Finding Your Place: Building Belonging and Community[1]

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Feeling like you belong—that you matter to others and they matter to you—is one of the most important factors in learning success. Research shows that when students feel connected to their learning community, they persist through challenges, engage more deeply, and achieve more. The good news is that belonging isn't something you have to wait for—you can actively build it.

When you feel a sense of belonging, it helps you:

- Build relationships that provide academic and emotional support
- Feel more comfortable taking risks and asking questions
- Stay motivated during difficult coursework
- Connect your learning to your identity and experiences

Here's what matters most: **belonging isn't something that happens to you—it's something you actively build**. While instructors design opportunities for connection, your participation is what makes those opportunities meaningful.

Four Ways You Can Build Belonging

Building a sense of belonging involves four interconnected actions: connecting with others, sharing your perspective, seeking support, and contributing to the community.

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[1] Content developed with AI, based on the CAST UDL Guidelines™, scholarly sources, and web resources. Icons courtesy of *Flaticon.com* contributors.

1. Connecting with Others

Meaningful connections don't happen by accident—they develop when you reach out and engage. In online and in-person settings, even small interactions build the foundation for supportive relationships.

Strategies:

- Introduce yourself to classmates in discussion forums or before class—share something beyond just your name
- Participate in group activities and collaborative assignments, even when optional
- Respond thoughtfully to peers' posts and contributions
- Find at least one person you can check in with about coursework

2. Sharing Your Perspective

Your unique experiences, knowledge, and viewpoints make the learning community stronger. When you share your perspective, you help others learn while strengthening your own sense of belonging.

Strategies:

- Connect course content to your own life, work, or interests when relevant
- Ask questions that reflect your genuine curiosity
- Contribute your experiences and insights during discussions
- Offer your perspective even when it differs from others—diverse viewpoints strengthen learning

3. Seeking Support

Reaching out for help isn't a sign of weakness—it's a smart strategy that successful students use. When you seek support, you build relationships while getting what you need to succeed.

Strategies:

- Form study groups with classmates
- Use campus resources like tutoring, writing centers, and counseling services
- Contact your instructor when you're struggling—they want to help
- Let people know when you're managing competing priorities like work or family

4. Contributing to Community

Community grows when everyone contributes. Small acts of support create an environment where all learners can thrive.

Strategies:
- Offer help to classmates when you can
- Acknowledge and appreciate others' contributions
- Follow community agreements and treat peers with respect
- Share resources or strategies that have helped you

Key Takeaway

Belonging doesn't just happen—it develops through intentional connection and participation. When you actively engage with your learning community, you're not only supporting your own success but also helping create an environment where everyone can thrive. Your presence matters, your perspective is valuable, and your participation makes a difference.

Resources

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