Executive Summary
Fostering Student Belonging and Connectedness in College: A Scoping Review

Janelle R. Clay, PhD[1]
Georgia State University
2024 Summer Fellow
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Student belonging in postsecondary education is increasingly recognized as crucial for promoting student retention, academic success, and overall well-being. A sense of belonging is considered essential for students' emotional and psychological well-being, their motivation and how they make sense of their academic environment (Gopalan & Brady, 2020). Studies suggest that belonging uncertainty can lead to social and academic disengagement resulting in poorer academic outcomes. Conversely, a strong sense of belonging is linked to better academic outcomes, particularly course grades, persistence, and completion (Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Walton & Cohen, 2007). However, despite these assertions, research on the relationship between belonging and academic outcomes has produced mixed results, particularly, for students from historically marginalized groups. The review aims to contribute to existing body of knowledge by examining interventions related to student belonging in college. Eight quantitative studies were reviewed, categorizing interventions into experiential and group-based, narrative-based, technology-mediated, and mindset-based strategies. These interventions address social and academic challenges faced by students from underrepresented and marginalized groups.

- Experiential and Group-Based Interventions: Programs like The Connection Project (Costello et al., 2022) and Klamath Connection (Johnson et al., 2020) emphasize social interaction and shared experiences to foster peer support and community. These interventions focus on face-to-face engagement, encouraging students to build lasting relationships that enhance both academic success and psychological well-being.
- Narrative-Based Interventions: Approaches such as the College Transition Assignment (Murphy et al., 2020; Weaver et al., 2021) rely on personal stories to normalize common challenges, particularly during the transition to college. Students reflect on their experiences, which helps them recognize that feelings of doubt or isolation are temporary, fostering a shared sense of belonging.
- Technology-Based Interventions: Digital platforms like You Are College Material—You Belong (Patterson Silver Wolf et al., 2021; Silver Wolf (Adelv unegv Waya) et al., 2017) and Strayhorn's (2023) web-based video intervention, deliver culturally affirming messages to underrepresented students. These video-based interventions, followed by group discussions, aim to normalize concerns and promote help-seeking behaviors, providing scalable solutions for institutions.
- Growth Mindset Interventions: While not directly focused on belonging, the Growth Mindset Intervention (Broda et al., 2018) encourages students to adopt a view of

intelligence as malleable, which helps foster resilience, a key component of academic and social integration.

Across the eight studies, most interventions demonstrated positive effects on students' sense of belonging and academic outcomes. For example, The Connection Project significantly improved students' belongingness scores, while video-based interventions enhanced GPA and reenrollment rates among underrepresented students (Silver Wolf et al., 2017; Strayhorn, 2023). However, some interventions did not consistently produce academic benefits. Weaver et al. (2021) found no significant effect on retention despite improvements in perceived belonging, and Broda et al. (2018) observed GPA improvements for Latino/a students, but not for African American students, suggesting that interventions may need to be tailored for specific groups.

Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of designing targeted belonging interventions to meet the unique needs of diverse student populations. Programs that foster peer connections, integrate culturally relevant narratives, and provide reflective spaces tend to be most effective in improving both social and academic outcomes. In conclusion, belonging interventions are vital for promoting student engagement, academic persistence, and social integration in postsecondary education. Addressing structural barriers and creating inclusive environments can help improve outcomes for marginalized student groups, fostering a more equitable academic experience.

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