

Department's role in fostering a sense of belonging

*From the Anti-Racism Action Committee to Chair Michael Oskin
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Proposed changes: Encourage anti-racist actions that can be taken by the EPS department as a whole that increase the sense of belonging for BIPOC members of the department.

Why: An anti-racist department culture is fundamental to supporting students outside of their interactions with faculty and fellow students. Small actions and changes can add up to have meaningful impacts. These suggestions from the literature have been shown to increase a sense of belonging among students, a critical aspect to the success and satisfaction of all students, especially BIPOC students.

Purpose: The suggestions are detailed in the [Examples for the EPS Department to Increase a Sense of Belonging](#) document. Specifically, each suggestion has been shown to increase the sense of belonging and mattering in students and department members. The “background” section of this proposal explains that these feelings are directly related to a student’s overall success and satisfaction with their educational experiences.

This proposal is one of three related documents: *Faculty, instructors, and advisors role in fostering a sense of belonging*; *Department's role in fostering a sense of belonging*; and *Peer roles in fostering a sense of belonging*.

Implementation: These suggestions are each provided as a resource for department members to implement. It is the hope that the department can review, discuss, learn about, and incorporate many of these suggestions. It is not expected that all suggestions are implemented, however all should be considered for their relevance and feasibility within the department. One strategy is to choose a few suggestions to implement each year. To help in these efforts, ARAC commits to sending out a few suggestions at the start of each quarter or year to the department leadership.

The incentive to incorporate these suggestions is that they are effective at the primary goal of increasing students’ sense of belonging. This has a secondary goal of increasing students’ academic performance as well as their overall satisfaction with their college or graduate school experience.

Audience: This proposal is aimed at department leadership and staff, as those most directly responsible for implementing the types of suggestions within the examples document. This information is also valuable for all students, faculty, staff, and other department and community members to be aware of.

Throughout this proposal and the examples, the “department” may include department leadership such as chairs and vice-chairs, staff, student organization leadership, and anyone else who makes decisions and takes action on behalf of the department.

Background:

A sense of belonging, mattering to another person, and being involved in a campus community all directly and positively impacts a student's academic success and their overall satisfaction with their time in college or graduate school (Roufs, 2015, p. 74). A sense of mattering for students can be developed by folks at an institution through specific actions that demonstrate attention, importance, and appreciation (Schlossberg, 1989, p. 8-10). Additionally, students' involvement in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities directly and positively impacts their academic success and persistence to graduation (Roufs, 2015, p. 70-71; Negroni et al., 2006, p. 208). The Department has an important role in planning and implementing such activities.

Peer group interactions affect students' sense of belonging, especially early in their college careers (Thiry et al., 2019, p. 301). Supportive, inclusive student organizations provide important sources of support among peers (AIP, 2020, p. 64). When guided by inclusive guidelines, student organizations can alleviate [imposter syndrome](#) (attributing success to luck rather than one's own skills) and stereotype threat (the fear that a negative stereotype about one's background might be true for them) (AIP, 2020, p. 64; Thiry et al., 2019, p. 316).

Faculty can have an important role in developing or increasing a sense of belonging among minoritized students especially, and faculty hold key roles in department leadership to help build this supportive culture. These actions are detailed in the proposal and *Examples for Faculty to Increase a Sense of Belonging in the EPS Department*, but department leadership holds an important role in promoting adoption of these actions within the entire department. We note that institutional and departmental commitment to diversity creates a supportive environment. This should be evident in the faculty, staff, and student makeup, in student organizations, and in the physical environment (Negroni et al., 2006, p. 209-210).

Evaluation: Assessment of these suggestions should answer the question: *Do students feel a sense of belonging in the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences?* This question can be answered within a climate survey as part of a larger department assessment program. This assessment program will evaluate the climate of the overall department, but should be developed in such a way as to address disparities in experience between folks of different races.

The *Examples for the EPS Department to Increase a Sense of Belonging* will be a living document, edited over time to incorporate successful suggestions from folks inside and outside the department.

Affordances and Limitations: The biggest consideration is time and effort to intentionally build in new practices for increasing a sense of belonging among students. We highly recommend that the department incorporates a few suggestions each quarter or each year.

References

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