Fostering Belonging

Gardner Initiative Working Group

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Gardner Working Group

- **Our group:**
- Leads: Santiago Solis, Karen Danna
- **Members:** Shawn Watkins, Daisy Wang, Ahmed Yousof, Laura Kieselbach, Brooke Langan, Beth Sockman, Curtis Dugar*, Allyson Wind*, Jackie Kessel, Joe Akob, Yvonne Catino, Cornelia Sewell-Allen, Megan Smith
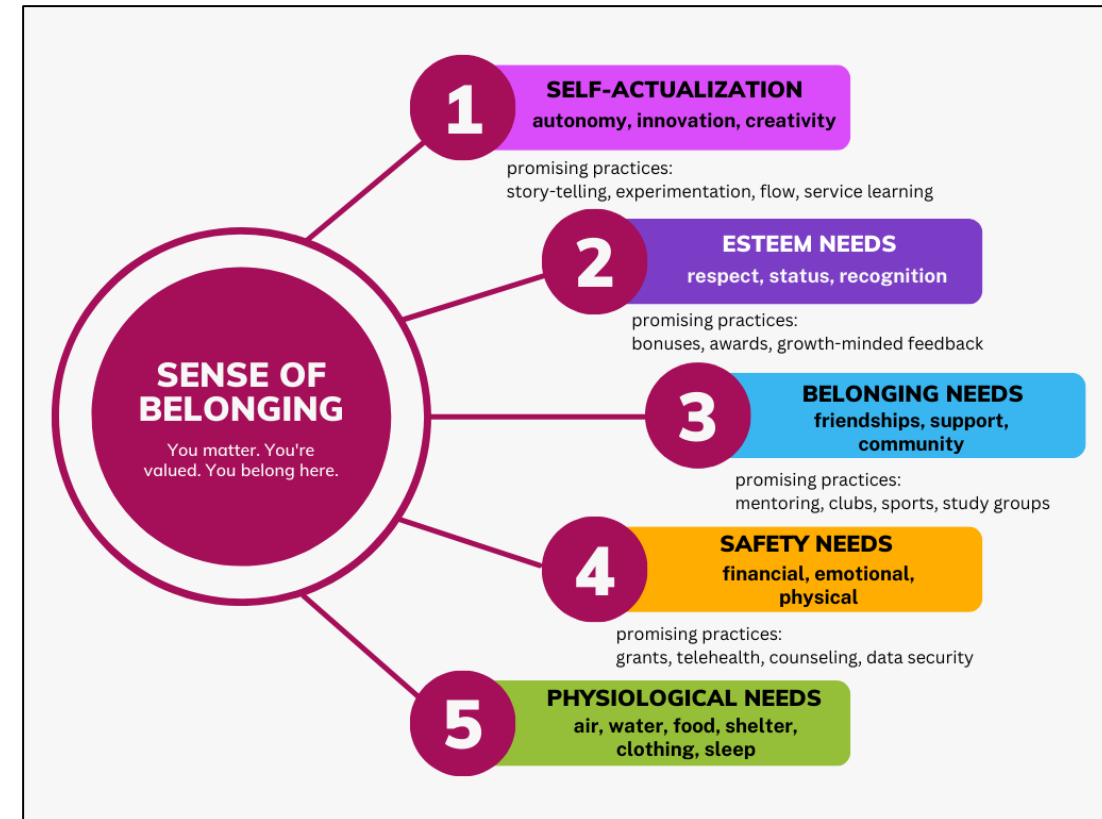
  *Spring 2024 only

- **Our charge:**
- Analyze current literature on the relationship between 'belonging' and 'student retention'
- Develop and align measurable goals to strategic plan

Why 'belonging'?

- Solidifying social bonds linked to: increased retention, timely graduation, positive student development, increased sense of well-being, higher GPA's,

- Uncertainty about belonging can undermine academic performance and achievement, lead to isolation, decrease retention, negatively impact graduation, undermine well-being

Sense of Belonging Sign

Tuition may increase.

Dimensions of belonging:

- **Social Dimension:** This involves creating a community where students feel they matter and would be missed if they weren't there

- **Academic Dimension:** This ensures students have what they need for academic success, such as relationships with faculty members and a comfortable learning environment to ask questions, engage in class, and interact with other students

- **Institutional Dimension:** This fosters a connection to the institution itself, with students feeling pride in their school and engaging with its resources and community

The 'seed' and 'soil' metaphor

- In this analogy, sharing a hopeful way to think about and experience belonging (planting a "high-quality seed") will make a difference only in contexts in which that way of thinking is true and useful (in "fertile soil")

- If the soil is inhospitable the seed will wither. Students will drop the idea, and it won't help them succeed

Diagram of a plant growing from soil

Belonging:
Defined by 2025-2028 Strategic Plan

- Fostering a community of belonging establishes a foundation of trust, inclusivity, and active listening. A sense of belonging positively impacts performance, retention, morale, school spirit, and engagement, and leads to strategic problem solving and critical decision making. Ultimately, a sense of belonging is the key to realizing potential and the catalyst for creating a campus culture that is defined by respect and gratitude – a place where faculty, students, staff, alumni, and campus guest are valued –

- A Place Where Warriors Belong

How do we develop an authentic culture of belonging for students at ESU?
Key areas for building 'hospitable soil':

- Early Experiences

- Social Settings and Peers

- Faculty and Classrooms

Early Experiences:

- **Normalize 'belonging' worries**
  - Peer-to-peer discussion groups
  - Sharing of information that demonstrates how 'things get better'

- **Create opportunities for relationship/team building:**
  - Early arrival programs
  - Residential colleges / Living & learning communities
  - Stony Acre days by college
  - Common Read

Create class traditions
  - Class pictures
  - Class celebrations/calendars
  - Strategic use of symbols, colors, banners, etc

Social Settings & Peers

- **Invest in 'third spaces'**

  - Create Indoor and outdoor amenities w/ rearrangeable furniture, charging stations, free streaming services, etc

- **Enhance student transportation**

  - Implement an accessible transportation mode to increase access to local businesses

  - Scooter or bike share program

- **Develop public safety infrastructure and messaging**

  - Deployment of additional cameras/streetlights

  - Targeted messaging campaigns to students

Faculty & Classrooms

Foster 'relationship rich' pedagogy

- Emphasize regular dialogue
- Promote feedback and reflection
- Enhance shared responsibility between educators and learners

Increase inter-disciplinary connections

- Creation of 'real world', project-based opportunities that bridge disciplines
- Development of interdisciplinary field trips
- Co-teaching of classes

Update classroom spaces

- Develop 'Active Learning Classrooms'
- Increase use of movable and adaptable furniture, smartboards, displays, owl cameras
- Create space for hands-on and project-based collaborative learning

Next steps:

Phase II: Employees
 	
Key areas of focus:
   - Psychological safety and well-being
   - Motivational supports & structural opportunities
   - Mattering and gathering
	Overall:
	
	• Identify actionable & measurable goals
	• Map and align to the strategic plan

Any questions or concerns, please reach out:

- **Santiago Solis:**

ssolis@esu.edu

- **Karen Danna:**

kdanna@esu.edu