

Personal Tutor Guide to Social Identity Mapping (SIM¹)

What you will need

- The SIM Excel Workbook accessed [here](#).
- The SIM Student Guide accessed [here](#).
- Reviewed the supporting video on using the workbook, accessed [here](#).

Rationale

SIM exists to help address the problem of supporting students as they adjust to UK Higher Education (HE) and transition through the different stages of their degree programme.

This rationale and development of SIM has the following academic argument:

The acculturation of students to Higher Education (HE) and their integration into the social system of a university is their first step in developing academic skills and voice (Aoyama and Takahashi, 2020) and a primary contributor to successful transition to HE (Lochtie et al, 2018). The motivation of the new learner is intrinsically linked to their context and to potentially evolving contradictory identities (Hashimoto, 2002). Working in a new learning environment, one that has new challenges every academic year, can generate negative coping behaviours as students physically and cognitively distance themselves (Bjork et al, 2020). We want to reduce this behaviour and this was the starting point for the development of Social Identity Mapping (SIM).

The objective is to surface and support the development of a socially integrated learner, particularly the new international student (who may feel more inclined to discard unique aspects of themselves in seeking to 'fit' into a new learning environment) (Bjork et al, 2020) by instead valuing their social location, aided by a supportive personal tutor and activities (Lochtie et al, 2018).

Surfacing and promoting exposure to diversity leads to positive coping changes in development and cross- cultural adjustment such as information seeking, relationship building and positive thinking (Portes et al, 2007; Mesidor and Sly, 2016; Hashimoto, 2015; Haverila, Haverila and McClaughlin, 2020; Hua, Zhang, Coco, Zhao and Hou, 2020). Support to develop student

1 The focus upon exploring social identity as a means to understand student engagement follows from the work of Ng et al (2018) at Queensland University (see also their SIM app here: <http://www.socialidentitynetwork.com/sim-info/> (September 2020)) and Michigan University's Inclusive Teaching (see: <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/sample-activities/mapping-social-identity-timeline-activity/> (September 2020)). Ng et al (2018) - "How can you make friends if you don't know who you are?" A qualitative examination of international students' experience informed by the Social Identity Model of Identity Change. It is also derived from Vygotsky's(1978) emphasis upon the social in learning and the importance of lived experience, where a learner's social location is the cognitive co-ordination of organisations and communities valued, experienced and engaged with. Social cognitive theory helps understand arguably a fundamental perspective of human action that emphasises the role of the social environment in those actions (Schunk and DiBenedetto,2020) and that is the starting point for this work.

academic self-efficacy is an established approach to promoting engagement (Zimmerman, Bandura and Martinez-Pons, 1992; Lochtie et al, 2018) and SIM was designed as a resource to allow students to identify and academically value their social location (Lochtie et al, 2018).

SIM supports the development by students of resilience and autonomy (Walker, 2020) extending beyond induction into their programme and social experience. By enabling reflective analysis of the learner's social context, an ensuing dialogue between students and tutors can result in

effective coping and adjustment strategies, as students seek to engage more effectively in their new environment (Harmon-Jones, 1999; Cooper, 2019). It is known that Multiple Group Memberships (MGM) are sources of comfort, identity, security, and resilience (Sønderlund et al, 2017; Ng et al, 2018). Surfacing self-identified MGMs through a 'live' activity of an easy-to-use SIM resource can help students anticipate and understand changes in their social context (Lochtie et al, 2018).

How does SIM create an Identity Map?

SIM asks students to identify a number of aspects of groups that they view shape their social identity. This is undertaken through completing a number of worksheets in the SIM Excel workbook. The workbook similarly contains an opening Instruction worksheet which summarises their task and this is further supported by a student guide ([accessed here](#)).

Students are asked to identify those groups relevant to them (a minimum of seven, up to maximum of twenty) and then value their importance, how positive they feel towards those groups, confirm how much time they spend with those groups and then value how helpful those groups are to their engagement with their studies.

These questions all use the same scale of 1-10 (where 1 reflects the least important / least positive / least time / least helpful view of a given group, and 10 the most important / most positive / most time / most helpful view of a given group).

Data is collected via individual worksheets that are pre-populated by the identified groups from the first worksheet (Groups). Students move through the worksheets once they have completed each valuing/scoring activity, which leads to the creation of their SIM map.

Gathering this data supports the calculation of a multidimensional construct of group influence that Cruwys et al (2016) articulate as a stage in the development of an identity map. It is unique to the individual as to how importance, positivity, time and helpfulness are understood. Thus SIM is not a comparative nor absolute tool – it does not suggest there is a correct map to aim for, for each student.

A final data worksheet then gathers data about the perceived influence of the groups upon the engagement of the student with their learning environment. This is undertaken by presenting pairings of the groups that the students then rate by their influence (0 = no influence, 1 = limited influence and 2 = significant influence). This is based upon scenario planning methodologies.

The collated data is then combined to construct a final value that reflects the reported views of the student towards a given group's contribution in their social identity map.

The workbook computes the data as follows:

- The first three values (importance, time and positivity) are multiplied together. This new calculation is then scaled by helpfulness to create a *relevance value*. So a group scoring high

on the first three values and high on the helpful value has a high relevance to their social world when explored from the view of contribution to engagement in the student's studies.

However, a group might score high on the first three values but not be viewed as helpful in supporting engagement with the student's studies and therefore the contribution of this group to the student's social world in this context is reduced. Similarly, a group might be valued relatively low in the first three values but be viewed as helpful and which then creates a higher relevance value for that group.

- The relevance value is then scaled by taking its log value to create a relevance multiplier. This both helps computation and scaling of the final map but also reflects the view that we (as human beings) tend to think in ways that are open to influence of others in a non-proportionate manner (hence the log value reflects this non-linearity).

It is an approximation but a reasonable assumption.

- The influence data process is based on scenario planning methods, used to consider the scope of different potential outcome likelihoods. It is used here to provide some comparative scaling between groups – in other words to recognise how group influence can be enhanced by convergent views and actions of others that have been identified and valued.

The influence data is multiplied by the relevance multiplier for each group.

For example:

Group = Parents (with a relevance multiplier of 1.3)

Group = Grandparents (with a relevance multiplier of 1.5)

Are viewed as possessing a collective influence on a student of '2' (significant) – which creates the final influence value of 3.9 (ie $2 \times 1.5 \times 1.3$)

- To determine the final strength of a relationship between two identified groups, the computed influence data is scaled again so that any influence data from the preceding step is scaled to values of:

2 if the multiplied influence data is >4

1 if the multiplied influence data is between 2 and 4

0 if the multiplied influence data is <2

- The sensitivity can be adjusted to reflect different views about the identity map by you on the 'Your Map' worksheet (the default is set at 4 as in the example above, but students can change this).
- The final map is then drawn to reflect the number of groups identified in a circle and lines drawn between the groups to reflect the influence of those groups accounting for how important, how much time, how positive the student feels and how helpful, a given group is.

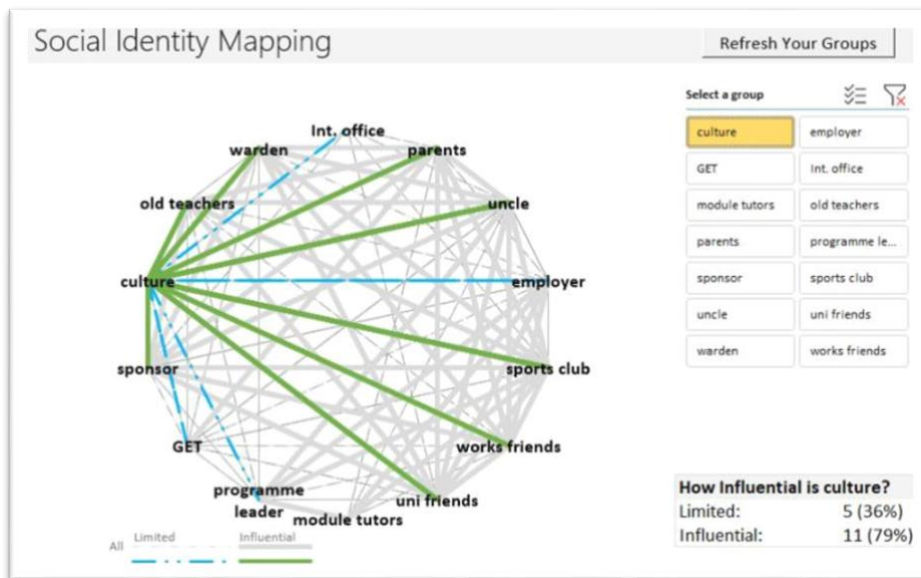
Excel computes this as an x-y plot.

Supporting Students and exploring an Identity Map

Your input as a Personal Tutor is to outline the nature of SIM through the materials available [hosted online](#) by LALT and support students in how they complete the analysis.

Students may or may not wish to discuss with you the outcomes of their map, but it can be used by them to support their action planning towards the end of each academic year.

A SIM plot/map looks like this:



The plot is interactive and visualizes how they feel about what is influencing and shaping their identity as an output of their engagement with their studies. More influential labels are shown in green, with less influential ones in blue. The whole grey map identifies how groups have been valued.

Students can change the sensitivity of their map to highlight particularly strong or weak group relationships that they have identified as shaping their engagement. The default value is 4 and the range is (3-10). The higher the value, the lower the sensitivity so only stronger group influences are plotted. Once constructed students can select which group within their map, they wish to view to see the significance of connections. They can also refresh their map if they have chosen to amend any of their data group labels.

Similarly, if students want to delete all their data and start again this can be actioned on the Groups tab via the Clear Groups button.

Identify your groups		Instructions
Group 1	Parents	<p>In this worksheet - please enter the name of those groups you feel are part of your social world. Please review the student support guide for examples of groups.</p> <p>Please enter each group name in the green cell. One group name per green cell, starting at Group 1 and working down the listing sequentially. You must choose at least seven groups, but cannot choose more than twenty groups.</p> <p>Do not enter any text into blank group names.</p> <p>Press this button to reset your group names and data if you want to delete all the data:</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 10px 0;"> <input type="button" value="Clear Groups"/> </div> <p style="text-align: right;">Now Goto Worksheet 2 - Importance</p> <div style="text-align: right;"> <input type="button" value="NEXT"/> </div>
Group 2	Grandparents	
Group 3	Siblings	
Group 4	Close Friends	
Group 5	Associates	
Group 6	Lecturers	
Group 7	Uni Classmates	
Group 8	Sports buddies	
Group 9	Social buddies	
Group 10	Social Media	
Group 11		
Group 12		
Group 13		
Group 14		
Group 15		
Group 16		
Group 17		
Group 18		
Group 19		
Group 20		

Using the map above, the learner has identified culture as an important influence upon their views and values in their studies. This has strong compatibility relationships with 7 other identified group influences and weak inter-group relationships with 4 other group influences. Notably one strong relationship was with their programme leader but not their module tutors. One observation might be from this that they feel their module tutors are struggling to understand their culture at University (or vice versa) in their classes. This focus might then need further reflection and consideration.

What can be learned from this?

Students using the pilot SIM last academic year reported that they viewed the activity as helpful, pushing them to consider their social world more explicitly, who they were within it and their changing learning context.

A common comment was that SIM offered a structured tool enabling reflection upon social location, facilitating an awareness of change and transition. SIM aids student transition in surfacing issues, such as lost relationships, new relationships, cultural time demands, and motivational sources; it helps students articulate the discord between 'hidden' aspects of their engagement and their social learning environment. SIM also encourages tutees to engage individually with personal tutors, recognising the value of difficult conversations, where tutors support open dialogue, resulting in appropriate structured student support and action plans.

Thinking about difficult conversations

SIM output discussions may give rise to Personal Tutors engaging in difficult conversations. We have found these can be approached with a sense of exploration and curiosity. Where difficult SIM outputs are shared, personal tutors can:

- Keep dialogue open – listen and reassure the issue identified through the SIM output is relevant. It is helpful to avoid sweeping generalised statements in discussions. Personal tutors may suggest for example “How can we have this conversation in a way that is positive and helpful?”
- Deal with issues raised with respect both in tone, language and words.
- Be clear about personal tutoring goals with the learner (to discuss, to explore, to consider) – and that this can be undertaken until there is an agreed resolution.
- Listen, suggest, engage are more useful than countering in such discussions.
- Recognise that not all issues can be resolved or need to be/can be in a short space of time or in a given meeting. Waiting and reflecting further can help to also progress difficult issues.
- Guide the learner to think about moving forward and what they want from the future and their situational position with regards to those they value and/or have influence upon their engagement and studies – how would that look in a social map?
- Recap for the learner on the scope of other internal University supports and external community support services.

References and Further Reading

*Excel analysis adapted from coding at chandoo.org

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