

Q&A Session with Dr. Christine Logel

- 1. What actions could be implemented in the work environment to contribute to a sense of belonging?**
 - Belonging matters everywhere, and a lot of times when people reflect on their belonging stories it takes place at a new job/work environment
 - Ensuring that people feel like they belong in their departments contributes to a wider belonging culture
 - As new employees are coming in, people can be welcoming them and sharing their own stories of how they transitioned into the department
 - People can be checking in with each other. A lot of what we're talking about with students spreads into how we're treating all the people around us, like our coworkers, colleagues, and the people we've worked with in our life

- 2. When is it appropriate to share our story of belonging? Should we share it in lectures? In one on one interactions with students? Is there a time we shouldn't share our story of belonging?**
 - This depends a lot on you and who you are speaking with and both of your comfort levels when it comes to speaking about your own story of belonging, which has the potential to become personal
 - We want to be conscious of the fact that in sharing our own belonging story, we are not trying to suggest that the student's experience is invalid (you do not want the student to think that by telling your own belonging story, you're negating their experience)
 - You do not want to come across as saying that what they are experiencing is exactly what you have experienced; in comparison, you want to send the message that going through some challenges and feeling like you do not belong is common and will pass
 - You need to use your own judgement based on the context of the situation, and take some time to reflect on what your belonging story is and what you are hoping the students will get from hearing it

- 3. Are there resources that support sense of belonging that are missing at UW that we should implement?**
 - This is a work in progress, and the university is becoming more aware of what is needed, accessing these needed resources, and using their innovative talents to do so

- 4. Are there any available documents/resources for faculty and staff with information and guidelines on how to foster a sense of belonging on campus?**
 - <https://collegetransitioncollaborative.org/>

- This website has tip sheets that focus on fostering a sense of belonging and reinforcing the idea that students have the power to continually grow (especially during this time)
- To access these resources, visit <https://collegetransitioncollaborative.org/resources/>

5. Dr. Logel, what would be some concrete steps/low hanging fruit that a post-secondary institution can take to begin the work on enhancing social belonging on campuses?

- When it comes to beginning this work, people feel as though they need permission or a mandate to focus on it – they want to see that the university is willing to put resources and effort into it, and to be supportive of enhancing social belonging on campus
- Being able to have individuals that belong to the campus community (students, faculty, staff) gather and talk about enhancing social belonging on campus together can have a strong ripple effect throughout the university environment and communities
- We all need to work towards coordinating with other groups on campus to effectively begin this sense of belonging work – these partnerships help to see that this effort towards sense of belonging is actually being implemented and making a difference among the entire campus community

6. What actions need to occur at a policy-level to contribute to a sense of belonging? Are you aware of any studies that have investigated interventions/policies to improve scores on sense of belonging over time?

- This is one of the goals of the College Transition Collaborative. Currently work is focused on direct student interventions, in which students read each other's belonging stories and reflect on them. The real change has to be in the institution.
- Some of the things we have been talking about have the potential to make a difference, but what we ultimately need is the resources to give everyone the space and mandate to be able to reach out to students to be mentors to them and help them feel belonging.
- We need professors to have the time to say to students, “Come to my student drop-in hours,” and that they actually could see every student if they came. And we need to give academic advisors, who work tirelessly advocating for students, lighter loads (assigned to less students) so they have the time to work one-on-one with each student.
- A lot of things that I frequently suggest, are things that we can reasonably do in a situation in which we have limited time and we are constrained by our roles.
- A world in which we want to create belonging and truly foster equity would be one in which we really have the resources to put towards that goal.

7. Email does not seem to be a regular or personalized method of communication for students. Has there been thought to using texts to check in with students to personalize communication more?

- There have been research projects that have implemented the use of apps and text messages as forms of communication between professors and students.
- This is something that is currently being considered, and it is an interesting idea to continue working on.
- In terms of other methods that have been used, we value an authentic approach to belonging in the classroom by giving professors the resources that they need to implement sense of belonging at a larger scale – this can involve factors such as syllabus writing, letters to students, and communication audits to signal belonging.

8. What are some changes that can be made in the built environment that can help build students' sense of belonging?

- There are a number of ways to do this, and a good start to all of them is to simply walk around campus and see it through the eyes of the students.
- This can mean looking for diversity in images, posters, and infographics posted around the campus and in the buildings, or considering the origin of building names and recognizing whether or not changes are needed if these name origins counteract or do not promote the message of sense of belonging and wellbeing on campus.

9. What is the most important thing I can do as an instructor at UWaterloo to support a sense of belonging?

- I believe that the most important thing professors can do is to genuinely care about their students and make sure this is expressed to them clearly.
- In order to do this, professors need to make this messaging obvious, and recognize that there are actions that they can take to make a real difference in the lives of their students.
- As a professor, it is important to remember that if you genuinely care, your students will be able to pick up on this.

10. What sort of research are you planning to do in the future?

- With the College Transition Collaborative, we are beginning to work on a larger scale, which involves partnering with university networks as a way to get this sense of belonging message out on a larger scale and reach more students.
- We also have [toolkits](#) available that any professor at any university can access if they want to be a changemaker in wellness, belonging, and equity both in their classroom and on their campus
- Partnering with professors who know what their campus community needs to get started helps to create a greater focus on promoting sense of belonging on their campus through familiarity, which has the potential to reach real change in a shorter time period.

- We are also beginning to move in the direction of less basic research to establish the concepts, and instead actually working with universities and university networks to implement what we now know at a larger scale (we have already established the research base, and now we are putting it into practice while also continuously working to update research in order to ensure relevance)
- All of this also involves analysing data from past studies to see how it can be used to help other groups of student populations, those of which the data may not have been originally meant for – this allows the same research to be more highly utilized and analyzed for different purposes.

11. "Do you have any recommendations for how to foster a sense of belonging among students in the coming semester where everything will be online? Specifically, part of my job in the Fall will involve creating a sense of community among first year students in my program who have never been on campus and have never met any staff, faculty, other students, etc."

- Students still need a chance to connect to their peers and be able to talk about their issues and concerns for starting university, and there are ways to do that with discussions and small groups in which students get to connect, hear from one another, and share similar experiences and struggles.
- It is important to acknowledge that yes, this situation is not ideal, but with that being said, here are ways that you are still able to connect with your peers during this time – it is important to put effort into addressing belonging by taking the time to connect first-year students to peers who may have similar interests or concerns.

12. You mentioned lots of examples of what we can do individually, however what are the most important actions for leaders to take to contribute to a sense of belonging on campus and/or in our department?

- Leaders have big opportunities to create a culture where everyone is contributing to belonging.
- A good example of how leaders on campus and in within departments across campus can contribute to a sense of belonging is by putting aside a budget to support and organize events that foster sense of belonging among students, whether it be by connecting students with similar interests, providing academic support, or going on fun trips that highlight teamwork (there are lots of event possibilities that contribute to sense of belonging among students).

13. General question for wellness collaborative (maybe not to discuss now, but as a question/thought for future): How can UW's institutional commitment work within (& improve structure in) our competitive industry? (e.g. promoting sense of belonging and healthy work parameters for pre-tenure faculty)

- The purpose of the university is to make the world better, and creating belonging is primarily a moral responsibility, but there is also a clear business case for this work.

- For more detail, a business case for belonging and equity can include factors such as closing opportunity gaps, lowering rates of dropout, improving overall grades, etc. For example, increasing enrollment among minority and first-generation students and decreasing the achievement gap between students from disadvantaged and advantaged backgrounds.
- These goals help more students to be successful and fulfill their potential

14. How do we work with staff or faculty who do not have a belonging mindset? Someone who thinks "students need to toughen up" and don't value the importance of belonging?

- While there are still instances of this happening, it is worth noting that this is beginning to change at a rapid pace.
- The new cohort of professors may not even think this way – they have a greater desire to care about their students, and professors are beginning to hold fellow staff to higher standards.

15. Employees are often the front-line supporting students and faculty. I often feel like resources exclude those front-line folks who are doing the heavy lifting. How do we foster a support system and stronger sense of belonging for staff who often bear the brunt of all impacted parties? (What is the venue for their specific voices?)

- There are a number of different communities on campus – and if one of these communities does not feel as though they belong, then they are unable to spread this message of belonging to students as effectively.
- There should not be any prioritizing of certain departments or faculties – addressing this means recognizing that the university has to support each department and faculty equally, so everyone gets this sense of belonging.
- This can also be applied to faculty members: we need to talk about BIPOC faculty members and LGBTQ+ faculty members, and recognize how to support them in their own sense of belonging.
- A complete belonging mindset is imperative in order to recognize the needs of these communities on the campus as well, not just the students.

16. Creating a sense of student community feels "easier" with clubs, sports, academics for students. (Forgive my use of the word easy...) How do we create this within teams/departments and staff at UW - while they support those struggling students?

- From a professional perspective, letting people know that their skills and contributions belong in the workplace is important, but that does not mean they have to identify with their workplace.
- We need to be aware and considerate of the types of events we engage in with coworkers to create sense of belonging, as some of these activities could actually end up unintentionally leaving others out – this can happen based on aspects of gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.

- We want to engage in activities that promote sense of belonging for all coworkers

17. You mentioned that 25% of students don't feel like they belong. What can you tell us about who they are i.e. international and if they come more from certain faculties/programs?

- There are lots of reasons students may feel like they do not belong, but this is common for all students at university.
- Groups that are underserved or underrepresented will be more highly impacted, but overall struggling with a sense of belonging is a very common student experience.
- When it comes to recognizing a demographic breakdown, Canadian universities can improve upon this practice by making more data available for people to access.