UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

School of Nursing
Inclusion, Diversity and Excellence
Achievement (IDEA) Initiative

https://www.nursing.virginia.edu/diversity/

9 WAYS to create belonging in a virtual classroom

What is belonging?

Belonging occurs when students feel accepted, valued, and understood as an important part of the group. They feel that they fit in.

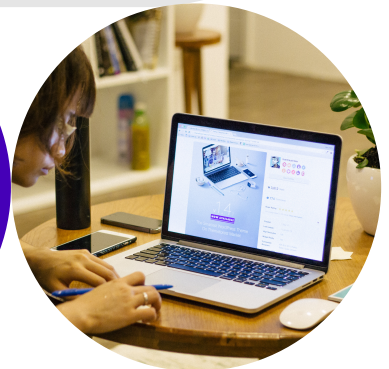## Why is belonging important in an online environment?

Motivation, persistence, and academic performance decrease significantly in an environment where physical cues of acceptance are not present.

1 Greet students at the door

Making students feel comfortable in a new environment begins as they enter into that space. Just as with physical environments, individuals feel more comfortable and at ease when acknowledged and greeted as they enter.

2 Be present

Belonging begins with you! Faculty set the tone of the learning environment in both online and place-based settings. Belonging increases when faculty participate in discussions and other course activities.

3 Foster a sense of community

Establish classroom acceptable norms and behaviors that increase a sense of community focusing on matters such as respect and fair treatment. Teach students the value in hearing all voices.

4 Ensure accurate and timely communication

Students feel their work is valued when faculty respond quickly to student submissions. Avoid duplicating the same response to all students. Making communication specific to an individual increases as sense of self worth.

5 Develop activities that promote interaction

Decrease the likelihood students will feel alienated or disengaged by creating activities that require students to engage and interact with the group. Faculty or random assignment of groups avoids cliques or exclusion.

6 Provide an online student lounge

Create student-to-student engagement opportunities finding ways that students can connect with other students using tools such as group study sessions, team work assignments, and discussion response requirements.
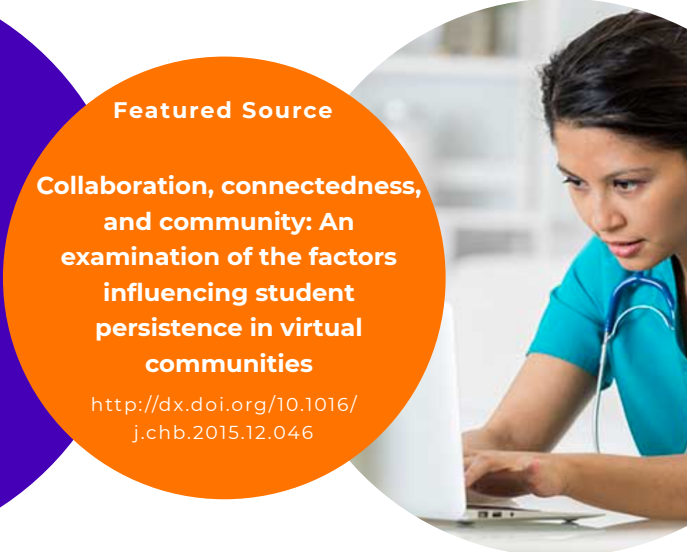
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Use assessments for student communication and collaboration

Belonging results from feeling like you are a part of something. Linking assessments to student involvement increases the likelihood that students will connect frequently in the online environment.

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Emphasize professional behavior in an online environment

Casual communication in an online environment can leave individuals feeling like an outsider. Setting a standard of professional vs. casual communication in online settings helps to lessen negative online exchanges.

Featured Source

Collaboration, connectedness, and community: An examination of the factors influencing student persistence in virtual communities

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.12.046

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Create multiple ways for students to contribute content

Create opportunities for students to create individual videos, submit ideas for discussion questions, and offer suggestions of additional tools and resources to strengthen egagement

The key to creating a sense of belonging in a virtual learning environment is to diversify engagement strategies, employ assessment and non-assessment activities, and mirror the involvement you want to see in your students.