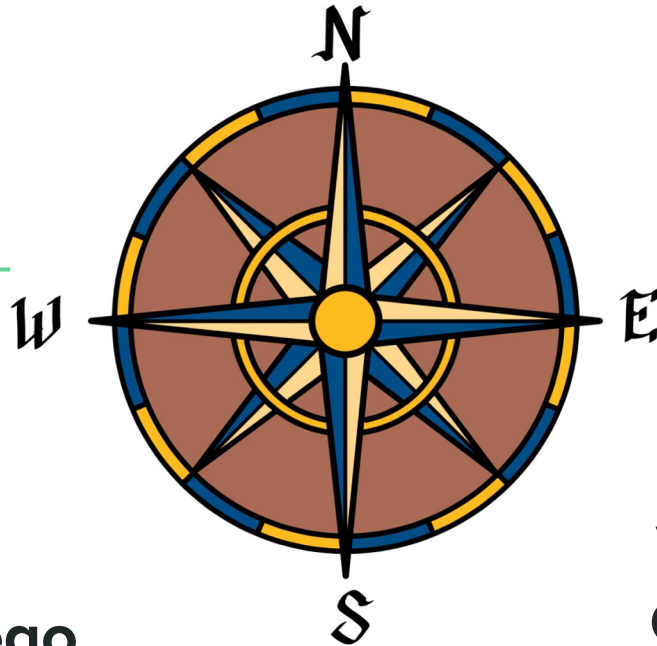


College Belonging

for students *and all of us*



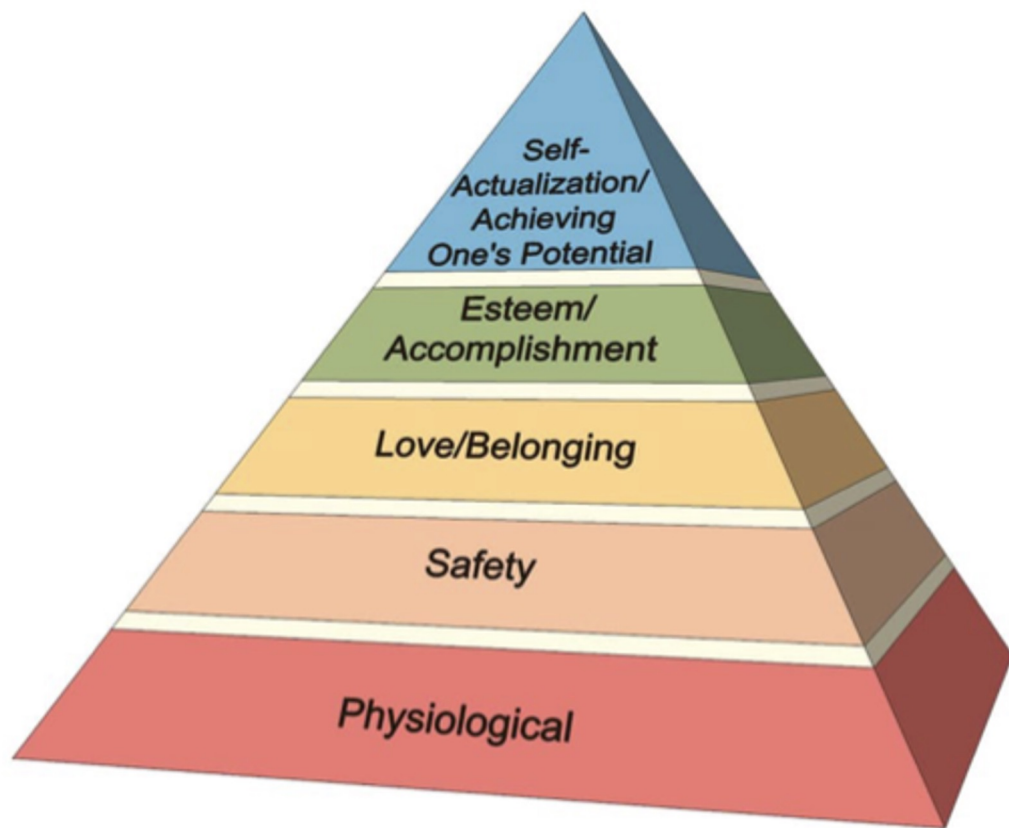
Lisa M. Nunn
University of San Diego

Park University
Virtual Academic
Conference 2024

Belonging

- Belonging is a fundamental human need.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Belonging for College Students

- Improves retention.
- Improves persistence to graduation.
- Enhances overall wellbeing.

How Belonging Works



Healthy communities **integrate**
and **regulate** their members.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)

How Belonging Works

Integration:

- Each person feels needed by the larger community. They feel valued.
- Each person feels socially and emotionally connected to others. They feel that they matter.

How Belonging Works

(Moral) Regulation:

- Each person clearly understands what is expected of them.
- Members hold each other accountable to follow rules and uphold social norms.
- Each person believes in the “rightness” and “goodness” of the rules and norms and thus freely submits to them.

How Belonging Works

When individuals are **insufficiently integrated** they feel:

- Alone, isolated, adrift, not connected to others.
- Unwanted, irrelevant to the community.
- That the traits, skills and talents they bring are unwelcome or unvalued.
- That that they don't matter.

How Belonging Works

When individuals are **insufficiently regulated** they feel:

- Lack of social direction. Unsure what is expected.
- Moral confusion. Community has not convinced them of the “rightness” of the norms.
- Lost. Not sure where they fit in to the community.
- Disappointed and frustrated. Desire for things impossible to have in the community.

Belonging Is a Gift

Belonging can not be garnered by an individual person.

It must be given by the group.

Belonging means...

- Feeling seen.
- Feeling valued.
- Feeling like we would be missed if we didn't show up.
- Feeling that we matter.

Belonging means...

No judgement.

You feel safe.

Just feeling comfortable walking around campus.

Feeling at home.

Being comfortable.

That my friends really truly want me around.

Not having to worry.

Being part of a community, in a mutual relationship.

Feeling like I'm supposed to be here.

This is my right place.

College Belonging

Social Belonging

- Finding friendships; getting involved in clubs, organizations, sports teams; feeling wanted and valued by others.

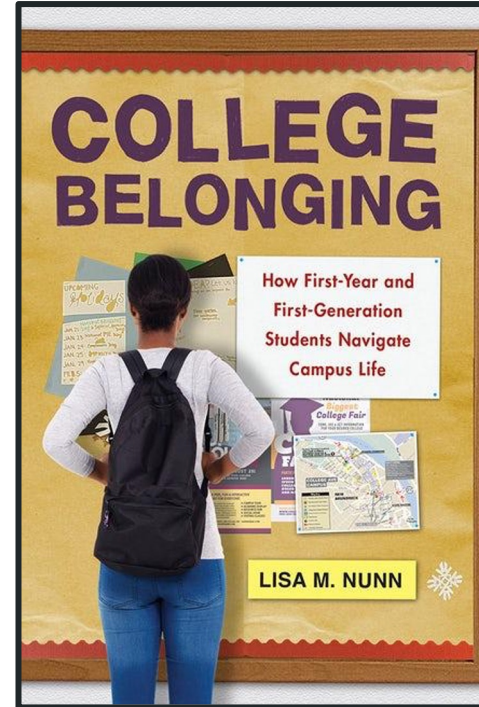
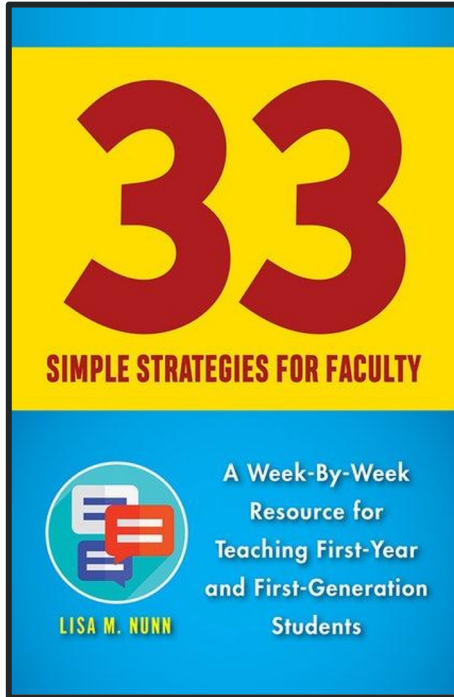
Campus Community Belonging

- Feeling at home; feeling valued; validated and comfortable in campus spaces; a sense of ease.

Academic Belonging

- Doing well in classes; feeling competent; comfortable studying with peers; confident to raise your hand in class or talk to a professor one-on-one.

Research Study



Research Study

Followed 67 incoming first-year undergraduate students over their first two years in college.

- \cong 50% of random sample first-generation
- 186 total interviews.
- Incoming 2015 cohort

Compared organizational cultures of two campuses

- Private University
- Public University

FIND
YOUR
PLACE

IT'S TIME TO

*get Out
There*



GET OUT THERE



FIND *your*

Cultivating Belonging

Continuing-generation students' own cultural sensibilities and expectations are reflected in the campus cultural environment, in social & extracurricular expectations and also in academic ones.

- “Find your place” is reasonable advice.

Cultivating Belonging

Continuing-generation students (particularly white and affluent) have a more straightforward path to belonging.

- Sense of ease
- Automatic, effortless
- Certainty belonging will come

Shane, continuing-gen, Private

“I went to another school first and I liked it. Then I came to Private and just fell in love. This is the school...Just walking around seeing kids in flip-flops and their board shorts and just t-shirts. That’s me, clearly. It’s a very relaxed feel, but you can still tell you’re going to be academically challenged, which is kind of what I was looking for...That’s the main reason why I came here. I just got that feeling like I belonged here.”

Cultivating Belonging

First-Generation students and students of color describe “finding their place” as a struggle.

- Demands a great deal of effort and energy.
- Includes missteps, false starts, disappointment and frustration.

Brianna, first-gen, Private

“I think any campus community you can feel you belong once you make the effort to belong there...Coming to college, you are thrown into a new environment. You don't know anyone, or you have a few friends, but you have got to put a lot in to create that belonging...you know what you have to do to make it work. Because not everything goes smoothly—that's not normal. For everything to just work out—it is never going to happen.”

Alma, first-gen, Public

“I had to make myself belong here. I don't feel it was a welcome flag showing, ‘Oh! You belong here!’—maybe like the first week. And then just, ‘Okay, you are on your own.’ I felt like I had to make myself belong here. I felt like I had to really put in the effort, which is understandable because when you are an adult, things aren't handed to you and that's understandable. But I was just —yeah, I really had to make myself belong here.”

Incomplete Belonging

Providing underrepresented students with their own spaces on campus is valuable.

- Safe haven
- Sense of family and home
- Support and resources

This is necessary, but incomplete.

Incomplete Belonging

As first-generation and students of color navigate the larger campus they often feel out of place: invisible, unvalued, or both.

- Housing
- Classroom environments
- Common areas and spaces intended for “everyone”

Dannisha, continuing-gen, Public

First semester:

BAfA, “that’s a family that I have now. Without it, I would definitely feel like I’m just a number...that’s a place where I belong. But then, the university as a whole, I don’t really feel that it’s meant for people like me.”

Dannisha, continuing-gen, Public

End of first year:

“It’s hard to go to class and not see people who look like me all the time. Maybe one or two, and maybe I already know those people... I want there to be people I don’t know: “Hey, it’s nice to meet you. This could be my friend, here. We look the same, you understand my struggles, how I’m perceived in the world. You understand everything about me, we can make a connection ”

Dannisha, continuing-gen, Public

End of second year:

In my first year “I struggled a lot with finding friendships and feeling accepted on this campus and I didn’t feel validated sometimes in myself and my personality and speaking aloud. I would just stay silent when I did have opinions because I didn’t feel they will be accepted or looked at correctly...I was just kind of by myself and I didn’t feel really welcome in a lot of spaces”

College Belonging

Social Belonging

- Finding friendships; getting involved in clubs, organizations, sports teams; feeling wanted and valued by others.

Campus Community Belonging

- Feeling at home; feeling valued; validated and comfortable in campus spaces; a sense of ease.

Academic Belonging

- Doing well in classes; feeling competent; comfortable studying with peers; confident to raise your hand in class or talk to a professor one-on-one.

What Can We Do?

- Strategizing to foster belonging and to offer it ourselves does not have to be costly or time consuming.
- It does require intentionality.

Strategies for Belonging

Pepper students with *unsolicited* advice.

Lucas, first-gen, Private

“I just reach out to students. Because no one knows better than them, especially for making your schedules; which classes should I take...or professor I should take; or ‘no way I have time to finish this what should I tell my professor?’ That type of stuff.”

Do you feel like you get good advice from other students?

“For the most part. They're also kids too so I guess nobody has the real right answer. I guess literally no one has the right answer to anything.”

Unsolicited Advice

- *Have you been to the Center for Student Success? They are so helpful over there.*
- *Did you know we have Military and Veterans Program? It's a whole support structure just for you.*
- *Have you ever gone to a There's More storytelling event? They are my favorite. I bet you'll like it too.*
- *Did you know you can change majors as many times as you want?*

Strategies for Belonging

Be available.

Be *perceived* as available.

Perceived as Available

- Don't seem busy.
- Never answer “How are you?” with: “Fine.”

Perceived as Available

- Don't seem busy.
- Never answer “How are you?” with: “Fine.”

First-gen students often show their respect by not “bothering us” or “wasting our time” with their questions.

Open the door all the way.

Hold office hours someplace convenient for students.

Personally invite students to yours.

Tell them what to expect.

Hand out conversation starters.

Office Hours

I've heard you should, for like letters of rec.

Nope. Never.

He would look at me like, 'Are you dumb?' or 'Are you serious?'

How do you even talk to them at all?

I was scared to go.

I want to figure things out on my own first.

It's okay, I'll just ask someone else.

Hey, can we talk, like not about chemistry?

It's always intimidating.

I don't want to bother them.

Strategies for Belonging

Share *stories of woe* from your days as a student.

Alma, first-gen, Public

“My chemistry professor—honestly, her backstories! One time she mentioned how she got a really bad score on her first midterm and she realized, ‘You know what, I need to study!’ She gave us that pep talk. It was motivating—okay, yeah, if she can do it, I can do it too...she puts herself in the student’s position, and she challenges us. But at the same time she’s helping us, allowing us to learn.”

Stories of Woe

- Bad grade.
- Bad roommate.
- Bad decision.

How did you handle it and what did you learn?

Mason, first-gen, Public

“I got a 71 in my first computer science midterm, and I was like, ‘Oh Dear!’ And it was heart-wrenching because I love the major. But if I’m not good at it, what am I supposed to be doing?”

Belonging means...

- Feeling seen.
- Feeling valued.
- Feeling like we would be missed if we didn't show up.
- Feeling that we matter.

Belonging is a two-way street

- Feeling seen.
 - *Others let us see them too.*
- Feeling valued.
 - *Being encouraged and pushed to grow.*
- Feeling like we would be missed if we didn't show up.
 - *Held accountable out of respect, not anger.*
- Feeling that we matter.
 - *Others in the community need us and we need them too.*

Belonging is for all of us

All of this applies to *workplace belonging* too.

In our colleague-to-colleague interactions we are either offering belonging or withholding belonging.

Everyday.

Thank you!

Please be in touch.

lnunn@sandiego.edu