



PREPARED BY DANIELA GONZALEZ

Assessment: Shaping Academic Resources: For Diverse Student Experiences and Belonging

2024

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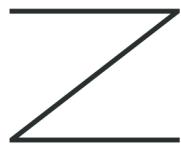
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Introduction



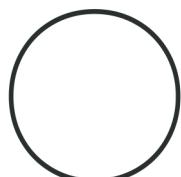
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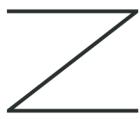
ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Daniela Gonzalez is currently completing her master's degree in Applied Anthropology at California State University, Long Beach.

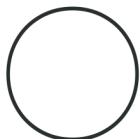
Throughout her academic career, Daniela has gained knowledge and expertise on various organizational and program evaluation methods through her formal training in Anthropology. Her current approach is informed by the unique combination of critical design research, ethnography, and stakeholder engagement approaches (including collaborative evaluations). By leveraging these methodologies, Daniela collects rich and diverse qualitative data, engages with stakeholders in a meaningful way, and analyzes data in a manner that captures both surface and deep-level meanings. Her multifaceted background contributes to her ability to generate insightful and actionable recommendations for program design, implementation, and evaluation that are grounded in a deep understanding of the complex social, cultural, and economic factors that influence program and strategy outcomes.



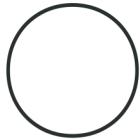
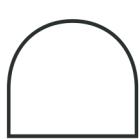
“The Anthropological Lens allows me to gain a holistic understanding of the intricate interplay between people, programs, and the cultural dynamics shaping their use.”



Shaping Academic Resources: For Diverse Student Experiences and Belonging is a proposal for a cultural assessment.



The California State University of Long Beach (CSULB) is a public university, part of the California State University system. CSULB aims to “support a compassionate *community*” as part of the value system and shared mission as an organization (“Supporting a Community of Belonging” 2023).



CSULB offers resources for students including academic support, tutoring, career advising, psychological and physical support and services, leadership, student involvement opportunities, and diversity and inclusion resources which seek to offer *community*. Although this umbrella of resources covers many areas of the student experience, all aim to contribute to campus goals of community building and increase student success . The Student Affairs office describes the resources as a “network of support to guide students to graduation” which “help [students] get connected across the campus” (“Campus Resources”).

In 2020, a sense of belonging was measured through a Campus Climate survey. The survey collected quantitative data in which only 50.36% of full-time CSULB students strongly agreed to the following statements (“Diverse Learning Environments Survey 2019-2020 Results” 2020):

- “I feel a sense of belonging to this campus”
- “I feel that I am a member of this college”
- “If asked, I would recommend this college to others”



CSULB is seeking an assessment from a diversity, equity, and inclusion specialist to guide short and long-term DEI strategies for current and future student experiences with academic resource designs, features, and services. CSULB is looking to expand on previous findings with a focus on belonging and academic resources to align current organizational processes with DEI strategy.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

During preliminary research interviews with students and staff, Daniela uncovered...

- Belonging is related to experiences with staff and that there are varying uses of the term belonging.
- There is no current unified definition of belonging within the university.
- The Campus Climate Survey provided numerical insights but did not provide qualitative context that is essential for formulating impactful and meaningful strategy plans.

*"I connected immediately upon being accepted, and I found a counselor that I actually went to see." - **Student**
describing an immediate attempt to build a relationship with staff*

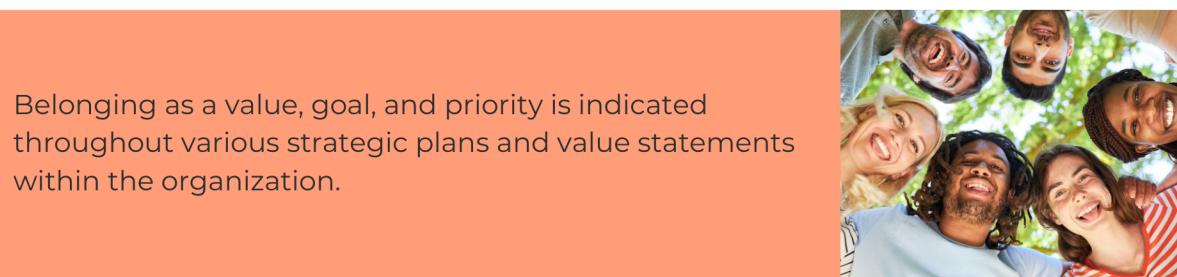


*"I like to meet in person to establish rapport with individuals that provide services" - **Student***

PROBLEM

For CSULB to meet their goals of providing academic resources that foster a supportive learning environment and community, it is important to recognize the significance of a shared sense of belonging. The absence of a unified definition of belonging within the university hinders accurate measurement and understanding.

CSULB needs to define a cohesive definition of belonging to work towards cultivating inclusive academic spaces that truly meet the diverse needs of the student community.



Belonging as a value, goal, and priority is indicated throughout various strategic plans and value statements within the organization.



It is critical to consider the presence and use of the word of belonging to identify shared definitions or interpretations of belonging within staff, faculty, and students.



A quantitative summary and report, while providing numerical insights, often falls short in gathering rich context that is essential for formulating impactful and meaningful strategy plans.

Proposal: CSULB would benefit from a qualitative understanding of community and belonging. A blend of quantitative and qualitative insights forms a holistic foundation for strategies that are not only data-driven but also contextually informed, ensuring a more comprehensive and effective approach to organizational planning and strategy.

ASSESSMENT

The assessment identified the current student experiences with academic services and their sense of belonging. Ultimately, the study identified the collective interpretation of belonging and needs of students for current and future academic resources.

01

Review

Facilitated an organizational-wide review of belonging and its impact on academic resources.



02

Needs Assessment

To align proposed academic resource features and designs with current organizational expectations and reported sense of belonging from 2020 Campus Climate Report.



03

Recommendations

Provide a short and long-term action plan to increase sense of belonging and improve academic resource services.



METHODOLOGY

This assessment design used qualitative methods, including interviews and focus groups to gain holistic insights on the patterns of student resource utilization and to explore the student and staff experiences, feelings, interactions, and behaviors throughout multiple campus resource spaces.

01

Interviews

Semi-Structured interviews were used to gather context specific data for individual spaces. They provided the flexibility to probe and enter more in-depth discussions on specific topics as participants responded to questions and uncovered new themes. Interviews also allowed beliefs and practices to be uncovered to better understand belonging in students and experiences with current academic resources.

02

Focus Groups

The use of focus groups in the research plan was grounded in the recognition that certain insights are best unearthed through collective discussions and the synergy of group dynamics. Focus groups served as a powerful tool to provide students with the opportunity to express individual opinions but also to collaboratively design an academic resource. This interactive approach allowed participants to build upon and challenge each other's ideas, which fostered a creative and collective vision for an ideal resource center.

03

Data Analysis

This needs assessment depended on data analysis to conclude findings. A software program titled NVivo was used for thematic analysis. Transcripts and data from interviews and focus groups were coded according to assessments on the experiences with academic resources (positive, negative, neutral) and for features students and staff/faculty perceived as priorities for academic features. Belonging and related terms to describe a sense of belonging were coded and identified to define perceptions and compare concepts of belonging.

"Build Community." 2023. Annual Report 2030 Build Community. August 25, 2023. <https://www.csulb.edu/beach-2030/annual-report-2023/build-community>.

"Campus Resources." CSULB Student Affairs.
<https://www.csulb.edu/student-affairs/dean-of-students/campus-resources>.

"Diverse Learning Environments Survey 2019-2020 Results." 2020.
<https://csulb.sharepoint.com/sites/Campus-Climate/>.

"On-Campus Resources." 2021. <Https://Www.csulb.edu/Student-Affairs/Dream-Success-Center/Campus-Resources>. May 11, 2021.
<https://www.csulb.edu/student-affairs/dream-success-center/campus-resources>.

"Supporting a Community of Belonging." 2023.
<Https://Www.csulb.edu/Beach-2030/Annual-Report-2023/Supporting-a-Community-of-Belonging>. August 25, 2023. <https://www.csulb.edu/beach-2030/annual-report-2023/supporting-a-community-of-belonging>.

Shared with TikTok for position consideration.

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