

# Fast Actions to Increase Student Sense of Belonging



UF Interface 2023



# Motivation

Sense of belonging positively influences academic achievement, retention, and persistence (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Rhee, 2008).



# What is Sense of Belonging?



“...sense of belonging refers to students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers.”

Strayhorn, Terrell L. *College Students' Sense of Belonging : A Key to Educational Success for All Students*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018. (available online via UF Libraries/ProQuest Ebook Central)

“...a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together.”

McMillan, D.W., & Chavis (1986, January.) Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 14, 6-23.



## Plan for session?

- 3 Quick Actions
- Individual Reflection
- Group Activity
- Shares and Q&A


# NameCoach

- Name pronunciation tool available in Canvas
- Invite students to record their names and share pronouns
- Emphasize why this is important to you and your class environment
- Practice pronouncing names that are challenging for you

**Students record one time and pronunciation is available in all future courses that enable NameCoach.**

Learn more at  
<https://go.ufl.edu/namecoach>





# Impact of Growth Mindset Syllabus Language on Students' Anticipated Sense of Belonging

Research shows that syllabus language that communicates growth mindset increases student sense of belonging and improves student learning outcomes.



# The syllabus is a tool to promote student sense of belonging

Concept	Fixed Syllabus	Growth Syllabus
Prerequisites	"If you have not mastered those concepts, you should consider dropping this course."	"If you have not mastered those concepts, you should see me or a teaching assistant and we will provide resources...which should prepare you for this course."
Daily homework	Not graded. Only encouraged for weaker students.	Graded. Encouraged for all students.
Quizzes	"Based on my previous experiences teaching this class, weaker students that do not perform well on quizzes struggle a lot on the exams. If you realize that you are not performing well on the first quiz, you should consider dropping the course."	"The quizzes show me how well students are understanding the material, whether there are some students who are not there yet, and whether I need to review certain concepts with the class. If you find yourself failing quizzes, you should seek additional help to grow your understanding of the material."
Exams	"I do not give partial credit on answers—students either get the questions correct or they do not."	"I am interested in your learning and your approach to problems. Therefore, partial credit will be given when you have solved parts of the problem correctly."
Attendance	"I do not take attendance in class. I believe some students can do well in the course without attending class, and I will not penalize these students with strong math abilities. I recommend that weaker students attend every lecture and discussion section."	"I do not take attendance in class...I recommend that all students attend every lecture and discussion section, regardless of previous performance. All students will learn something new and attending class is the best way to learn the concepts and improve your math skills."
Grading	Heavily weighted final exam. Few opportunities to demonstrate understanding.	Relatively equally weighted, multiple exams. Many opportunities to demonstrate understanding.
Help sessions	"The Math Department offers help sessions for struggling students enrolled in M212. However, smart students who are gifted in math will probably not need these resources."	"The Math Department offers help sessions for students enrolled in M212. I strongly suggest that all students make use of these resources, as every student can improve and challenge themselves by attending these help sessions."

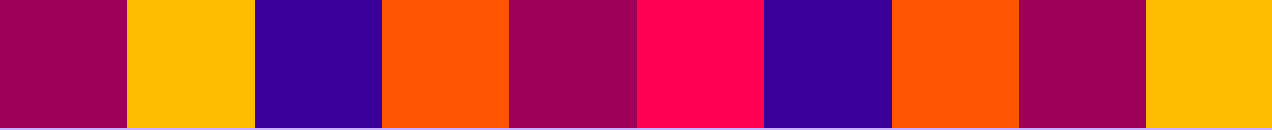
# Remedial Help vs. Academic Supports

- **Fixed Syllabus**

- This campus provides extensive resources for students **who are struggling** academically. I have provided a list of the academic support offices below.
- **Math Department Help Desk:** The Math Department offers help sessions for students **who are failing** this course. Please check the Math Department website for information about their virtual drop-in hours, or to schedule an appointment.

- **Growth Syllabus**

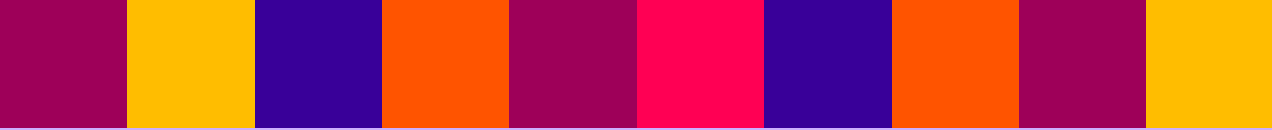
- This campus provides extensive academic supports for students, and **these supports are there to let students achieve the academic success they are truly capable of.** Most students access them at some point in pursuit of their degree. I have provided a list of the academic support offices offered by [school name] below.
- **Math Department Help Desk:** The Math Department offers help sessions for students enrolled in M212. **I strongly suggest that all students make use of these resources as every student can improve and challenge themselves by attending these help sessions.** Please check the Math Department website for information about their virtual drop-in hours, or to schedule an appointment.

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- Is it accurate?
  - Is an extension necessary due per UF attendance policy?



## Late Assignment Policy

- Harsh policies discourage less confident students from communicating.
- Are all students aware that they can ask for an extension to avoid a late penalty?

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- Acceptable reasons for absence from or failure to engage in class include illness; Title IX-related situations; serious accidents or emergencies affecting the student, their roommates, or their family; special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, professional conferences); military obligation; severe weather conditions that prevent class participation; religious holidays; participation in official university activities (e.g., music performances, athletic competition, debate); and court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena). Other reasons (e.g., a job interview or club activity) may be deemed acceptable if approved by the instructor.
  - Students shall be permitted a reasonable amount of time to make up the material or activities covered during absence from class or inability to engage in class activities because of the reasons outlined above.




## UF Attendance Policy



## Consider:

- Incentivizing early submission
- Inviting students to communicate when they struggle
- Encouraging them to turn-in partial work for feedback
- Establishing a formal process for extension requests



## Late Assignment Policy + Growth Mindset

- What do late policies teach besides compliance?
- Consider prioritizing mastery learning over compliance.



Sign up to enroll



**Your Syllabus as a Tool to  
Promote Student Equity,  
Belonging, and Growth**

**FREE**

Need help placing your order? [Contact us](#)



## **Growth Mindset Syllabus Resource**

Student Experience Project Course, “Your Syllabus as a Tool to Promote Student Equity, Belonging, and Growth”



# Ally Accessibility Report

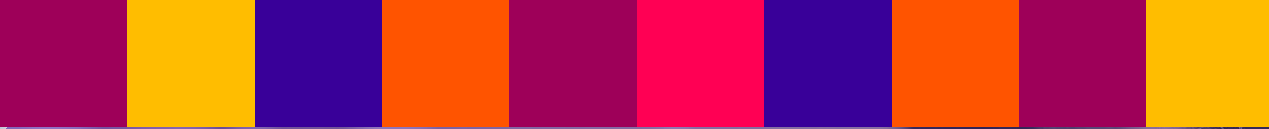
- Identify areas for improvement
- Prioritize issues to address
- Find out where you need guidance
- Make it a part of your practice
- Celebrate your progress



## 3 Fast Actions

- Create a welcoming environment with NameCoach
- Foster growth mindset via the course syllabus
- Increase course accessibility using Ally





## Individual Reflection

Reflect on a time when you felt a lack of belonging. What could have been done to prevent that?

# Group Breakout

- As a group, consider your assigned scenario.
- Describe proactive action(s) that would increase student sense belonging and prevent the situation from occurring.
- Share proposed solutions:  
<https://go.ufl.edu/breakout>





“One of the biggest surprises in this research was learning that fitting in and belonging are not the same thing. In fact, fitting in is one of the greatest barriers to belonging. Fitting in is about assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be in order to be accepted. Belonging, on the other hand, doesn’t require us to change who we are; it requires us to be who we are.”

- Brené Brown





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