



Creating a Campus Culture of *Belonging*

Programs, Initiatives, Training and Strategies

**PAPERCLIP
COMMUNICATIONS**

www.paper-clip.com • info@paper-clip.com

Copyright 2023

Written by the PaperClip Communications Staff

Edited by Julie Phillips

Design and Layout by Amy Oliveira

Reproduced or retransmitted under license by
PaperClip Communications.

PaperClip Communications does NOT provide legal advice, and this document should be considered general information only. The answers to legal questions generally hinge upon the specific facts and circumstances. Individuals with specific questions should contact that institution's legal counsel.



Creating a Culture of Belonging

Planting the Seeds of Belonging and Connection

It's one thing to tell students, "You belong here." Yet, you truly need to *show them* through your actions for your outreach efforts to be effective.

So, what are some things you can do? Shannon Brady, an assistant professor of psychology at Wake Forest University (NC), suggested...

- Help students face challenges and setbacks
- Help them better understand things like course grading
- Have trustworthy mentors and faculty available
- Connect students with other students

You can plant the seeds of belonging and connection through other simple actions such as...

- Using community-oriented language like "we" and "us" to include everyone
- Explaining campus lingo so newcomers aren't left in the dark
- Asking students about their interests and then making connections to related organizations, academic fields and other opportunities
- Using eye contact, smiling and giving people your *full* attention

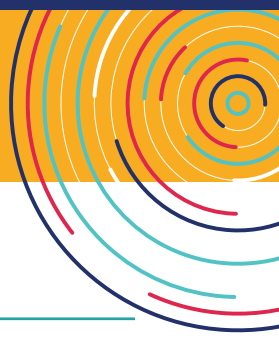
"We find experimentally trying to help people foster a sense of belonging can improve a number of positive outcomes. We have found benefits on academic outcomes, benefits on health outcomes, benefits on engagement types of outcomes."

- Shannon Brady, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Wake Forest University (NC)

Belonging Matters

Researchers have found that, at four-year institutions, an enhanced sense of belonging among students leads to higher rates of personal and academic success later in their college experiences, reported *Inside Higher Ed*. Those students reporting a higher sense of belonging at the end of their first year seemed to do better than their peers. The researchers also found that those students seemed to be persisting more in their second and third years, as well as reporting fewer mental health issues. Belonging definitely matters!

Source: *Inside Higher Ed*, 1/2/20



Creating a Culture of Belonging

Are We Putting Too Much Responsibility on Students to ‘Find Their Place’?

In her book, *College Belonging: How First-Year and First-Generation Students Navigate Campus Life*, Lisa M. Nunn, director of the Center for Educational Excellence at the University of San Diego (CA) and a professor of sociology, brings up some interesting points.

#1: Higher education tends to place much of the responsibility to seek and attain belonging on students, rather than on the campus community.

“Yes, we do have to make some effort to join new communities or orgs,” Nunn wrote for *Inside Higher Ed*. “We can’t just shut ourselves up in our dorms rooms and never talk to anyone. But also, I can’t just walk up to a new group I want to be a part of, knock on the door, and demand belonging. It doesn’t work like that.”

#2: Belonging can only be achieved when the group or community grants an incoming student a sense of being “valued and important,” Nunn said.

#3: Campus cultures that call for new students to “get out there and find your place” put the burden on students, including the burden of failure if they don’t find their place of belonging on campus, she emphasized.

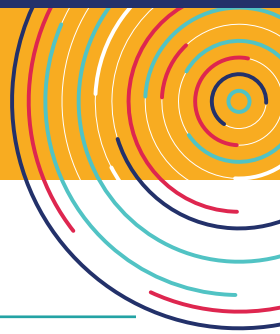
#4: From the amenities offered on campus to the events hosted, social climate and classroom environment — especially for first-generation and students of color — it can greatly impact students’ overall sense of belonging and, possibly, trigger imposter syndrome.

“They didn’t see much of their heritage reflected in campus events or curriculum. They didn’t see many of their favorite foods in the campus markets or their favorite music playing in the rec center or their favorite fashions in the bookstore,” Nunn described.

“We need to communicate to students through our everyday interactions that they are important. The university exists because students exist.”

– Lisa M. Nunn, Director of the Center for Educational Excellence at the University of San Diego (CA), Professor of Sociology and Author of *College Belonging: How First-Year and First-Generation Students Navigate*

Source: *The Feed* at Georgetown University, 2/26/21



Programs and Initiatives

Tapping Into Placemaking to Enhance Belonging at Delta College

At Delta College (MI), they've been engaging in an intentional placemaking initiative to provide welcoming spaces that make students and visitors feel connected to the institution. It's designed to enhance a sense of belonging.

At a Board of Trustees meeting focused on the placemaking initiative, Dee Dee Wacksman, a Foundation board member and former trustee, explained that the placemaking committee developed ideas about what Delta's buildings should be communicating, including: imagination, welcoming, innovation, technology, attractive, connected and belonging. This was after asking students what they thought of Delta's interior design and getting answers that ranged from "beautiful brick but boring" to "old-fashioned" to "good bones, but looks like it was founded in 1961."

Graphics, Signage, Messaging and Murals

Through Delta's placemaking efforts to create more welcoming environments centered around belonging, interactive spaces and colorful murals were installed throughout main campus hallways. They include...

- Digital signage
- Ambient learning murals
- Exterior entry graphics
- Career pathways and programs – such as art, history, health, trades and business – highlighted throughout the building
- A color palette which matches the college's branding

For instance, in one hallway, the words "THINK BIG" are several feet high, designed to encourage students to take selfies. The words then lead to a large graphic of a graduate with the words "Success is right around..." and then another graphic when you turn the corner that says "...the corner. Start today."

Students pursuing different academic programs are highlighted on wall-size murals with captions such as "Create a masterpiece. Capture a moment" featuring a man with a camera. There's one that says, "Sing your heart out" with a woman singing and then an interactive wood mural on the adjacent wall that says, "Knock on wood."

You can check out photos of Delta College's efforts at: <https://bit.ly/3ZNvvjM>.

"National studies and our own research showed us that students who have a sense of belonging at their college demonstrate more intention and motivation to persist past their first year. It's in their best interest to do all we can to make Delta a place where they feel they belong – from their first visit right on through to graduation."

– Dr. Jean Goodnow,
President of Delta College

Sources: Delta College Board of Trustees Minutes, 4/9/19; Delta College News, 1/14/20



Programs and Initiatives

WIU Vending Machine Provides Hair Care Products for Underrepresented Students

A vending machine offering hair care products for underrepresented students is now available in Western Illinois University's Multicultural Center. It provides bonnets, durags, hair oils, styling gel and edge control, all available by using cash or a credit card. And it provides a sense of belonging.

If this vending machine pilot program is successful, another machine will be installed on campus, according to officials.

"It is our hope that we can establish another vending machine on the Macomb campus, as well as look for other types of machines and products that appeal to our diverse University community," WIU executive director of Auxiliary Services and Risk Management Joe Roselieb told University News. "In addition, in this phase of the program, we have worked closely with Rosalind Lewis of RND Vending, who is a small business owner. This is a great collaboration and we are excited to see it offered to our students."

"The awareness of, and visible support for, different needs is important. We are certain the students appreciate and value the added options and convenience this brings."

- Carl Ervin, WIU's Acting Director of the Multicultural Center and Interim Director of Justice, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Source: Western Illinois University News, 10/31/22



Programs and Initiatives

Supporting Student Parents and Families at Portland State University

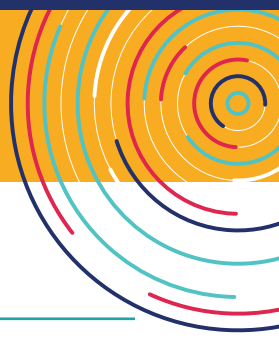
Students aren't the only ones being welcomed at Portland State University (OR). Children and families are also being told, through words and campus services, that they belong.

The university's Services for Students with Children provides resources, support, services and community for this student population. Inside the Resource Center for Students with Children – located in the Student Union – initiatives and services include...

- **Family Events.** The Resource Center generally hosts 5 to 10 events each term, from a Parent Social Hour geared toward adults to others intended for the entire family. These events give student parents an opportunity to network and socialize with other families.
- **Individual Consultations.** Students can meet with consultants if they need support with parenting, personal and family issues, child development, and accessing resources both on and off-campus.
- **A Family Resource Room.** This room comes equipped with a study space, computer station, lounge area, refreshment station with microwave and an area for children to play with plenty of toys. Games and activities are also available for older children, plus diapers, formula and baby food are available for younger children free of charge.
- **Clothes Closet.** Student parents can stop by to find free clothes in all styles and sizes for their rapidly growing kids.
- **Fun Kits.** These activity backpacks filled with age-appropriate toys, books and games can be checked out to keep kids occupied while their parents attend study groups, meetings or appointments.
- **New Baby Starter Packs.** PSU students expecting a baby or recently becoming a parent can receive a free diaper bag filled with newborn essentials.
- **Lactation Supplies.** Students can find pumping kits, diapers, wipes and breast pads to use in any of the university's 15 lactation spaces. Plus, those needing to make an appointment with a lactation specialist can reach out via email.

"It would be harder at a traditional university because there are sort of expectations like that after school you can just go home and do this project and tomorrow have it ready. Here the professors understand that for a lot of students that's not the case so they're structuring things so there's a little flexibility. They're not assuming that you're going straight home. They're assuming you might have to work after this."

- Jade Souza, a 36-year-old divorced mother of three as she got close to getting her bachelor's degree at Portland State University



Programs and Initiatives

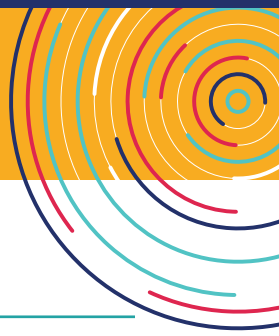
Supporting Student Parents and Families at Portland State University *(continued)*

Elsewhere on campus, other services are available to parenting students, including...

- **Family Rooms.** Two secure family spaces each equipped with a study space, plus an area for children to play with the provided toys, are available to reserve.
- **Lactation Spaces.** PSU currently has 15 lactation rooms available, all listed on an interactive Google map. Student parents can fill out a form to receive a universal access code to these spaces.
- **On Campus Childcare.** A full-day, year-round child development center; a full-day and flexible hours children's center; a flexible by the hour day care for infants and toddlers; and a full-day, flexible by the hour day care for children 6 weeks through 2 years old are all available on campus.
- **Funding Assistance.** Various on and off campus resources are available to help eligible student parents pay for childcare.
- **Student Sitter Portal.** PSU students interested in babysitting can be listed on this portal. Student parents can then negotiate directly with these sitters to arrange rates, job responsibilities, house rules, caregiving preferences and more.

At Portland State University (OR), 24% of the student body are parents, with 54% of them as single parents and 75% who are women.

Learn more about the programs at: www.pdx.edu/students-with-children/.



Training Resources

Student Voices TRAINING ACTIVITY

Listening to student voices is a key way to understand what belonging means to them – and how you might help. This activity focuses on real comments from Nazareth College (NY) students.

- Put each comment (see box) on a different piece of paper and post them all throughout your training space.
- Ask participants to stand by one of those papers — it doesn't matter which one.
- Have volunteers read each one out loud.
- Next, encourage participants to mill around your training space, reading the comments and jotting their thoughts about how they can support each statement of belonging. Encourage them to consider retention and persistence in the mix when they're responding.
- When folks have had a chance to write on several of the sheets, have them all come back to the large group. Ask volunteers to read the recommendations from each paper.
- Discuss how belonging is interconnected with issues such as inclusion, retention, persistence and well-being, and how participants can put some of the suggestions into action.

Note: You may have statements of belonging from your own students to use rather than those boxed off here from Nazareth College students. If so, by all means use them!

What Belonging Means...

When students at Nazareth College (NY) were asked what belonging means to them, they responded...

"To be at home"

"That your voice matters"

"It also gives you power to bring other people into the circle"

"I am accepted, I am comfortable with myself and people are okay with that"

"Being comfortable, being secure where you are"

"We should always feel like we are a person, not a thing or a number or anything less than that"

"Recognizing each person as having value and accepting them in a way that, together, we can make the world a better place despite the division"

"Finding that special thing in every person"

"Finding somewhere where... you can be free to be yourself, you can be accepted, you're not judged for who you are"

"I would just like someone to acknowledge me, know that I exist and I'm not a stereotype"

"Know that I exist and I'm going through it too"

Source: Community and Belonging at Nazareth College, <https://www2.naz.edu/campus-life/diversity-belonging>