

Note taking template
Academic Planning Summit
January 16, 2015

Title of Session: Social belonging, URM (underrepresented) and nontraditional students

Faculty Facilitator(s): Bryan Dewsbury

Note taker name: Michele Martel

Check one:

_____ **Morning Breakout 1** _____ **Morning breakout 2**
X **Afternoon breakout 1** _____ **Afternoon breakout 2**

Ideas proposed/Recommendations

Importance of social belonging: Sense of place that an individual has in a new environment. Common responses to new environments tend to range from feeling out of place to feeling enriched and accepted.

Does URI as an institution understand our URM students? These students need additional guidance in how colleges work. There are 275-400 (documented) first generation college students each year.

How can we create a sense of belonging? URI has started the process of inclusion by creating smaller clusters/cohorts (learning communities, living learning communities).

- URI has been attempting to move from a “school” to a “community” but the student body is changing so rapidly that it is difficult to capture the diversity.

How do students form identities throughout their academic careers? (Within themselves, their families, communities, etc.)

- Advising Issue: We don't talk to students about *why* they are majoring in a particular area. If the student cannot give you the reasons why they are in a major, you need to dig deeper and ask more questions. Honest conversations between faculty and students are necessary to help students create identities.

Example that can apply to any URM/nontraditional student:

Women are selecting majors and life choices based on a sense of belongingness and not necessarily based on their interests. These decisions are made without any advising from faculty. Faculty have the responsibility to make it clear that all fields are made for everyone. For example, one should use female leaders as examples in class, so students have an opportunity to see women succeeding. Give guidance in developing a sense of recognizing who they are, what their differences are, and how to work and succeed in any environment.

Some students may feel that they need to streamline themselves into an accepted position. Help all students navigate by building empathy and awareness of URM and nontraditional students.

How can faculty perform social belonging in classes? Students typically enter a class having already identified whether they can do math/science or not. Carol Dweck's research says if you tell a student they can do something, they will believe you. There is an inherent need to understand educational psychology and notice students and trends in your classroom.

Stereotypical Threat: As a member of a particular group, you are aware of stereotypes in your own group, and feed into them.

What initiatives might we create to help faculty start the conversation about social belongingness and other cultural issues?

- Office for Advancement of Teaching and Learning: idea to form book clubs to help faculty think about the move from generalities to identifying their own biases/stereotypes.
- Faculty have social belonging issues too! There is a real opportunity to introduce issues like belongingness to new faculty members.
- The University should change as the population of the university changes. Need a more global perspective university-wide.
- Faculty mentoring group for new faculty that provides a safe place within the individual colleges to ask questions or connect.

Eco-mapping: ID all different communities they belong to, how are they different and how are they similar: cultural competencies and cultural acceptance. There are skills and exercises to help individuals identify biases and act introspective.

Three points that would help the institution make the next step:

1. Need a safe place that faculty can speak their minds.
2. Fine-tuning social and emotional radar – how you educate yourself on bias and stereotype- help become more aware of entire classroom and the individuals in it. Need to be more respectful and comfortable with relating to difference by modeling acceptance. We should retain the interest in social belongingness.
3. How do people identify into groups and how will this change going forward? People who struggle with identity questions not only want a safe place to feel like they belong, but also try new things and branch out. Small groups help provide confidence to participate in larger groups (students *and* faculty!)

The university as a whole community (faculty, staff, students, etc.) should be focused on and trained in cultural competency. It is important to create a sense of community at every level; we cannot continue to separate student affairs and academics. In student affairs, “people don't care about how much you know until they understand how much you care,” it goes a long way to engage students.

Notable Issues, Questions, Challenges:

N/A

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Social belonging: Sense of place that an individual has in a new environment. Students of all walks of life and how they feel when they come to a large institution like URI.

URI is a great petrie dish for the future of diversity in higher education – institutions like ours are going to be looked at as a low-cost model of introducing diversity. STEM fields are concerned with retention and attrition issues.

International students have a difficult time finding a place to belong in our university.

Providence and Kingston campuses are separate due to continuing education students versus traditional students but we are starting to see more traditional students go to Providence. Professors tend to emphasize inclusive behavior within the classroom to make up for the lack of inclusion on the Providence campus.

In the library, students use the library as a social learning community; social belonging comes easy to these groups. This helps them succeed and ultimately reach peak self-actualization. The library hosts group study as well as individuals working beside each other to feel like they belong to a learning institution. The university should promote the library more as a place to succeed. Research question: how do the students who use the library compare in social belonging to students who study alone?

Diversity: Helps to see leaders in their cultural groups.

Students have small cultural groups where they can feel safe, but would also like to feel that the university as a whole can teach everyone new things.

Next step: How do we empower existing faculty to better understand the cultural climate in general on campus?

- Faculty book groups: Can help faculty move from generalities to identifying their own biases/stereotypes. Learn about other departments in the university. Feeling overall momentum within the university; just looking for the connectivity. Searching for a campus-wide conversation.

Part of the human condition is that we all have these biases due to social upbringing. When you recognize that, you are able to identify how to deal with these biases. The conventional structure of the class is hierarchical. However, in the social, emotional classroom, we are a community and need to understand each other in order to identify and answer big questions.

Socioeconomic diversity or first generation college students have difficulties navigating the academic world.

Need to take the time to observe students and gain a new insight on reasons behind their actions.

Acculturation/ assimilation/validation – this is where the Arts can play a role. Arts have always been inclusive with many diverse cultures; an untapped resource for consultation about inclusion. There is a lot of work being done with cultural validation in the Arts on campus. It's about the whole person, not a gender/age/race/culture.

- Possible solution: Instead of broadcasting to entire campus, look for ways to create bridge between STEM and the arts. If those partnerships work, they can work as a model.
- Campus climate is not as accepting to cultural awareness, **yet**.

Are there available resources/funds for small multicultural events?

Is there an opportunity for a discussion for students and faculty about campus climate?

- There will hopefully be an opportunity at Inclusion Day: March 26-27, 2015

Notable Issues, Questions, Challenges:

N/A