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How to Encourage Belonging in the Classroom

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Provost's In-Service Workshop, 8/28/2024

Goals for Today

Share	Share outcomes of a pilot study conducted last year at Parkside to improve student success outcomes by finding ways to improve sense of belonging
Provide	Provide some examples of relatively simple interventions that have been shown to improve students' sense of belonging that you could still implement for the fall or spring semester.
Invite	Invite you to make a commitment to try at least one of these interventions in the 2024-25 academic year

ENGL 100 Belonging Pilot AY 2023-24

- ▶ 2 ENGL 100 instructors worked over summer 2023 to revise their courses and increase a focus on research-supported strategies to improve belonging
- ▶ Natural test environment in Fall 2023 semester comparing their sections to sections taught by other ENGL 100 instructors as usual
 - ▶ 16 total sections, 5 in test group and 11 in control group
- ▶ All course sections were 3 credits, though there was a mix of modalities
 - ▶ Nearly all sections were f2f or hybrid, only 2 fully online and both in control
- ▶ Important Caveat: Pilot sections were given a reduced course cap of 16 students compared to the usual 22 for the control group. Cannot separate impact of belonging interventions from reduced course cap in the student results data

ENGL 100 Belonging Pilot Areas of Focus

- ▶ Content Focus
 - ▶ Integration of assignments focused on Self-Identity, Civic and Social Engagement, and College Resources
- ▶ Integration of “Real World” Content/Impact
 - ▶ Civic literacy/engagement and self-reflection opportunities focused on lived experience and current issues that matter in the community to encourage connection between course content and “real world”
- ▶ Scaffolding and Structure for Instruction
 - ▶ Clear scaffolding and structure throughout for ease of student navigation and to help understand connections while building skills
- ▶ Holistic Student Model
 - ▶ Prioritized holistic model that considers students’ social, emotional, and academic needs

Examples of Interventions in ENGL 100

- ▶ Series of 6 Canvas modules due every other week (some replaced previous writing assignments, others supported them as drafting/brainstorming)
 - ▶ Each required a reflective writing assignment and usually incorporated engagement with campus offices, staff, and/or other students
 - ▶ Organized around student's learning journey
 - ▶ Who are you as a learner? What learning communities do you already belong to?
 - ▶ Why do people go to college? What does college mean for different people?
 - ▶ What does it mean to learn at Parkside?
 - ▶ What kinds of learning communities and supports can you find at Parkside? What learning communities do you belong to at Parkside?
 - ▶ How does what you learn at Parkside impact the way you interact with the various communities you're already part of?
 - ▶ How does your connection to these various communities impact your understanding of our society? How does what you know impact the way you interact with society?
- ▶ Bi-weekly check-ins with students (missing work, doing well, attendance)
- ▶ Created a universal Parkside Student Resource Page in Canvas
- ▶ Focus on growth mindset and destigmatizing use of supports like PARC

Student Outcome Highlights

Student Group Pass Rate FA23	Test Group	Control Group
Combined Students	81%	73%
Black Students	71%	62%
Latinx Students	87%	79%
White Students	83%	76%
PELL-eligible students	82%	66%

Note: Pass = C or better

Retention from FA23 to SP24: 81% (test) vs. 78% (control)

Retention FA23 to FA24*: 57% (test) vs. 50% (control)

*2 caveats on this data:

- 1) Data from week of Aug. 5, 2024, enrollment still active so FA24 results could change
- 2) This combines test instructor class results from FA23 and SP24 sections. No control data from SP24 due to course assignments but SP24 to FA24 retention was 54% which likely skewed overall retention rate calculation. Spring ENGL 100 sections historically have lower student success rates than fall sections.

Student Outcome Highlights, continued

Students who passed ENGL 100 in FA23 and **CONTINUED** to ENGL 101 in SP24

Student Group	Test Group	Control Group
Combined Students	85%	78%
Black Students	83%	65%
Latinx Students	100%	81%
White Students	85%	78%
PELL Students	94%	83%

Students from that group who **PASSED** ENGL 101 in SP24

Student Group	Test Group	Control Group
Combined Students	71%	54%
Black Students	50%	53%
Latinx Students	100%	59%
White Students	74%	53%
PELL Students	75%	47%

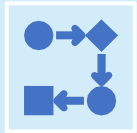


So What Can
You Try in
Your
Courses?



Warning:
Potential Option
Paralysis Ahead

Don't Try To Do Everything All At Once



Pick a couple of ideas to try, modify as needed, and add another few ideas when you're ready for more.



More resources on deeper interventions and course restructuring will be coming. For now, focus on what is feasible.



Today's Ideas Roughly Organized Around These Concepts:

Content Focus

Integration of "Real World" Content/Impact

Scaffolding and Structure for Instruction

Holistic Student Support

Content Focus: Avoid Accidentally Reinforcing Harmful Stereotypes

- ▶ **GOAL:** All students should feel that they belong in your discipline, even if they don't match the stereotypical identities of an expert in your field
- ▶ Re-examine your lecture examples, case studies, problems, etc. for places where you may be unintentionally reinforcing gender, racial, or ability-based stereotypes. Change things up with names, pronouns, and cultural markers.
- ▶ Do you have images in slides, videos, or assignments? Try:
 - ▶ Including multiple types of people/cultures
 - ▶ Deliberately challenging stereotypes (e.g. a woman physicist or disabled CEO)
 - ▶ Use culturally neutral images, like neutral art or multicultural images
- ▶ Watch out for assumed shared cultural knowledge in examples or assignments- it may be part of the majority culture but could make some feel excluded/confused
- ▶ Share your own non-stereotypical hobbies or stories, if comfortable

Integrate “Real World” Content or Impacts

Instead of using a theoretical model or case study, try to find a relevant example in the national or regional news to help students connect the abstract to their lived experiences.

Look for ways to help students apply their knowledge outside of the classroom, e.g. writing a letter to the editor, contacting a government official, or creating a proposal for change on campus related to your content.

Share short news articles or discussions of your course material in pop culture during class or within Canvas to highlight how popular understanding (or lack thereof) of the course material has real-world impacts. Encourage students to do the same and consider incorporating it into an assignment.

Look for opportunities to highlight how the skills and knowledge students are learning in your course might connect to career opportunities after graduation, especially if those careers might be otherwise unexpected.

Scaffolding and Structure: Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT)

What is TILT?

- ▶ Transparent teaching clearly explains to students:
 - ▶ How they are learning
 - ▶ Why you made the instructional choices you made
 - ▶ How they will use this learning in their lives after college
- ▶ Removes the hidden curriculum
- ▶ Activates meaning and connection between course and life goals
- ▶ <https://tilthighered.com>

What Does TILT Look Like?

- ▶ **Purpose**
 - ▶ Skills practiced
 - ▶ Knowledge gained
- ▶ **Task**
 - ▶ What students will do
 - ▶ How to do it (or what to avoid)
- ▶ **Criteria for Success**
 - ▶ Checklist or rubric in advance
 - ▶ Multiple real-world examples of work

Scaffolding and Structure: Make Space for Revision and Growth



Openly and clearly endorse hard work and effortful thinking over brilliance. It's normal to be confused sometimes, and seeking additional help doesn't mean you don't belong in this major/course.



Find ways to reward students for seeking feedback, revising their work accordingly, and showing improvement over time rather than focusing your grading system on just a few high-stakes assessments.



Provide timely, formative, actionable feedback on assignments.



Organize your assignments to build upon each other and provide opportunities for students to demonstrate a deeper understanding of a skill or idea they may have struggled with previously.



Provide opportunities to revisit, revise, and resubmit material after absorbing feedback. Consider using exam wrappers or allowing revisions of work to earn a percentage of points missed on the initial submission.

Reinforce Link between Course, Goals, and Values Multiple Times

- ▶ Conduct a values or goals affirmation exercise at key points during the semester, such as the first day and immediately before each major exam.
- ▶ Helps buffer students against self-doubt and stereotypes. Studies have shown significant (61%) decrease in course grade and/or course test scores between majority and minoritized groups after this type of intervention. Some examples:
 - ▶ To connect goals and coursework to improve perceived value of effort: “Write a short essay addressing [topic] and discuss the relevance of the concept or issue to your own life. Include some concrete information from this unit, explaining why this specific information is relevant to your life or useful to you.”
 - ▶ Combat stereotype threat with values before a test: “From the list provided, select 2 or 3 values that are most important to you and explain, in a few sentences, their importance and relevance to you. Then list the top two reasons the selected value are important to you.”

Communicate in Ways that Challenge and Support

- ▶ Make clear to students that you have high expectations of them AND that you are confident they will succeed in your course if they work hard, keep trying, and use the support tools available to them.
- ▶ Regularly reinforce that the work is challenging, that it is normal to struggle with new concepts, and that you believe that your students can succeed.
- ▶ Share stories of your own struggles to master new material or moments when you felt like giving up but persisted, as you are comfortable doing so.
- ▶ Use email or Navigate “Issue an Alert” to send personalized reinforcements of this message. Use a template and tailor to the student’s performance to date, strategies that may help the student learn, and the availability of resources to support their work (yourself included!). Try to do so three times per term.

Holistic Support: Guard Against Disengagement by Reaching Out



Deliberately set aside time to check in with students at the beginning or end of class, or at a certain time each week for an asynchronous online course.

Informal chat, anonymous survey, 1-5 scale poll, meme exchange, etc.



Don't just address course admin (e.g. assignments/exams), get a sense of students' current academic and/or overall stress levels.



Don't ignore life events that impact students. Make space to discuss important national news or campus flashpoints as needed. Recognize that students will have different responses and model how to make space for them all. Guard against unintentional exclusion of minority opinions.

Holistic Support: Provide Resources and Regularly Model Their Use

- ▶ Provide and reference support options to students. Make it visible in your course (Support Page, Ranger Resources, etc.) and normalize using these as useful tools.
- ▶ Mention resources multiple times, e.g., nearing major due dates, stressful national or local news, when students appear particularly anxious
- ▶ Engage directly with support areas on campus by bringing them into your class to reduce the risk of students avoiding them due to feeling like an imposter.
 - ▶ Bring in an academic advisor or career advisor when appropriate
 - ▶ Embed a subject librarian in your course to support research projects
 - ▶ Introduce students to a subject-specific tutor or tour PARC/Net tutor
 - ▶ Don't Cancel That Class- Use OMSA's MOSAIC peer-to-peer educators to provide some cultural competency programming when you are away
 - ▶ Highlight some of the free mental health, wellness, and stress or anxiety reduction tools you just learned about in class

Core Four: Commit to Integrate These 4 Steps within First 4 Weeks

1. Learn students' names.
2. Return an assignment to each student with formative, actionable feedback early in the semester.
3. Articulate high academic standards for the course but also send a clear message that students who struggle are not doomed, because it is normal to not get everything right away and opportunities exist for academic support outside of class.
4. Meet 1-on-1 with each student for a 10- to 15-minute conversation.

Adapted from Oakton Community College's Faculty Project for Student Persistence

What will you
try?



What questions
do you have?

