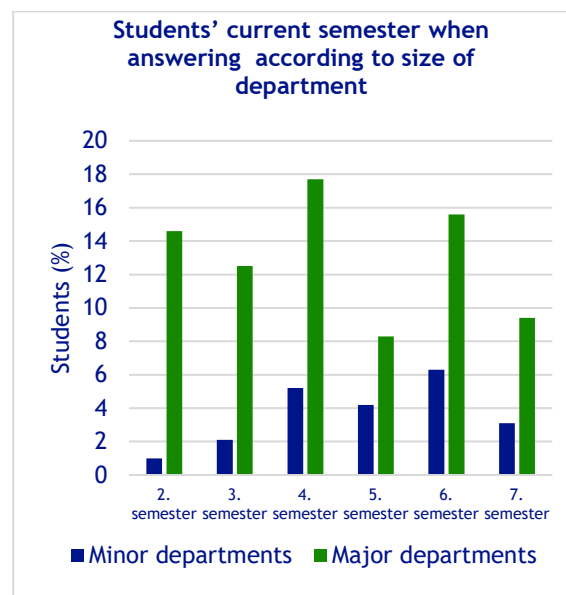
Gender (%)	
Male	17,7
Female	81,3
Other gender identity	1
Age (%)	
<20	5,2
21-25	56,3
26-30	19,8
31-35	10,4
36-40	3,1
41-45	3,1
46-50	2,1
Size of department the student based their response on (%)	
Minor	21,9
Major	78,1
Students' current semester when answering (%)	
2. semester	15,6
3. semester	14,6
4. semester	22,9
5. semester	12,5
6. semester	21,9
7. semester	12,5
Number of clinical placements at OUH (%)	
1	16,7
2	6,3
3	15,6
4	31,3
5	14,6
6	8,3
7	7,3



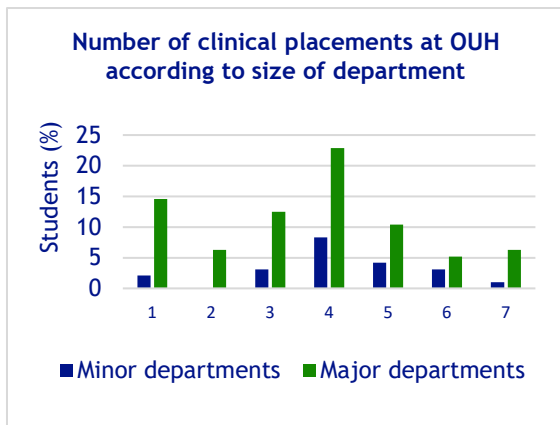
**Figure 1.** Distribution of gender in minor and major departments respectively



**Figure 2.** Distribution of age in minor and major departments respectively.



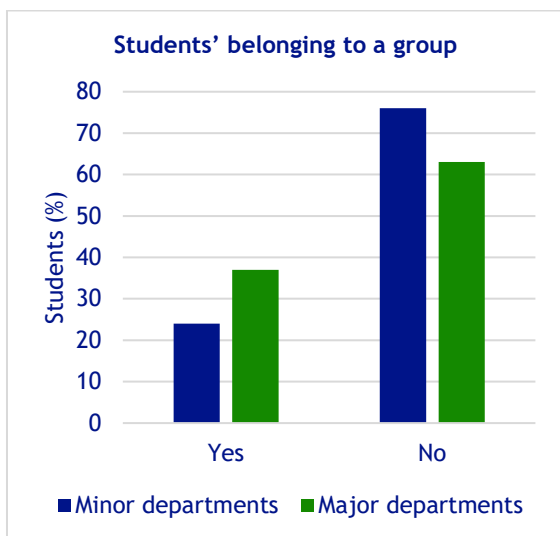
**Figure 3.** Distribution of students' semester when answering in minor and major departments respectively.



**Figure 4.** Distribution of students' number of clinical placements at OUH in minor and major departments respectively.

### Social grouping

Students' responses show that 68 (71%) encountered social grouping among the BLS in the lunchroom at the departments on which their responses were based. Out of 96 students, 37 (39%) experienced belonging to a group. Students' perceptions of belonging to a group varied based on their placement in minor or major departments (Figure 5).

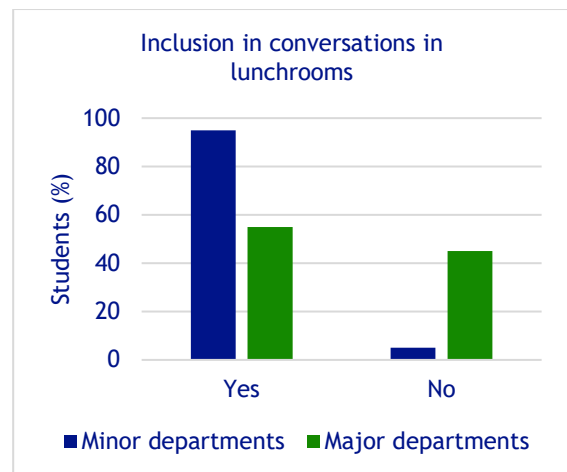


**Figure 5.** Comparison of students' belonging to a group in minor vs major departments.

### Feeling included in conversations

When asked about the feeling of being included in conversations in the lunchroom, 59 (61%) of the students answered they felt included to either a *very high extent*, *high extent*, or *some extent*. The feeling of being included in conversations in the lunchroom

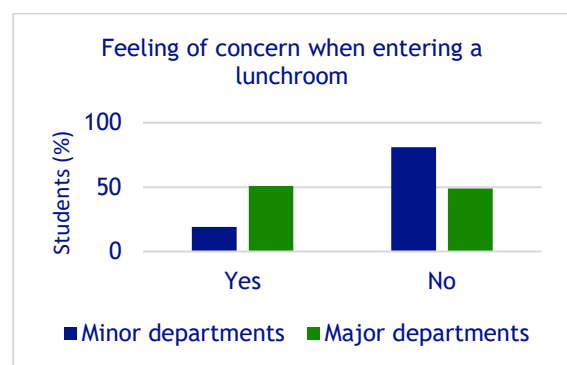
differed depending on whether students based their responses on a minor or major department (Figure 6). When asked whether the feeling of being included in conversations in the lunchroom mattered to them, 78 (81%) of all students answered yes.



**Figure 6.** Comparison of students' feeling of inclusion in conversations in minor vs major departments.

### Feelings of concern

Students were asked about feelings of concern when going to lunch, and 42 (44%) of the students answered they had occasional concerns. This outcome also differed depending on whether students based their responses on a minor or major department (Figure 7).

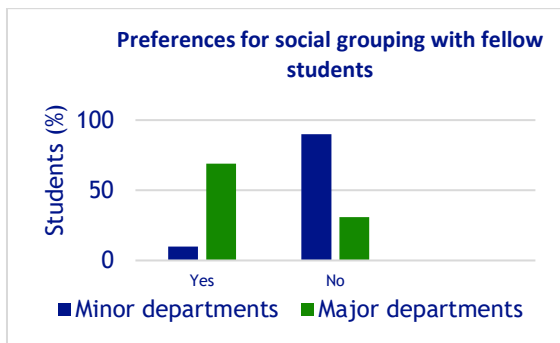


**Figure 7.** Comparison of students' feeling of concern in minor vs major departments.

### Preferences for social grouping at lunch areas

When asked about social preferences, 55 (57%) of the students expressed they would prefer to eat lunch with fellow students. This outcome also differed depending on whether the

students based their responses on a minor or major department (Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** Comparison of preferences for social grouping among students in minor vs major departments.

### Qualitative findings

Four overall themes emerged in the analysis of the interviews: grouping, inclusion, belonging, and concerns.

#### Grouping

During the clinical placements, students experienced grouping among the BLS in the lunchroom. They found it challenging to navigate the unspoken guidelines and complex social dynamics that governed these groupings, which often left the students feeling awkward and uncomfortable. Student A reported having an unpleasant experience when attempting to join a group of BLS in the lunchroom and was informed that the seat was reserved for another person. This left student A feeling unwelcome and excluded.

Some students expressed that having their fellow students around in the department could enhance their feeling of assurance during the clinical placements. However, they admitted that they also tended to form groupings among themselves. Student A explained that the desire to have fellow students around emerged from a need for social support during the CP.

However, student B expressed a different opinion. It was elaborated that, claiming that it did not solely depend on whether a student belonged to a group or not, but more about how the BLS made each individual student feel

welcome, regardless of being a part of a group at the department.

Student B: *“... whether they placed themselves randomly, with whomever they wanted, or in groups of their choice, wasn’t important to me. What mattered was that they made an effort to make me feel welcome, asked me questions, and showed some interest in me.” (Quote 1)*

Some students described that sitting with their fellow students during lunch break gave them a pause from the learning environment. They felt it was essential to engage with other students during the lunch break to mutually process their experiences. They clarified how the lunchroom often did not feel like a place for an actual break, but rather an environment where they needed to be engaged and present in the same manner as in the laboratory. Student C gained energy by spending time with fellow students. It was described how one was always actively participating as a student, even at lunch with the BLS, and how one constantly tried to do their best and give the best impression. It felt like a draining experience instead of an actual break and this was when lunch with fellow students became a much-needed break. It was a moment to relax and share experiences with other students, and a moment to gain energy for the rest of the day. Student A also sought out other students during CP’s and described this behavior as a natural reaction.

Student A: *“It’s probably because you need to have some kind of acquaintances. It’s incredibly awkward to sit in a gathering where you don’t know anyone, because then you don’t feel welcome. That’s what it’s all about. If you don’t know anyone, you seek out those you do know and usually that’s your fellow students, so you end up sitting with them.” (Quote 2)*

Seeking out fellow students can also be viewed as a response to not knowing anyone in the department, providing students with a way to find some familiarity in an unknown environment.

### **Inclusion**

The students believed that the feeling of being included depended on the BLS to show interest and include them in lunch break conversations. In general, these elements were highly valued by the students during their CP's. Students perceived it as inclusion when BLS's engaged in casual conversations regarding everyday life and personal subjects. It made them feel that the BLS's cared about them, which positively impacted their day. On the contrary, student D explained that not feeling included in the lunchroom, usually led to complete withdrawal from the social environment.

Student D: *"If I sense that the BLS I'm working with doesn't appreciate my presence, and I'm being ignored in the lunchroom, I would rather find a different place to spend my lunch break and call my dad and have a conversation with him, because he usually has his lunch break at the same time as me. After all, talking to him provides more companionship than sitting at a table in the lunchroom where I feel like an inconvenience."* (Quote 3)

The feeling of inclusion was not exclusively limited to the lunch breaks. The experiences throughout the day leading up to lunch influenced students' feelings of inclusion. However, several students knew they were also expected to actively participate in conversations during the lunch break, leading to an increased sense of feeling included, just as they expected the BLS's to do. Student E emphasized that expecting the BLS's to contribute to conversations without trying themselves did not make sense. The feeling of inclusion requires contributions from both BLS's and students.

However, some students described situations where the BLS's seemed uninterested and dismissed students' attempts to engage in lunch break conversations with brief and dismissive responses. Due to this behavior, student A felt excluded and overall unwelcome in the department. Likewise, student D described how the experience of not being included

in the conversations made it challenging to participate in overall conversations.

Student D: *"If I sensed that I was an inconvenience or that they [the BLS's] preferred me not to be there, I withdrew. I became very quiet and would keep myself in the background, so I didn't interrupt anyone. Then I would just wait until my workday was over and then leave the department."* (Quote 4)

Student D felt as though joining the ongoing conversations would be an interruption and eventually chose to withdraw from the lunchroom altogether. These feelings persisted throughout the day, impacting the possibilities for learning by creating hesitation to ask clarifying questions in the laboratory.

### **Belonging**

The lunchroom served as a major component in fostering the students' sense of belonging within the department. The students recognized that the lunchroom contained much more than a place to consume their meals. In fact, the lunchroom had the potential to influence their overall perception of the department. It was a space where the students evaluated their own sense of belonging and assessed their performance in their clinical placements. Student A expressed the association with the lunchroom and emphasized its importance within the department.

Student A: *"Overall, I have had a positive experience with the lunchroom. It provides a space where we can have private conversations during our lunch breaks, allowing us to form closer connections with each other. And that also affects how well you feel socially included within the department... The better experiences in the lunchroom, the more you feel like a part of the department."* (Quote 6)

The students wanted more than just to excel at the mandatory requirements for learning in their clinical placements. They desired a stronger social connection with the BLS's and a feeling of belonging to the department. Moreover, they wished to feel included and be seen as equals.

### **Worries and concerns**

The students expressed their concerns and mixed emotions about the lunchroom. They shared their experiences of trying to fit in and not being excluded from the groups of BLS. To accomplish this, student C described how one speculated on this issue when entering the lunchroom.

Student C: *“Actually I really don’t think that much about the lunch break before the break is about to start. It’s at that time, I use a bit of energy right before I enter the room to assess, if I should rush to grab my food and find someone I know to sit with, or if I should take my time getting my food and wait for the person I’m working with to finish so we can sit together. ...”* (Quote 7)

Entering the lunchroom ended up being quite challenging for some students as they didn’t possess the same understanding of the underlying social dynamics among the BLS’s during lunch breaks. Unlike the BLS’s, who seemed to possess an understanding of this process, the students found it to be taxing. Student D found entering the lunchroom to be a constant struggle. It was a preference to enter an empty lunchroom or to be the last person to enter the room because it made it easier to figure out where to sit. Student D worried about making the wrong choices in a crowded lunchroom and breaking the unspoken social guidelines and professional boundaries upheld by the BLS’s. It was a way of avoiding potentially awkward and uncomfortable situations with the BLS’s. It was a mindset that may have seemed necessary for some students to be successful in maneuvering through the lunchroom and getting closer to obtaining a sense of belonging.

## **Discussion**

### **Social grouping and inclusion**

In this study, the data indicates that students (n=68; 71%) encountered social grouping among the BLS in the lunchroom. Additionally, it was found that less than half of the students (n=37; 39%) experienced belonging to a group. The students’ responses, however, showed

that a majority (n=59; 61%) felt included in conversations in the lunchroom. These points were raised during the interviews where student A, as an example, experienced rejection when the student tried to join a group of BLS’s at lunch. In response, students formed their own groups to gain support during the clinical placements, as they highly valued socializing with their peers (n=55; 57%). In the interviews, it also became clear that sitting with fellow students allowed them to get a break from the learning environment and to process what they had experienced. Student A explained that a lack of prior knowledge of BLS was the main reason, and as a result, the student gravitated toward familiar students (Quote 2). The need to belong to a group is not unique for the students in this study since it has been documented that humans thrive better in groups and that it has a positive correlation between well-being and relationships with other people.<sup>2,15,16</sup> In a study by Berkman et al., it indicates that establishing social networks and relationships positively impacts overall well-being and mental health, emphasizing that humans thrive in groups.<sup>15</sup> Maslow also suggests that we thrive better in groups, as it is an innate urge for humans to form social bonds, as it can contribute to a sense of security as well as recognition from the groups.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in another study by Kleine et al., the importance of social integration is highlighted, where it suggests that strong workplace relationships contribute to the overall well-being of the employees.<sup>16</sup> Overall, these findings showcase the fundamental role of social connections in human well-being, and it clarifies the natural behavior of student A which is shown in the situation. Furthermore, achieving a sense of belonging does not only depend on belonging to a group as much as on how much each BLS made the students feel welcome, as student B expressed in the interviews (Quote 1). The social groupings did not matter as much, as the primary concern was whether the BLS would try to make the students feel welcome (Quote 1). These findings are in line with several other

studies, which emphasize the importance of including the students in work tasks, social groups, or informal conversation when wanting to enhance the student's capability to learn while in clinical placement.<sup>4,5,12,17-20</sup> The students are more motivated to engage in learning situations and activities about unspoken social rules or fitting in.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the students did recognize the importance of being as inclusive towards the BLS as they expected the BLS to be towards them. They were eager to make a good impression and, at the same time, show the BLS that they were interested in joining them, even during lunch. This is also supported by a study by Levett-Jones et al. who described that students seek out connectedness and genuinely want to develop a positive staff-student relationship, resulting in a more successful clinical placement for the students.<sup>12</sup> It is crucial for the students to feel included in creating these staff-student relationships. This aligns well with the questionnaire results, where 59; 61% of students reported feeling included in conversations in the lunchroom to a very high, high, or to some extent.

### **Worries, concerns, and belonging**

In this study the students (n=42; 44%) expressed concerns when going to lunch, however, the specific reason for their worries was not disclosed in the questionnaire. The interviews provide insight into the possible underlying reasons for their concerns, respectively. The concerns seemed to arise from the students not possessing the same understanding of the underlying social dynamics among the BLS's during lunch breaks. To avoid these concerns from occurring, student D preferred an empty lunchroom. The student did not have to worry about unwritten rules and the unspoken guidelines of the lunchroom. This is additionally supported by student C, who was aware of the energy one put into entering the lunchroom and assessing where to sit to keep away from overstepping the implicit customs (Quote 7). For some students, this created anxiety about being excluded by the BLS's, and the solution to this was either to sit with their

fellow students in their own group or to leave the lunchroom altogether. Student D gave an example of how interactions with the BLS's could have an impact, and to such an extent that it felt preferable to avoid the BLS's in the lunchroom altogether rather than sit with them (Quote 3). The student had the same approach during the workday as well if the student felt like an inconvenience to the BLS (Quote 4). Regardless of that as mentioned in a study by Levett-Jones et al., if the students do not feel like they have a sense of belonging during the clinical placement, it can diminish their motivation to learn. Therefore, could student D's approach, in response to not feeling a sense of belonging, potentially reduce the academic outcome of the placement if the student had this ongoing feeling around the BLS?<sup>5</sup>

The lunchroom appeared to be much more than just a room, but rather a place where the extent of a sense of belonging and social inclusion became clear. The students wanted to develop relationships with the BLS and be perceived as equals to the BLS staff. These desires could often be fostered in the lunchroom, as this area allows people to engage in informal conversation and focus on other things than the daily work and tasks in the laboratory. Inclusion in social engagements and casual conversations in the lunchroom made the students experience a greater sense of belonging, and positively affected their perception of the department overall, as was described by student A (Quote 6). These findings align with a study by Borrot et al., which concluded that a strong sense of belonging during clinical placements could essentially enhance the student's workplace satisfaction.<sup>17</sup> In the context of this study, workplace satisfaction can be interpreted as equivalent to clinical placement satisfaction.

### **Differences between minor and major departments**

Although the study indicates that students, who answered based on minor departments, felt less likely to belong to a group compared to students placed in major departments (n=5

vs. n=28; 24% vs. 37%) (Figure 5), an overwhelming majority felt more included in conversations at minor departments compared to major departments (n=20 vs. n=4; 95% vs 55%) (Figure 6). The study showed that compared to students at major departments, students at minor departments had less tendency to be concerned about going to lunch (n=38 vs. n=4; 51% vs. 19%) (Figure 7). Some students in the minor departments would rather eat lunch with fellow students, where in comparison, most students at major departments would rather eat lunch with their fellow students (n=3 vs. n=52; 10% vs. 69%) (Figure 8).

The findings suggest that minor departments foster more inclusive interactions, regardless of the students reporting a weaker sense of belonging to a group. The difference between the findings in minor and major departments could indicate that smaller departments are easier to socially navigate, as is reported in studies by Lampinen et al. and Radford et al., respectively.<sup>10,11</sup> This additionally supports that students may experience more frequent interactions with the BLS and staff when they are in the minor departments, therefore making the possibility of establishing interpersonal relationships easier, compared to the major departments. This is supported by Baumeister et al. whose study argues that the components of achieving belongingness consist of frequent positive interactions and stable long-term support.<sup>21</sup> This may explain why students in minor departments feel more included, as fewer employees can make interactions easier. Major departments may have fostered a greater sense of belonging due to more stable groups. In contrast, students in minor departments felt more included in conversations, supporting the idea that frequent positive interactions with diverse individuals enhance social connectedness without necessarily creating a deep sense of belonging. Furthermore, Baumeister et al. suggest that social interaction and inclusion do not always equal long-term emotional bonds, which are important for developing a sense of

belonging and could possibly explain the tendencies seen in the questionnaire.<sup>21</sup>

When going to lunch, only a small group of students from the minor departments appeared concerned, while students from the major departments expressed more concerns. As previously mentioned, interactions can be easier to engage in with fewer employees,<sup>10,11</sup> which may explain the difference. This could also be reflected in the way that the students from the major departments would rather eat with their fellow students compared to the staff. It highlights the need for student groups while in CP. Student A and C interviews indicated that their fellow students and the choice between sitting with them versus the staff was more related to gaining energy and social support and catching a break from the CP. The likelihood of having fellow students at the CP in major departments is higher than at the minor ones, which could also explain the increased need for contact with fellow students.

#### **Study strengths and limitations**

The response rate in the questionnaire indicates good external validity. As shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, 2, 3 and 4, the demographics of students at minor vs. major departments did not differ, which indicates that no selection bias in this study. It is, however, observed that significantly more students based their responses on major departments, which may be because there are generally more CP positions in larger departments. As a result, more students have had placements and experiences in major departments. Based on this, drawing conclusions from the data on minor departments should be interpreted with caution, as they are underrepresented. Since students were asked to choose which department to base their responses on in the questionnaire, this imbalance could not be avoided. Allowing students to select the department they want to focus on ensures that the choice is not limited by external influence but rather reflects the experience they wish to

highlight. The responses will always represent a snapshot of how students felt at the specific moment when they completed the questionnaire.

Additionally, the students' demographics align with the target group and are, therefore, representative of all BLS students at UCL and OUH. This is evident based on the participants, gender, age, and number of students at each semester at UCL during the study. Since the BLS education in Denmark is predominantly female, the study group did not take the demographics of gender into account. The results in this study are self-reported, which creates a possibility for information bias. Efforts were made to minimize this by pretesting the questionnaire to ensure the comprehensibility of the questions. In the meantime, the risk of information bias cannot be entirely excluded since the study relied on students past clinical experiences causing a risk of recall bias.<sup>22</sup>

Another factor to consider is that the restrictions because of the COVID-19 pandemic were experienced by nearly all participants. This could impact the students' perceptions of the work environment and potentially lead to a biased view of socialization with staff. However, this was not explicitly mentioned by the students.

## Conclusion

The social dynamics within the lunchroom during CP's have a significant impact on student's experiences of their CP's. Students' perception of social groupings, inclusion, feeling of belonging, and concerns can all impact

the perception of the department and of their own performance. These are factors that either enhance or diminish students' learning and well-being.

Social groupings can foster a sense of belonging or, conversely, contribute to feelings of exclusion among students. However, the sense of belonging does not necessarily depend on students being part of a group, but also on how each staff member includes them in informal conversations and overall if they contribute to making them feel welcome in the department. Inclusion impacts a students' learning ability positively, as it reduces concerns of social interactions in the lunchroom. The lunchroom provides social interaction, however, for students it still must remain a place where they are able to relax with fellow students and gain energy to continue the rest of the day.

Future considerations include evaluating initiatives for implementation across different departments, to enhance a stronger sense of belonging and improve the overall CP's for BLS students.

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