

# Reflecting on Belonging: Helping Faculty to Reflect on Inclusive Teaching Practices

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**Abstract**—The goal for this session will be to demonstrate a faculty development opportunity to help engineering faculty reflect on one aspect of their teaching practice related to enhancing equity and inclusion – student academic belonging. Participants will be provided with time to individually reflect on current practices and generate ideas for moving forward with their fellow participants.

**Keywords**—sense of belonging, faculty development, reflection

## I. SESSION DESCRIPTION

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) has been spotlighted as a key initiative for many colleges and universities, especially for STEM disciplines. Creating opportunities for faculty to reflect on their teaching strategies and transition to creating a more inclusive classroom are key to these initiatives. Sharing faculty development approaches can help to improve and facilitate these opportunities more effectively.

To aid our faculty in creating inclusive classrooms, the Leonhard Center for the Enhancement of Engineering Education has endeavored to grow our professional expertise in relation to diversity, equity, and inclusion to create a faculty development curriculum for our constituents (Zappe, Cutler, & Litzinger, in review FIE 2022). The Leonhard Center is an endowed teaching and learning center focused on the College of Engineering at Penn State. As part of our curriculum, we plan to integrate the “Reflecting on Your Practice: Applying Equity-Focused Teaching Principles” Guide developed by the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) at the University of Michigan [1]. This Guide focuses on four elements of equity-focused teaching: Transparency, Academic Belonging, Structured Interactions, and Critically Engaging Differences. Our plan is to create a workshop series that will focus on each of these elements.

The focus for this workshop will be Academic Belonging. The CRLT reflection guide defines Academic Belonging as “Cultivating students’ sense of connection to the discipline + scholarly and professional communities.” This includes helping students to see themselves as part of the professional discipline as well as students feeling that they belong within the classroom environment. A student’s overall sense of belonging in college and within a discipline has been shown to impact their success and persistence [2-3]. Additionally, faculty beliefs about students’ overall ability to be successful within a course or field has also been linked to student success [4]. Student perceptions of faculty empathy and caring have also been linked to a student’s sense of belonging, motivation, and success within the classroom [5-6]. Overall, providing resources and strategies to help faculty to promote a sense of belonging for all students within their classrooms and within

their discipline will aid in the creation of more inclusive classroom environments.

## II. GOAL OF THE SESSION AND ANTICIPATED AUDIENCE

The goal for this session will be to demonstrate a faculty development opportunity to help engineering faculty reflect on one aspect of their teaching practice related to enhancing equity and inclusion – student academic belonging. The learning objectives for this session include:

After attending this Special Session, participants will be able to:

- Reflect on current teaching practices related to promoting a sense of belonging
- Identify strategies to build community within their course and promote a sense of belonging.
- Define sense of belonging, empathy, and caring and how they can impact the inclusive culture within the classroom
- Identify concrete and specific ideas related to sense of belonging, empathy, caring, and inclusion that can be implemented within their classroom or professional practice.

This session will be applicable to any engineering faculty member interested in reflecting on and implementing strategies for a more inclusive classroom. Additionally, faculty developers and administrators may be interested in the structure and approach used to help facilitate the session.

## III. JUSTIFICATION FOR WHY THE PROPOSED SESSION IS NOVEL

This session will aid faculty in actively reflecting on their current practices and work as a group to generate ideas for how they could increase the sense of belonging among their student within their classroom. Multiple individual and group activities will be implemented to demonstrate the best practices being encouraged to demonstrate what they might look like in a teaching environment. Not only will faculty be provided an overview of what belonging means and why it is important within their classroom, but they will have the opportunity to actively generate implementable strategies for their teaching.

## IV. EXPLANATION OF THE INTERACTION AND AGENDA

A mixture of individual reflection and small group discussion will be used to help participants engage with the content. There will also be an opportunity for larger group discussion to share ideas, suggestions, and post questions to the group about how to implement strategies to promote belonging.

## A. Session Agenda

### 00:00-00:10 – Introductions and Icebreaker

To promote a sense of belonging within our workshop and demonstrate effective practices, we will facilitate networking and connections between participants by having formal introductions and an icebreaker/community building activity. Depending on the number of participants, this will either be done with the entire group or in small groups.

### 00:10-00:15 – Individual reflection using the Academic Belonging Page from [1]

Participants will then be provided with a copy of the Individual reflection guide on Academic Belonging [1]. The reflection guide includes 15 items for participants to rate as “I use this in my teaching,” “I sort of use this in my teaching,” “I do not use this in my teaching,” or “I would like to try this, though I may need more information and resources.” There is also an open response item for participants to reflect more broadly on their practice and potential ideas.

### 00:15-00:30 – Overview Academic Belonging and why it is important

The facilitators will provide an overview of Academic Belonging, Sense of Belonging more broadly, empathy, and caring. Connections will be made about how these constructs can impact the students experience and aid in creating an inclusive classroom.

### 00:30-00:50 – Small Group Discussion: Opportunities to grow sense of belonging within each participant’s teaching, using reflection as a guide.

Participants will then share elements of their reflection in a small group (4-6 participants). The participants can share their current practices as well as practices they would like to try moving forward. These small group discussions will focus on share practices and generating ideas for moving forward

### 00:50-01:05 – Small Group Report Out and Discussion

Each group will be given time (likely around 2 minutes) to share key takeaway thoughts. Any additional time can be spend building on ideas and general discussion or questions around the small group discussions.

### 01:05-01:10 – Letter to commitment: participants will be asked to write a short “Letter of Commitment” for what they expect to implement and accomplish moving forward over the next semester they are teaching.

The Letter of Commitment activity is a way for participants to reflect on what they have learned during the session and make a clear plan for moving forward on what they would like to see change in their practices. These do not need to be formal or extensive, but more of a reminder of what they want

to do when they get home from the conference and moving forward.

### 01:10-01:20 – Open Discussion, Questions and Wrap-up

The remainder of the session will be open for participant questions, discussion, and final take-aways from the facilitators.

## V. EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND FUTURE WORK

The expected outcome for this session is to provide participants with explicit strategies to increase student sense of belonging within their classrooms. Additionally, we will showcase a workshop approach to help faculty learn about important elements for DEI and generate strategies for implementation. Moving forward, additional DEI reflection workshops around different topics could be provided. Additionally, all participants will be asked to reflect on how they will take what they learn moving forward with their professional practice to ensure a broader impact from the session.

## FACILITATOR BIOGRAPHIES

Drs. Stephanie Cutler and Sarah Zappe work in the Leonhard Center for the Enhancement of Engineering Education at Penn State. The Leonhard Center facilitates faculty development opportunities and teaching innovation projects within the College of Engineering. The facilitators bring expertise in Educational Psychology and Engineering Education with them to the session. Additionally, the facilitators have received the Helen Plants Award for Best Non-traditional session at FIE for previous sessions and take great pride in creating exuberant sessions with lasting impact on participants.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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