Creating Student Belonging at WFU

Belonging means being part of a group, and sharing the confidence, security, and allegiance that a group brings. A sense of belonging is a basic human need and is experienced when we feel respected, valued, accepted, cared for, included, and that we matter. Individuals who hold identities that are underrepresented (e.g. race/ethnicity, language, socioeconomics, gender identity or expression, etc.) on a campus often experience a lessened sense of community and belonging. However, as we learn more about others, we also learn more about our own identity, perspectives, and challenge biases we may hold. Belonging helps both the individual and the collective; the more we create a sense of belonging across difference, the more likely we are to create a strong community at WFU.

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<th>Diversity</th>
<th>Inclusion</th>
<th>Equity</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Refers to the characteristics that make people unique.</td>
<td>Refers to the behaviors and cultural norms that make people feel welcome.</td>
<td>Refers to the fair and respectful treatment for all people.</td>
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Valuing diversity, inclusion, and equity are essential in creating environments that foster a sense of belonging.

Belonging
Refers to an individual and collective sense of acceptance into a group or community.

A sense of belonging:
- Gives people a space where they connect and can build a support system to address challenges experienced at WFU.
- Brings together people from all backgrounds to create mutual respect and opportunities for learning.
- Honors the diverse and rich culture of the Wake Forest University community, through in-class and co-curricular experiences.
- Belonging creates a community that is inclusive and welcoming.
- Addresses and holds accountable those who participate in harassment or discriminatory behaviors such as racist, homophobic, and ableist.
- Ensures that individuals with particular needs are accommodated and included with dignity and respect.
- Creates an environment where all members of the school community feel welcome, wanted, that they belong, and are appreciated.
Strategies to increase belonging:

#1: Getting Involved in Campus Programs and Activities

Given the size of a university, it can be challenging for people to find their community. Wake Forest has hundreds of student organizations on campus for you to join, based on your interests. Visit The Link to learn more about student organizations at WFU and begin your search by engaging in groups that spark your interests such as:

- Special interest groups (SIGs) by specialties and professional roles or interests
- Identity-based groups
- Interest groups within your college or academic department
- Student employment on campus in an area of interest such as research or programming.
- Create an art-based group to enhance or learn new art forms.
- Study groups, masterminds, discussion groups, and book clubs

Finding smaller groups of students with shared interests helps to make the larger WFU community feel smaller, so you have a greater sense of belonging and a support system on campus.

#2: Inclusive leadership

Students will never feel a sense of true community if they see your organization or leadership in a negative light. If leadership is perceived as exclusive or based on friend/associate groups, a sense of belonging will remain elusive for many.

If you’re a student leader looking to create belonging in your organization, make sure you offer transparent paths to leadership with many ways to get there by:

1. Inviting and looking for students who attend programs and meetings and may not have the opportunity if not asked
2. Look for students who are engaged and excited about what your student organization is doing, ask them to help out, or simply see how they are enjoying the experience.
3. Attend cultural events on campus sponsored by academic departments or one of our many Identity Centers as a way to learn and use inclusive programming strategies as a student leader.
If you're looking for a greater sense of belonging:

1. Join committees, attend programs, and learn more about WFU’s student organizations, so that you can find a role or place where your talents are best used.
2. Complete the WFU Personal Involvement Plan and meet with an engagement consultant to learn more about opportunities on campus to get involved.
3. Visit the University Calendar for events that may be of interest to you to attend.
4. Participate in University trainings and leadership conferences to build relationships and your leadership skills.
5. The Identity Centers on campus are a great way to not only learn about inclusion and belonging but to also experience it and find resources to help you during your time at WFU.

#3: Establishing trust

Trust is critical for the success of our relationships with peers. We know that trust can form much more quickly with people we are similar to and this is one of the reasons why we can feel 'wary' of people who may bring different approaches or perspectives to us through our networks.

Build relationships and spend time learning about other people who are different from yourself (e.g. different backgrounds, from a different region, speak a different language, different major, etc.). Ask about interests, majors, or goals, and learn ways to connect to get to know others on campus, and also share what you’re comfortable with, with your peers as a way to build a network of support.

Resources


