

Faculty, instructors, and advisors role in fostering a sense of belonging

*From the Anti-Racism Action Committee to Chair Michael Oskin
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Proposed Action: Encourage anti-racist actions that can be taken by faculty, instructors, and advisors in the EPS department that increase the sense of belonging for BIPOC members of the department.

Why: 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 Faculty to Increase a Sense of Belonging in the EPS Department](#) document. Specifically, each suggestion has been shown to increase the sense of belonging and mattering in students. 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 faculty. It is the hope that faculty will review, discuss, learn about, and incorporate as many of these suggestions as they feel able to. It is not expected that all faculty will implement all suggestions, however all faculty should work towards incorporating as many as possible while being effective and sustainable in their teaching and mentoring. 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 and incorporating habit-changing practice in departmental discussion spaces and skill-building opportunities (these discussion spaces and skill-building opportunities are detailed in the proposal titled “Promoting Equitable Mentoring in the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences (EPS)”).

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. In their role as teachers and advisors, faculty share this goal.

Audience: This proposal is aimed at faculty members, instructors, advisors, and mentors who influence the spaces and people they interact with. This information is also valuable for students and other department and community members to be aware of.

Throughout this proposal and the examples document, “faculty” is used as a term to refer to all faculty, professors, instructors, lecturers, and graduate student associate instructors and

teaching assistants. These folks may find themselves in the role of “teacher” within the classroom and/or “mentor” or “advisor” outside the classroom.

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 intentional relational strategies and 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). Faculty can help students become involved in the classroom, by direct supervision of co-curricular activities, or by referral to other co- and extra-curricular opportunities.

Faculty and advisors in particular have a strong influence in increasing a sense of belonging among students. Feeling that they belong in a classroom setting, even more so than in a university setting, has a strong influence on engagement and persistence (Thiry et al., 2019, p. 301). Institutions - not just students - have a responsibility to help students succeed, and this is often most useful at the department rather than campus level (Blackwell, 2020). While peer group interactions affect students’ sense of belonging early in their college careers, faculty can have more of an effect later in a student’s college career (Thiry et al., 2019, p. 301).

Faculty can have an important role in developing or increasing a sense of belonging among minoritized students especially. The more faculty get to know students on an individual basis and demonstrate their care and support for minoritized students, the better the students’ sense of belonging - and therefore retention and academic success (AIP, 2020, p. 64).

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 Faculty to Increase a Sense of Belonging in the EPS Department* 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 faculty take on these suggestions at their own pace, incorporating a few suggestions each quarter or each year.

References

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