



# Forging a Sense of Belonging in English Language Programs

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Adil Bentahar  
Julie Lopez  
Cheryl Ernst

## *Before Session Setup: Help Yourself Vs Personally Offered*

- Near the door, have a basket with granola bars and quotes. On the basket, have a sign: “Help yourself to one”.
- Before the presentation, arrange groups of 4 seats into a u to encourage participants to talk with one another about the quotes.
- We greet the participants as they enter and facilitate them meeting each other, offer them a mid-afternoon snack and invite them to sit and discuss the quotes on their snack/pen with their new friends.

## Quotes for paper slips

“Sense of belonging leads to positive outcomes and success — it’s about finding belonging but not fitting in.”

-Terrell Strayhorn

“If we’re serious about welcoming international students to our campus, then we have to be willing to host them.”

-Dean of a College of Education

“Because true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance.”

-Brene Brown

“Once people feel at home, then they're far more venturesome, far more able to sit at the table, and have free speech, and talk, and embrace different perspectives. But if that's not there, then it leads to all kinds of sensitivities and vulnerabilities that get in the way of creating a truly inclusive place, institution, community, even society.”

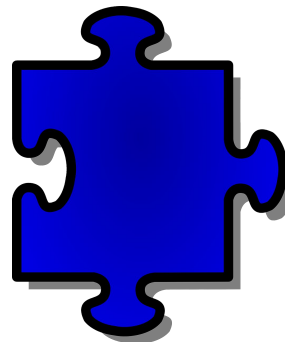
-Geoffrey Cohen

## Outline

- Rationale for belonging approach
- Actions taken as an ELP to foster belonging for:
  - Students and student teachers
  - Instructional assistants and adjunct instructors
  - Faculty and staff
  - Departmental situation within a larger context
- Conclusion and discussion

Not belonging is...

an extra *unneeded* puzzle piece



## The Need for Belonging

- Fundamental human need for personal development and well-being (Strayhorn, 2018)
- Isolation in the workplace = a problem (The Guardian, n.d.)
  - 40% of people say they feel isolated at work
  - Result = lower organizational commitment & engagement (Harvard Business Review, 2019)
- Benefits of a belonging-rich workplace: better job performance, lower turnover risk, and fewer sick days. (Harvard Business Review, 2019)

Not belonging is...

a lone ice cube next to a river

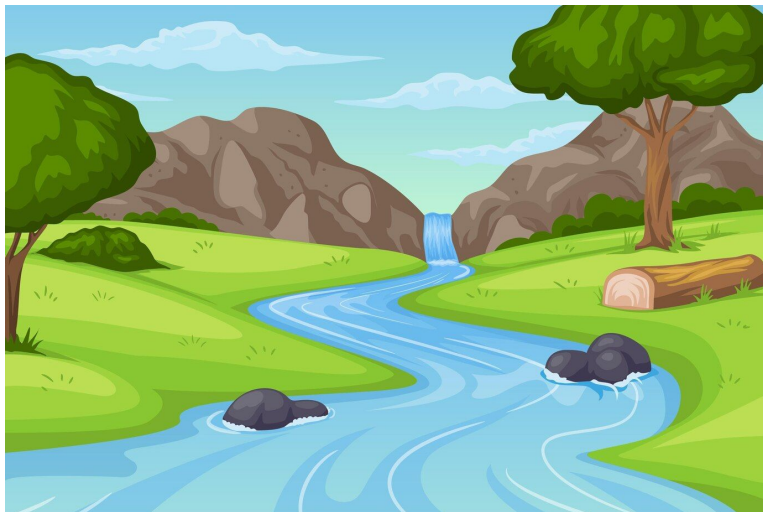


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## Why Belonging Is Important for Students

- Positively impacts educational outcomes
- Increases continuing enrollment (esp. for IEPs)
- Is protective for mental health
- Has a longitudinal effect [beyond student stay in college]—IEP experience shapes univ successes
- Fluctuates over time and is influenced by various contexts & interactions



# Belonging Research

“Belonging is the sense that you’re accepted and respected in a domain.”  
(Cohen, 2022)

- ★ Important for **retention** and **thriving**
- ★ Involves **engagement** in **community**



Not belonging is...  
closed doors.



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## Results of being excluded

- Not given same opportunities for campus positions, internships, professional growth
- Belonging Uncertainty (Cohen, 2022): *“the state of mind in which one suffers from doubts about whether one is fully accepted in a particular environment or ever could be.”*
  - Doubting one self’s abilities
  - Feeling one shouldn’t be there
  - Fear of not being able to understand or being understood
  - Less likely to attempt challenges if they don’t think they will succeed
- Hurt, which can lead to defensiveness

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Not belonging can be...  
a defensive shield.



## Stereotype Threat (Aronson, et al, 2009)

Definition: “a fear among members of a group of reinforcing negative stereotypes about the intellectual ability of the group.”

- Can negatively affect performance

Combat by...

- Reinforcing that **intelligence is expandable** (strengthens with practice, like a muscle)
- Teaching that **difficulties are a normal part of the adjustment process**
- Recognizing **values** besides academics that give them self-worth

Not belonging can lead to...  
death.



Image by brgfx on Freepik

- “Belonging isn't just a touchy feely construct. It's actually something that touchy feely has hard consequences. It's associated with physical illness, early death, cardiovascular disease, also vulnerability.”
  - Cohen, professor at Stanford's Graduate School of Education
- Giving up in a class: Failing
- Dropping out of school: Death of a future career
- Mental health
  - Loneliness→Depression
  - Suicide



## How we forge a sense of belonging



University of Delaware  
College of Arts & Sciences  
English Language Institute  
ELI Employees  
ELI Students



\*assets for people from freepik.com

University of Delaware  
College of Arts & Sciences  
English Language Institute  
ELI Employees









## Belonging layers graphic

- ELI within the University (largest group)
- ELI within College of Arts & Science (professional community)
- ELI EMPLOYEES (sense of belonging at ELI)
  - Part-Time Workers
    - peer mentors, Instructional Assistants, tutors
    - adjunct instructors
  - Faculty & Staff
    - Staff: administrative assistants, housing, advisors, program coordinators
    - Academic Development Specialist faculty
    - Continuing Track faculty
- ELI STUDENTS (sense of belonging at ELI)
  - students belonging at ELI in various programs and at the University



“Help yourself to  
food in the  
fridge!”



“Would you like  
some juice and  
bread?”



Image by Freepik



## Fostering belonging in students

- **Connect** with their own identities—intercultural competence begins with awareness of one's identity (presentations, choice of topics, showcase culture, discussions, prior knowledge use)
- **Build** opportunities in place and time—engage in relationships-building and gatherings for students to share while ensuring the privacy of those who don't want to share (Meet ELI-Stars, interfaith gatherings/Iftars)
- **Make a difference** in their new community—Festival of Nations through 1) showcasing cultural heritage and 2) leadership roles where they contribute to celebrating diversity by practicing belonging on campus

## Student teachers

- **Value** student teachers' experience in diversifying the what and the how of class running
- **Lead** with vulnerability—not only for IEP students to learn but also for student teachers to gain more confidence and feel reassured they're not alone in imperfection
- **Connect** beyond practicum period—ranges from recommendation letters to job and PhD program search to reacting in moments of crises (I've been there) to celebrating success (co-presenting at conferences)

## Belonging Research

- ★ Professor-student
  - ★ Teacher-student teacher
  - ★ Co-presenters
  - ★ Co-authors
- ...we belong..we grow





# Julie Lopez

- Advisor for International Freshmen in their first semester
- Academic Programs Coordinator
  - Adjust Instructors*
  - Instructional Assistants*





## *Design for Belonging:*

### *How to Build Inclusion and Collaboration in Your Communities*

by Susie Wise and Stanford d.school (April 19, 2022)

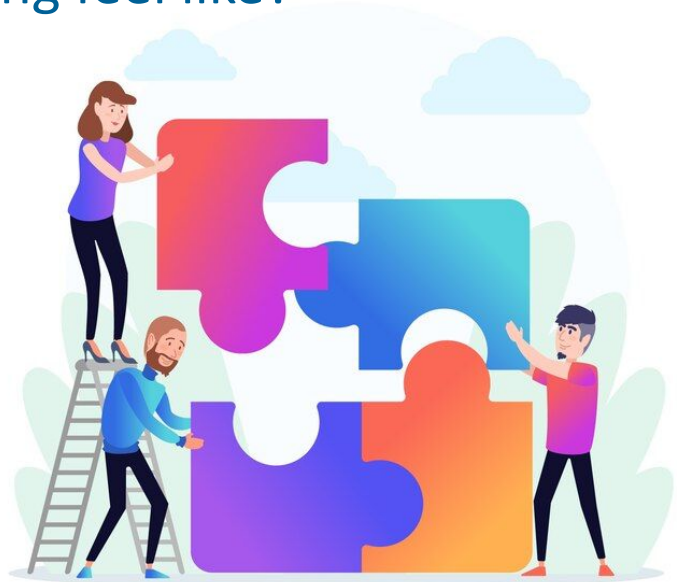
- Belonging is **relational**
- *Opposing force: **Othering***
- Leaders are **hosts**



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<https://www.designforbelonging.com/>

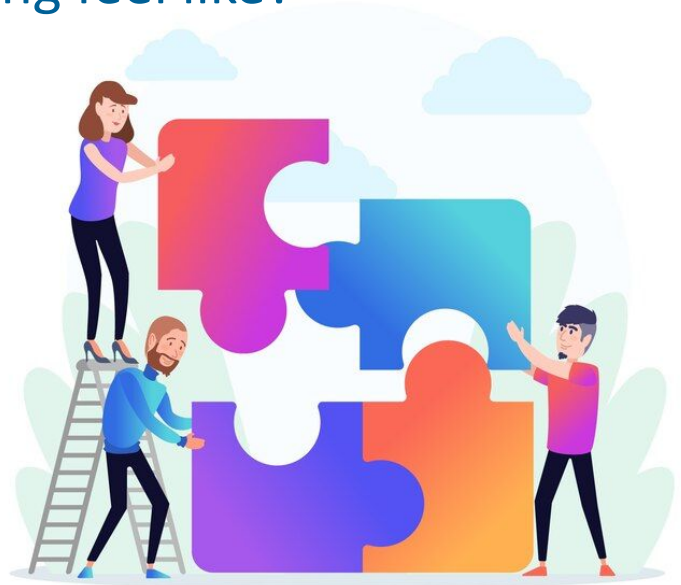
## What does belonging feel like?



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## What does belonging feel like?

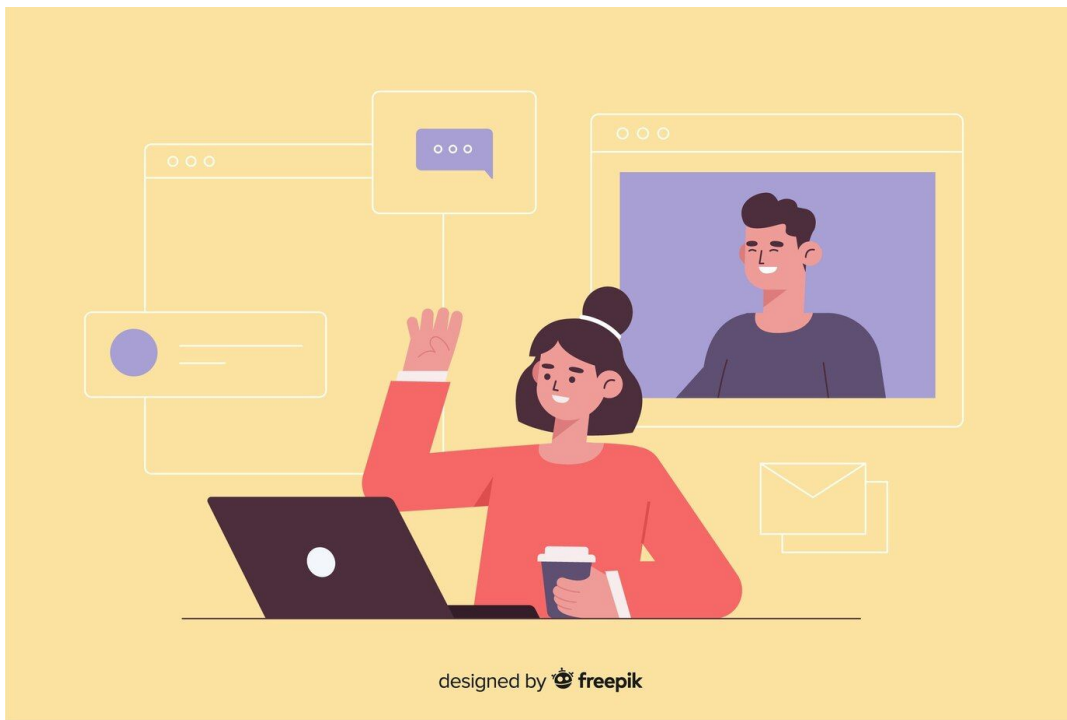
- Invited
- Well-informed
- Seen
- Valued
- Respected
- Connected
- Validated

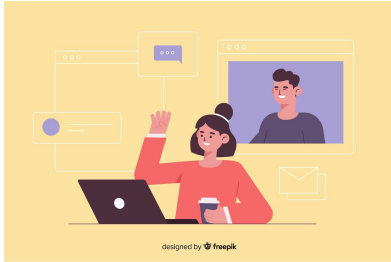


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# Design for Belonging: First Contact





# Design for Belonging

## First contact

- Job interview
- Pre-semester advising Zoom meeting

- ★ Description of programs & students
- ★ Stated team approach to student success
- ★ Explicit expectations and support for job responsibilities, orientation & professional development for future opportunities elsewhere
- ★ Expectations and resources for achieving success in role
- ★ Making mistakes and growth mindset normalized
- ★ Questions via email and text (What's App) welcomed
- ★ Responsive to all communication— politeness counts!

# Design for Belonging: Invitation



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# Design for Belonging

- **Invitation**

- Job offer email, new instructor orientation
- New student program orientation

- ★ Personalized to welcome, feel safe to be vulnerable and value students' identities (country, interests, etc)
- ★ Help familiarize them with campus and resources
- ★ Set expectation of rigorous classes, but they can succeed—there is support available
- ★ Peer panel sharing how they overcame challenges
- ★ Orientation value affirmation activity (Cohen) to strengthen students' confidence navigating transition

# Belonging & Values

We feel a greater sense of belonging when we feel accepted for **who we are** and **what we value**.

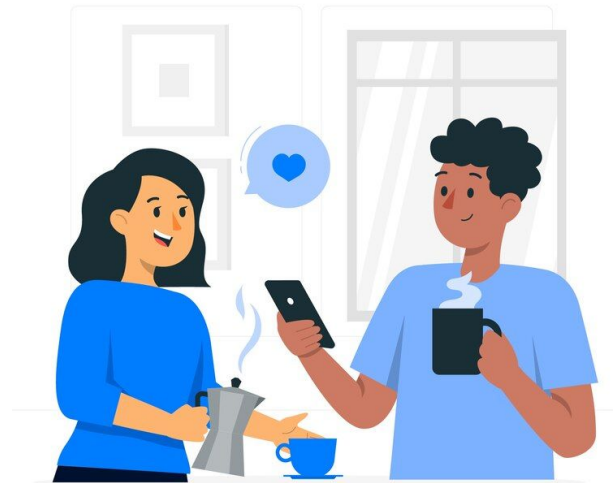
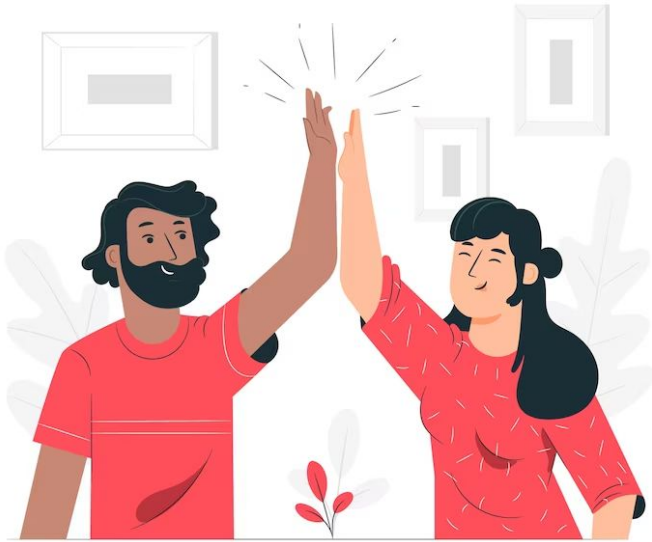
**BENEFIT:** Greater confidence in transitions



(Schreiner, L. et al., 2020)



# Design for Belonging: Check-Ins



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# Design for Belonging

- **Check-Ins**

- Via email, especially first week
- In person: informally in hallway and observation of a class to provide feedback on a rubric given ahead of time
- Time management check-in at 1st quarter
- Hospitality: mid-semester homemade lunch
- Available to answer questions
- Work recognized and appreciated
- Validation of cultural celebrations, achievements & performance





# Terrell Strayhorn

- Create personal high touch, high contact learning environments



“Mere presence of friendly staff, supportive faculty, or friends do little to build belonging or foster success. It’s when social support helps the individual feel cared about, thought of, or like they belong that real magic happens.”

<https://terrellstrayhorn.com/5-things-to-know-about-sense-of-belonging/>



# Design for Belonging

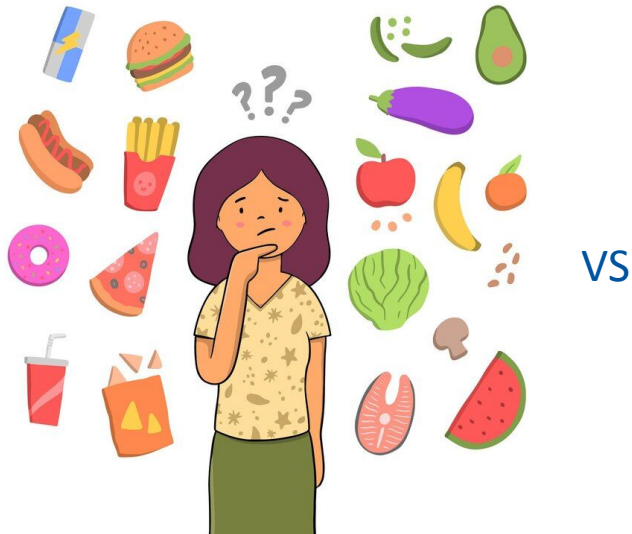
## Instructional Assistant Unprompted Email:



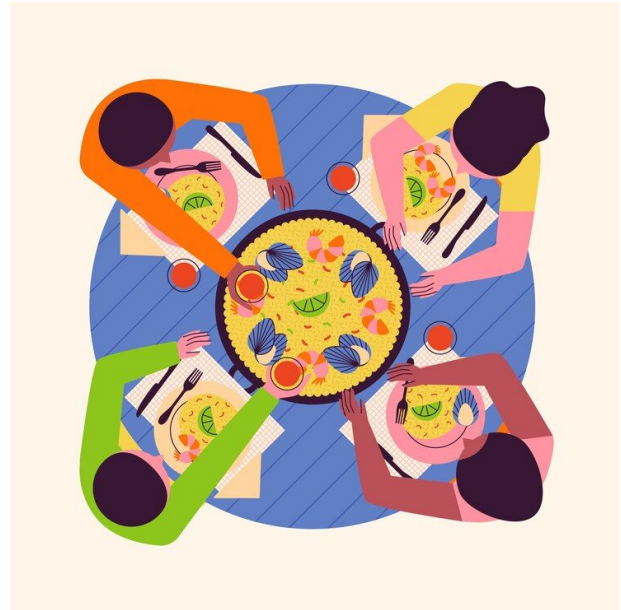
“I like how invested you are in our growth as teachers. Thank you so much.”

-David Oduro (graduate student from Ghana)

# Design for Belonging: Connections



VS



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# Design for Belonging

- **Connections**

- Offer to walk the person to introduce them to a new resource, or tour of the building
- Weekly team email: reminders and teaching tips
- Introduce to resources and other individuals
- Connect with strategies: study skills & teaching
- Connect with classmates: FYE retreat
- Connect students with peers (upperclassmen in same major/other international students)- to share how overcame challenges, belonging uncertainty
- Opportunities to work, get experience in their field, do something they enjoy



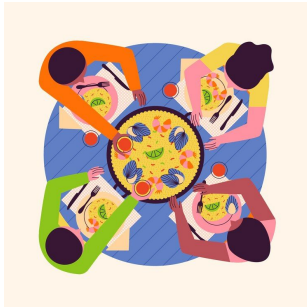
# Design for Belonging

## **Math Professor in our Academic Transitions Program:**

“I try to bridge the gap when creating application problems. I’ll ask about their local weather, wildlife, major industries, etc., and then try to include some of those things in word problems that we all work through together.

Also, there are some random things that come up before or after class, and I tried to include everyone in the discussions. For example, one of the Saudi students asked me if I believe in Karma. We talked about it a little bit and I asked her if that concept exists in her country, and then the conversation spread to the whole class to see if they have a similar concept in their various home countries. ”

## G.Cohen: *The Science of Belonging*



“There's three messages of belonging:

One is **you are SEEN.**

The second is **you have POTENTIAL.**

And the third and final one is **you're NOT ALONE.**

You're not alone. We're here for you, and that message is just so important, especially when people are going through challenges.”

*My example: Student who failed all his classes fall semester...*

# Design for Belonging: Sunsetting



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and Pixabay

# Design for Belonging



- **Sunsetting: Semester Endings**
  - Potluck/happy hour/cookies & tea to celebrate successes
  - Ask for feedback/evaluation to improve the program
  - Thank for efforts and contributions

- **Instructional Assistant Comment at Team Potluck:**

“I feel like we’re a family!”

# Cheryl Ernst

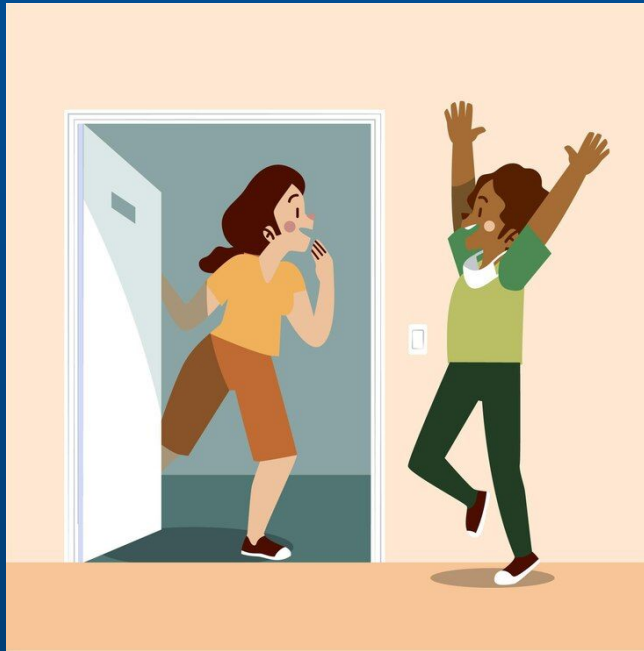
- Director of the English Language Institute

*Belonging in context:  
Professional & Personal  
Organizational  
Institutional*





**ELI - visits everyone's homes,  
and makes ourselves welcome.**



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# The Science of Belonging (Cohen)

- “Situation Crafting”: Targeting the right person, Tailoring the message, and Timing
  - Values Affirmations - “we provide an outstanding community to our students and colleagues.”
  - Rally everyone around a common purpose.
    - AT - pathway, AUD - gap with students, inbound study abroad, law, etc.
  - Small moments of connection can have big impact
    - celebrate partnerships
  - Clear norms, confirmed by current/previous students

# Belonging within the ELP

- Relationship between faculty and staff within the ELP
- Non-tenured faculty & short-term contracted instructors



# Administration and Belonging in ELPs

## Strategies with All Employees (faculty and staff)

- Meeting regularly as teams or as individuals - depending on need.
- In meetings, elicit goals, skills, talents, and dreams.
- Create a safe space for open communication to share truth with honesty.
- Observe staff in meetings and in interactions with others, identify and communicate skills and talents they may not have recognized.
- Remember specifics that are important to them. Celebrate them.
- Identify opportunities for staff to use those skills in meaningful ways on teams.

# Administration and Belonging in ELPs

## With Faculty

- Meet regularly, elicit goals, skills, talents, and dreams. Follow up regularly on goals set by the team(s).
- Remember things that are important to them. Celebrate them with them.
- Read course evaluations regularly and provide feedback.
- Observe teaching and provide immediate and written feedback.
- Observe staff in meetings and in interactions with others, identify and communicate skills and talents they may not have recognized
- Identify opportunities for staff to use those skills in meaningful ways on teams.
- Regularly plan group activities.
- Identify and mentor into leadership roles

# Build leadership capacity

- Build & fill leadership roles, mentor new leader and support long-time leaders
- Communicate professional development opportunities
- Ask for feedback and summaries at team meetings.
- Give recognition
- Involve in decision making, transparency - recognize transparency is sometimes painful

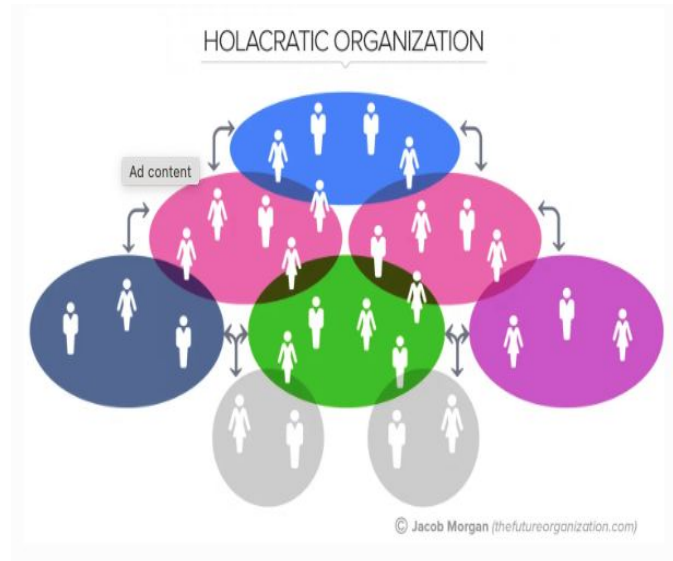


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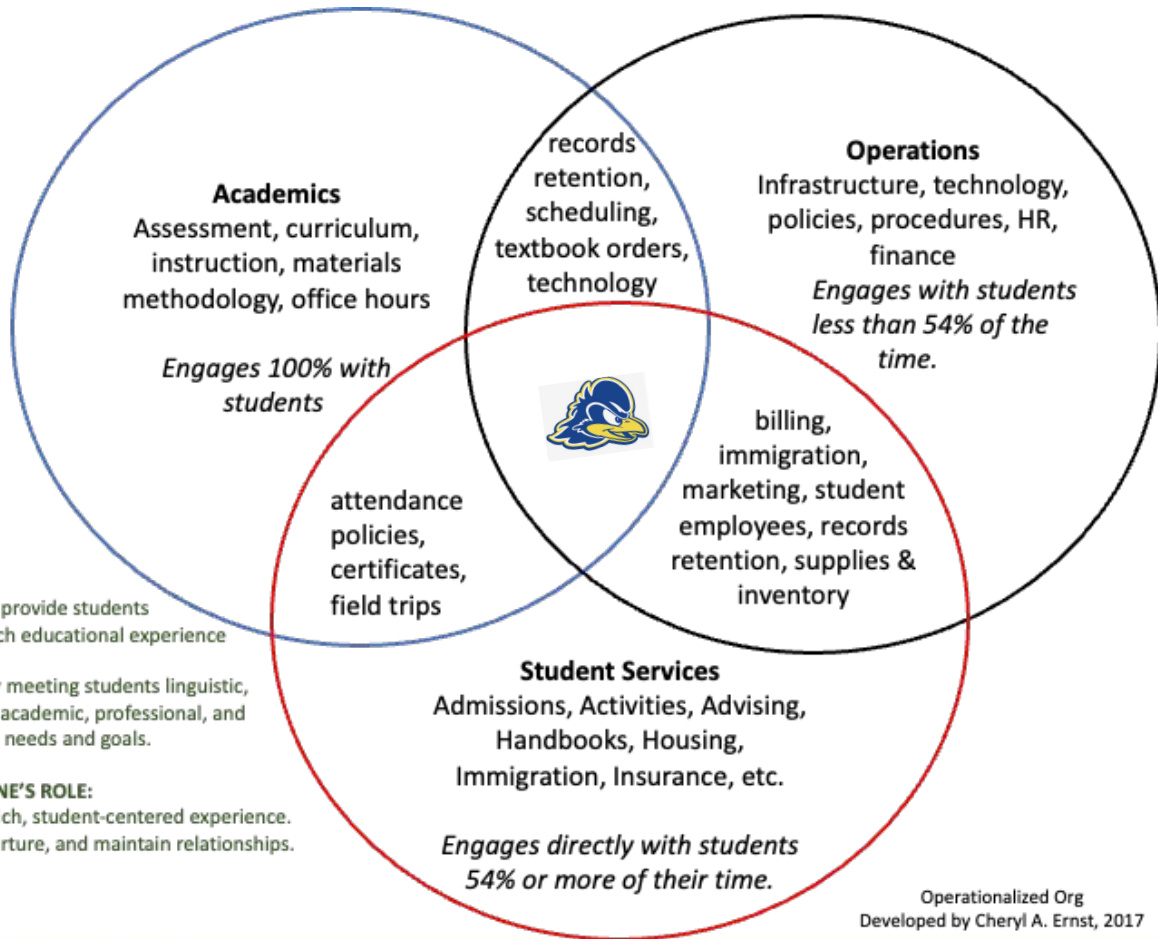
# Building belonging using organizational structure

## Using teams to build community

- Understand teams
- Strengthens communication
- Nurtures teams







# Belonging on Campus



University of Delaware  
College of Arts & Sciences

English Language Institute

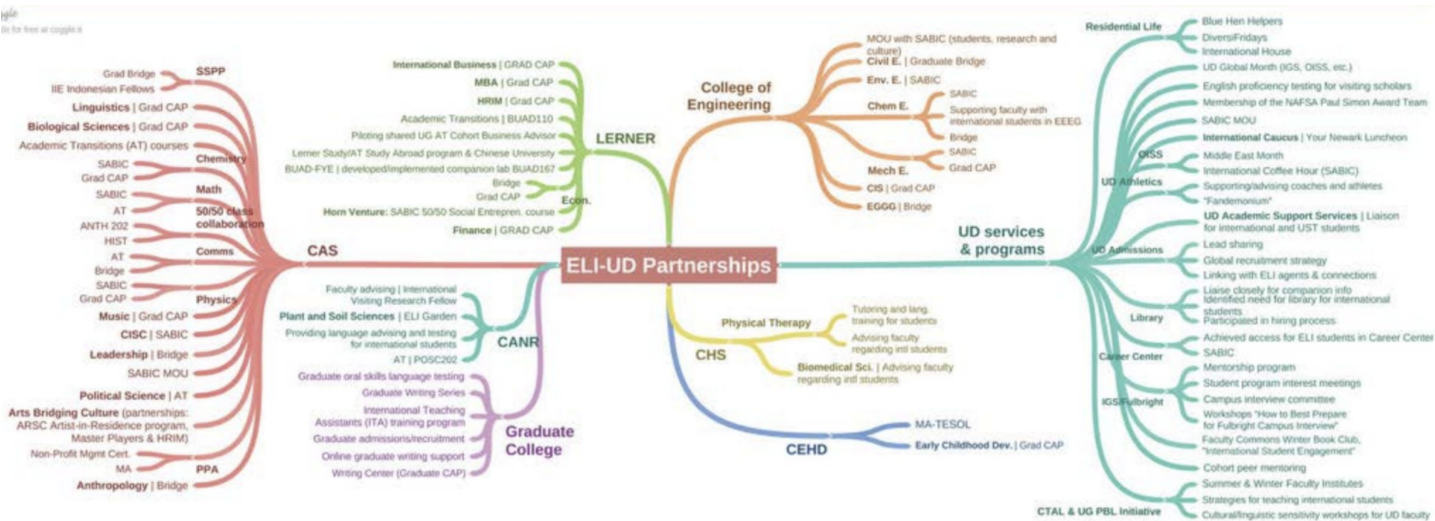
## Belonging on Campus

- ELI belongs to the institution: How does the campus see us vs. how do we integrate ourselves. How ELI integrated at UD
  - Attitudes towards students: YES, UD students
  - Faculty: YES, UD employees - same status as rest of campus, promotion capabilities, etc. Academically productive, and still great teachers
  - Reference belonging to departments on campus
  - “Look” like UD: Use the UD logo, use proper branding, colors, mascot,
  - Educate about connections & collaborations

# ALLLL the houses

igle

Do for free as Google it



# Administration and Belonging in ELPs

## At the University-

- Identifying and requesting ELP leadership and staff attend relevant meetings: UG Advisors Meeting
- Arranging meetings with relevant, Deans, Faculty, Advisors to explain the value of the ELP and how it can benefit a particular department or office. Listen to how you can connect. After listening, offer assistance. BUAD101, E110, FYS, Africana Studies: Have specific slide decks ready not general
- Read university communications. Reach out regularly to programs with which there may be synergy. Lerner
- Make time to connect in person.

# Belonging





# Belonging & Values

**“Living into our values means that we do more than profess our values, we practice them. We walk our talk — we are clear about what we believe and hold important, and we take care that our intentions, words, thoughts, and behaviors align with those beliefs.” (Brown, 2015)**



[Living Into Our Values - Brené Brown  
\(brenebrown.com\)](http://brenebrown.com)



# Questions & Discussion



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