

# 7th Annual Celebration of Teaching and Learning Symposium, University of Southern Indiana, February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023

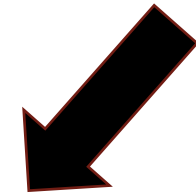


**Lessons from the Student Experience Project:**

**Low lift strategies to increase student engagement, improve educational outcomes and reduce equity gaps**

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# Introduction



# My teaching journey

Initially:

Clear lectures, real world examples, enthusiasm, office hours

Next iteration:

Active learning in lecture halls with informal group work and peer learning facilitators

Refinement:

Active learning in studio classrooms with formal group work and peer learning facilitators

**Result: Improvement in learning, final exam grades, drop/fail rates, and student evaluations, but there were still students I couldn't reach...**

# UNM SEP

## STUDENT EXPERIENCE PROJECT



“The UNM SEP has been transformative, particularly for student belonging. Faculty throughout the pandemic felt that the work gave them a community and a reason to stay in there. Advisors are now adapting the SEP to their work too.”  
– UNM administrator

**WHAT:** A 3 year national project to establish evidence-based learning conditions that are known to promote academic engagement and increase equity in academic outcomes.

**GOAL:** To improve academic outcomes and create an equitable university experience through innovative, evidence-based, and “low-lift” teaching practices that increase degree attainment.

**WHO:** USA: 300 faculty at 6 universities working with researchers and learning partners. UNM: 135 faculty from 10 UNM colleges, all 4 branches, and 43 departments, have used SEP with ~2,500 students.

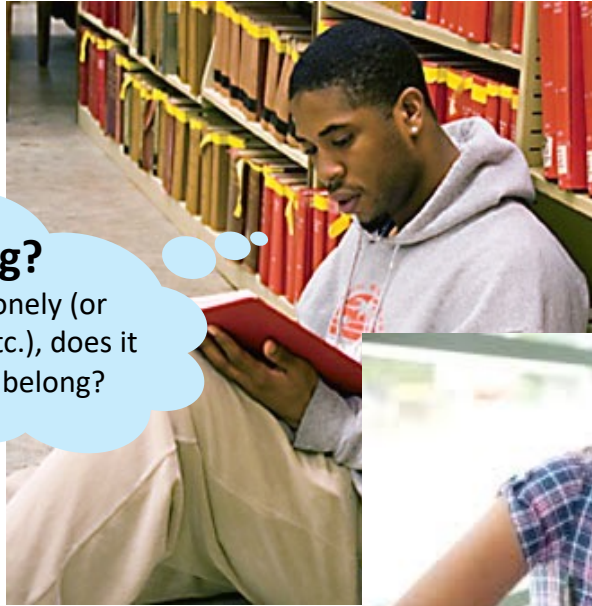
# Findings: Student Experience Project for Six Universities

- 1 Faculty are essential and interested partners in efforts to improve student experience and create institutional change
- 2 With the right resources and institutional support, faculty can meaningfully improve students' experience
- 3 Improved student experience predicts improved academic outcomes and engagement
- 4 Student experience has important implications for educational equity
- 5 Efforts to improve student experience can also enhance instructor belonging and job satisfaction





# College students are asking key questions



## Do I belong?

When I feel lonely (or disrespected, etc.), does it mean I don't belong?

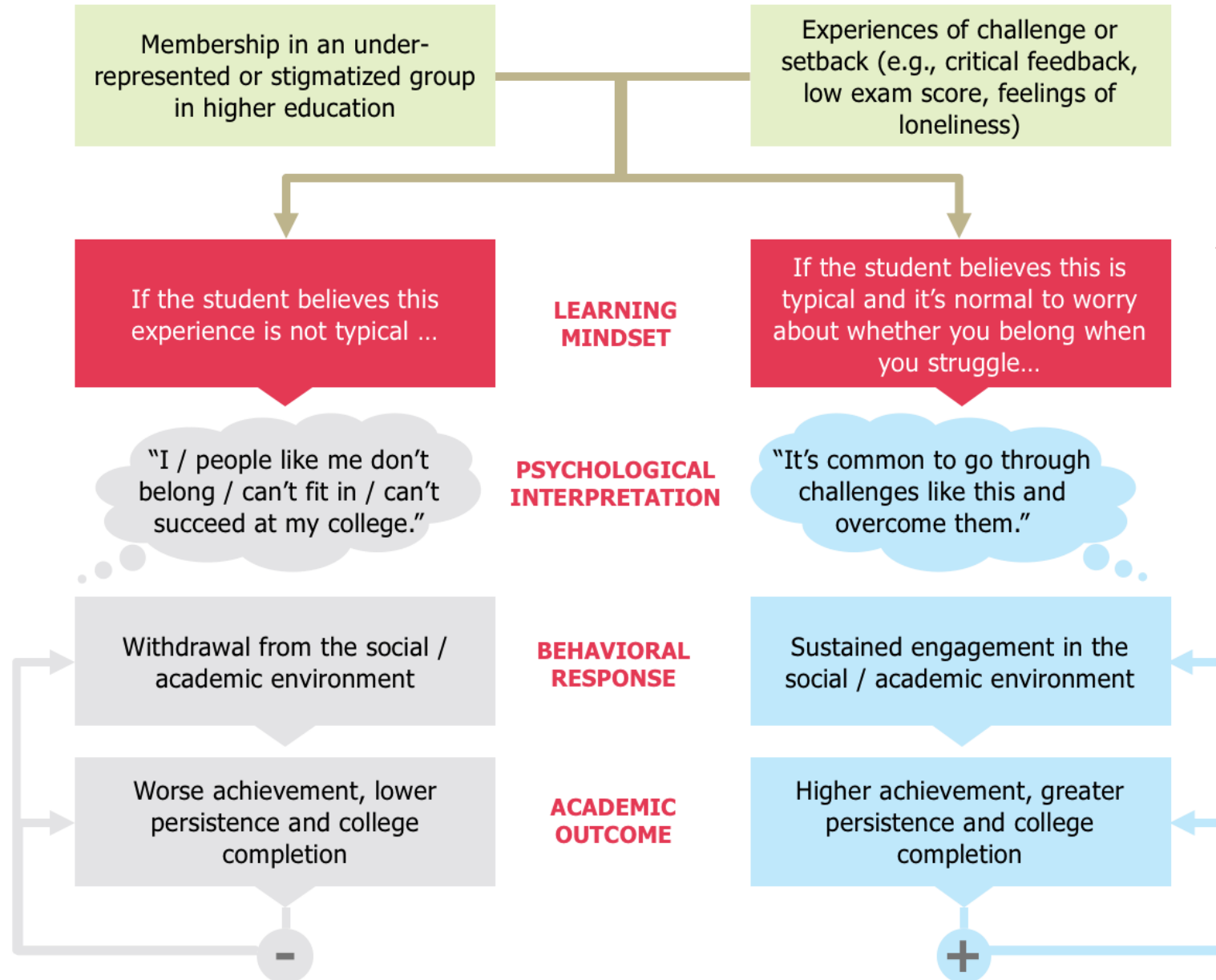


## Can I do it?

When it's hard, does it mean I can't do it?

- Their answers can determine how they face challenges that arise, whether they reach out for support, and ultimately affect their retention and academic achievement
- The answers are especially important for students from structurally disadvantaged groups

# How Learning Mindsets Affect Students



*Key factors:*

- Instructor growth mindset
- Student social belonging

## Instructors who communicate a growth mindset

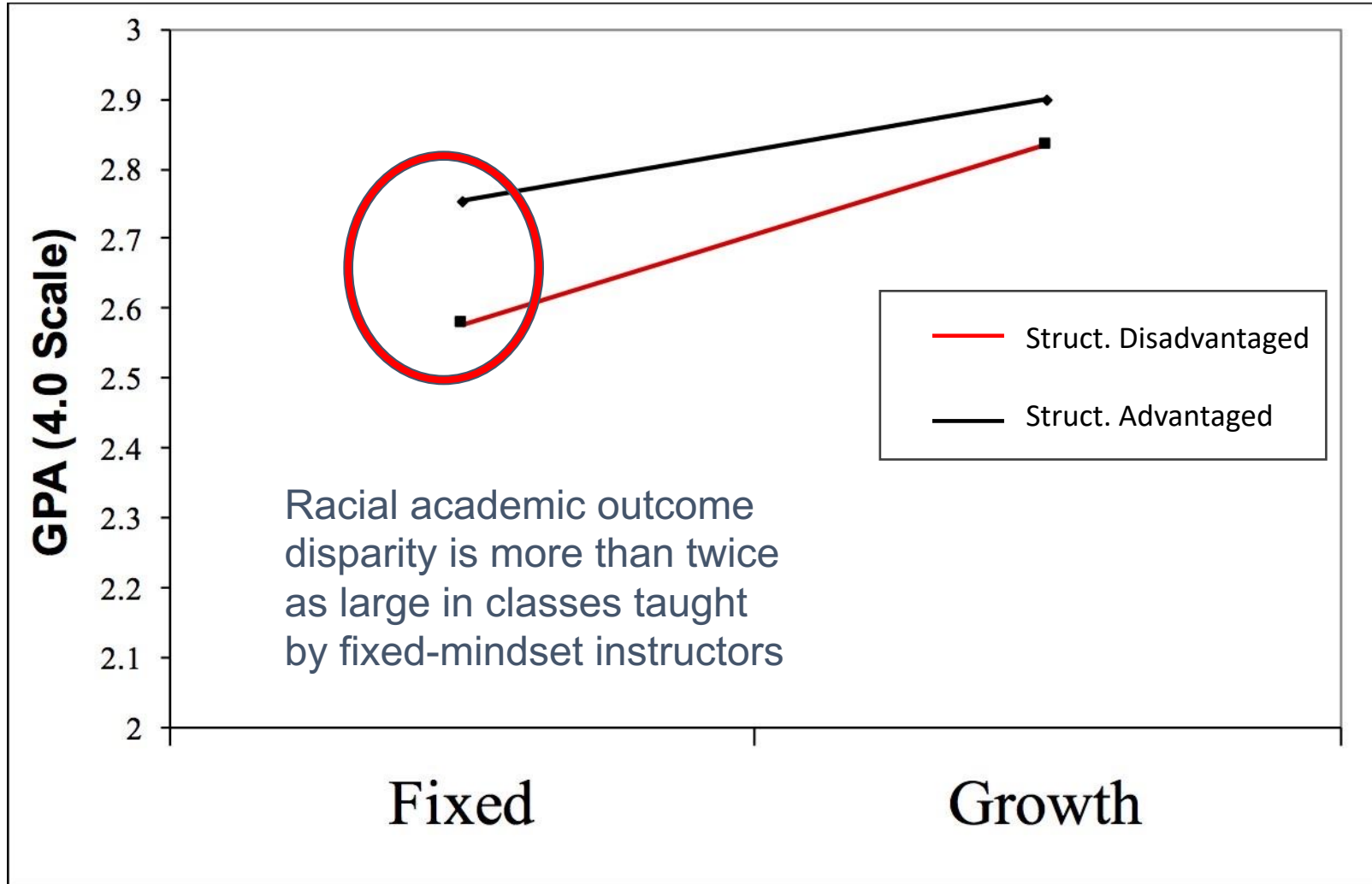
- Convey that academic ability is malleable, and not the result of innate qualities
- Convey that students can improve their academic ability over time with effort, feedback, and using effective strategies for learning

## Instructors who communicate a fixed mindset

- Convey that academic ability is fixed and students can't do much to change it
- Convey that some students have what it takes to succeed, and some students don't
- Have a disproportionately negative effect on students from structurally disadvantaged groups



# Instructor mindset affects student outcomes



Self-reported STEM Instructor Mindset Beliefs

150  
STEM  
instructors

602  
courses

7  
semesters

15,214  
students

Canning, Muenks, Green, & Murphy (2019). STEM faculty who believe ability is fixed have larger racial achievement gaps and inspire less student motivation in their classes. *Science Advances*, 5:2.



## Growth Mindset does NOT mean that:

- Every student is equally prepared for a given course or every student can grow their ability enough in a single term to succeed
- Successful completion of the class is merely a matter of *effort*
- It's about being nice or lowering standards

*\*Encouraging students to try hard without the tools for preparation, strategies and resources to grow in a course = 'False Growth mindset'. Students often face structural and environmental challenges to growing their ability.*



## Social belonging and the college classroom

When students experience a sense of social belonging in college, they are more likely to stay engaged, seek help when they need it, and persist through academic challenges

### Belonging uncertainty

- negatively associated with achievement, performance, and well-being
- more acutely experienced by groups historically excluded or underserved in higher education, contributing to equity gaps between well-served and underserved groups
- Can be exacerbated by perceived 'adverse' events e.g. a low score on an exam

Extensive research shows that interventions that increase social belonging by normalizing challenges can reduce academic outcomes gaps between racially minoritized and white students, women and men in male-dominated programs and first- and continuing-generation students.

# Improving Student Belonging Improves Academic Outcomes



Students in male-dominated engineering programs at highly selective program

Social-belonging treatment vs control

Walton, G. M., Logel, C., Peach, J. M., Spencer, S., & Zanna, M. P. (2015). Two interventions to boost women's achievement in engineering: Social-belonging and self-affirmation-training. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 107: 468-485. .



# Instructors Who Foster a Sense of Belonging in College

- Convey that their classroom is a place where all students belong
- Convey that almost everyone faces challenges (e.g. lower grades; feeling intimidated by course material)
- Convey that such challenges are not a sign that a student does not belong there
- Convey that by giving it time, and taking agentic steps, most students do come to feel a sense of belonging

## Fostering belonging does NOT mean:

- Blaming students for having belonging uncertainty
- Dismissing their belonging concerns
- Unrealistically positive or needlessly negative

# Classroom Strategies to support Student Experience

1. Syllabus Review
2. Rebrand Office Hours
3. Facilitate Connections
4. Attuned Course Messages
5. Course Policy Review
6. Gallery Project

Also:

Assessment scaffolding

Wise Feedback

Physical and virtual audits

**Transforming the college student experience so  
that every student is supported to succeed**





# 1. Syllabus Review: Six Core Questions



1. Does this syllabus communicate that the instructor has a “growth mindset” rather than a “fixed mindset” about students’ abilities?
2. Do the messages in the syllabus communicate that it is normal to be challenged by course material, and that this is not a sign that a student is not capable of learning or does not belong in the course?
3. Does the syllabus communicate that the instructor and the instructional team care about students’ success?
4. Does the syllabus communicate that diversity is valued in the classroom?
5. Does the syllabus normalize challenges that students often face in college, and connect students with resources that can support their overall well-being?
6. Does the syllabus communicate that utilizing academic resources is a standard part of succeeding?

# Analyze a sample syllabus using the 6 core questions

Non-attuned syllabus:

With a partner, take a few minutes to read through the syllabus focusing on any of the core questions.

Identify a section in which this syllabus doesn't meet the guidelines for your particular question. What do you think was the instructor's intent when writing this section? Do you have ideas about how to rephrase it?

Attuned syllabus example:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/127sINL\\_3RdYqEjU9VCpa3PNSognRDtR\\_/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/127sINL_3RdYqEjU9VCpa3PNSognRDtR_/view?usp=sharing)





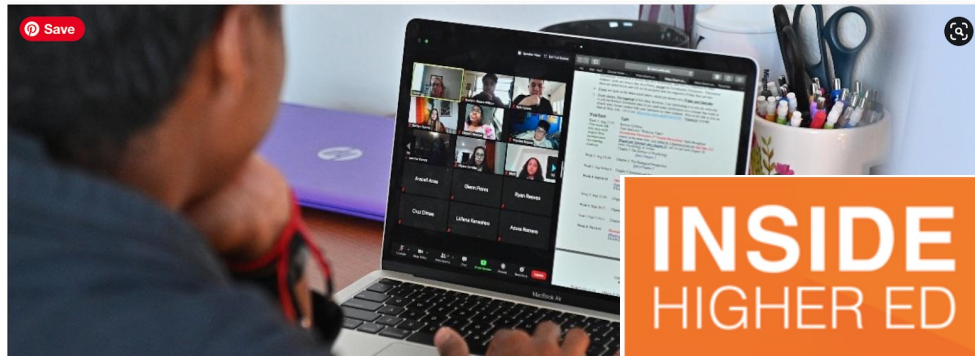
# Syllabus Review is part of the SEP 1<sup>st</sup> day toolkit



## Creating a Friendlier Syllabus


Course syllabi set the tone for the whole semester. With the help of a new tool kit, some instructors are overhauling theirs to make them more welcoming, inclusive and focused on student success.

By **Maria Carrasco** // April 21, 2022



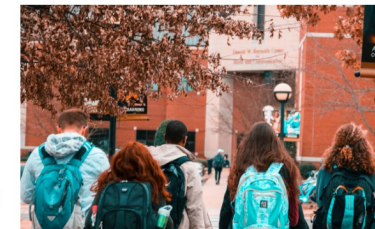
### STUDENTS

## How To Make A Syllabus Sound More Human

 Rebecca Kelliher  
Apr 21, 2022



A small shift in tone or word choice on a syllabus can bolster students' feelings of belonging and potential for success in a classroom, which can improve academic outcomes. That insight lies behind the launch of a free [First Day Toolkit](#) from the Student Experience Project (SEP) with



EDUCATION

## How To Help College Students Feel Like They Belong From Day 1

M. Peter McPherson Contributor @  
*I'm president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities*

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## Teaching

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

[Data](#) from the Student Experience Project, which involved 300 instructors across several campuses and was led by the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities and a coalition of urban-serving universities, demonstrated how syllabi revisions can increase students' sense of belonging.

## 2. Reframe office hours

- Uncover the purpose of 'office hours'
- Consider a different language – 'student hours' or 'drop-in hours'
- Or a different set-up – 'weekly review' or '5 things to know about... before the exam'
- Keep a bowl of fruit or candy, a picture of your pet

## 3. Facilitate connections:

- Icebreakers

A. Tell your 'name story' – speak to a couple of the questions in the list below.

Who are you named after and why? Where does this name originate from? What special meaning does this name hold for you? Do you have any memories or stories associated with this name? Do you like this name? Why or why not? If it is a name you chose for yourself, why did you choose this name in particular?

B. What are you really good at that isn't directly related to your academic work?

- Informal communication mechanisms e.g. Discord, discussion board on course management system
- Acknowledge campus/world events that might affect them
- Find a mechanism to check-in

## 4. Course messaging:

- Plan to send messages at times that coincide with the psychological stress points of the semester
- OR: Consider regular course announcements: Pick a specific day and message frequency (e.g. every Sunday)
- Include assignment due dates, reminders of upcoming exams and assessments
- Include a short message in each to promote belonging, communicate your growth mindset and normalize challenges.

**Week 5:** I'm making good progress with grading and hope to have that finalized before class time tomorrow.

Remember that the main purpose of this class is to help you learn the content and how to apply it to a high standard that will serve as a good foundation for your future. Another goal is to help you become a better test taker. **You are each fully capable of mastery of both of these goals**, and even if the first exam didn't go so well, many students who have scored lower than hoped on the first test have been able to succeed in the class and grow their content knowledge and learning skills significantly by adjusting strategies to increase efficiency (which does not necessarily take more time that you have already been spending).

## 5. Course Policy Review

Who are your students? How can you respect and support them through your course policies?

### My grading policies:

1. Some built-in flexibility in attendance and 'Life happens' allowance for regular assignments
2. Occasional opportunities to make up credit for exams through exam corrections discussion board and/or exam wrapper reflection.
3. Academic integrity policies and language

### Course materials:

1. Be pro-active about accessibility
2. Consideration of cost of course materials
  - open access resources
  - low cost options
  - text-book on reserve in library

# 6. Advice from former students: Gallery Project



# Solicit submissions from former students to with advice to my current students on how to succeed:



## A bit about me:

I was born in Durango, México and lived there for a few years before moving to the US. I grew up here in New Mexico in a small town called Grants that's about an hour west of Albuquerque. I was interested in studying biochemistry but I hadn't taken chemistry in high school, so it was a bit intimidating starting in college. A few rough weeks went by before I adjusted and got the hang of it. After my 1<sup>st</sup> semester, I felt comfortable enough with school to juggle other responsibilities and got involved around campus.

## Where I am now:

I am going into my 2<sup>nd</sup> year of medical school at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. I had always been interested in medicine, but was seriously doubting myself after starting general chemistry. It's nice to look back and think of how I was feeling then to where I am now.

## Top tip for success in General Chemistry:

Don't be afraid to ask for help—seriously! I barely passed the first three exams of general chemistry before I decided to ask for help from my professor. It was immensely helpful and I owe much of my success in college to getting the courage to ask for help.

## At the start of the semester, assign current students to choose and reflect on 5 submissions from information in summary table

Name	From:	Where now:
AM	Los Lunas, NM	Masters in Biotechnology at Johns Hopkins University, working at Astra Zeneca
AC	Lebanon, PA	Physician Assistant in Neurosurgery
CD	Farmington, NM	Occupational Therapist, Outpatient Neurosurgery
JE	Albuq, NM	Premed. Junior, Biochem Major, UG Research Fellowship at UNM, Officer: UNM Pre-Med Society, Co-program director of the Health Professions Symposium.
HE	Portales, NM	2 <sup>nd</sup> year Medical student, UNM School of Medicine.
LF	Middlesex, VT	PhD in Biomedical Sciences, Anschutz Medical Campus, Denver
LG	Belen, NM	Physician Assistant, Primary Care
NG	Pecos, NM	Masters of Public Health/MD at George Washington University
DJ	Durango, México	2 <sup>nd</sup> year Medical student, University of Colorado School of Medicine.
SK	Hyderabad, India	Premed. Senior, Tutor at CAPS, UNM
DL	Albuq, NM	2 <sup>nd</sup> year Physical Therapy Student, UNM School of Medicine

- Representation from local/international, urban/rural, race/ethnicity, gender, several different career paths



## Example of student reflection

I looked at NN who caught my eye when she talked about her feeling of being overwhelmed and unprepared but recognizing it early in order to maximize her resources. **It has only been 1 week and I feel extremely overwhelmed with college, but this encouraged me not to continue feeling that way and to find the resources to help that feeling.**

A few of the tips that I found most useful and interesting were to keep a **solid study group** that can help motivate you, **not ever be afraid to ask questions** and always **take advantage of my resources** when I do have questions, to allow myself a few mental breakdowns but move on from them, **to not beat myself up over a bad grade**, and to **keep my future as motivation to succeed**.

# At the end of the semester, assign the students to complete their own gallery project entry:



## A bit about me: (describe your experience getting used to the class and how you were able to adapt to it in a way that might be helpful for a future student of mine just starting the class)

I was honestly very intimidated to take chemistry, as I had struggled with it in the past, and never truly grasped the concepts that I had learned in the past. I found, however, that putting the time and effort into completing the requirements in the class and asking for help where it was needed allowed me to understand the topics that were more challenging and even helped me recognize when I thought I had understood something, but in fact hadn't.

## Where I am now:

(write this as if you are already there, at some future time in your life - dream big! What is your big picture goal?)

I am currently completing my third year of residency in cardiology at UNMH. |

## Top tip for success in General Chemistry

This class is challenging, but, if you put in the work and utilize the resources available to you, you will succeed. Make sure that you do not put off studying, this is not a class where you can cram the night before an exam. It takes repetition and practice throughout the course to learn the material. Because every topic is cumulative, if you do not understand one piece, you will not fully understand the rest. Utilizing the resources available and the supplemental sessions outside of class were a key element in allowing me to succeed. Lastly, if you feel like you are falling behind or having a difficult time understanding something, reach out and never feel "dumb" for asking questions, that is what will help you excel and fully understand the content.

Would you be willing for me to contact you in the future to provide a formal submission to this project for my future classes? Yes, definitely! |



## Next steps and acknowledgements

*Resource links – much to continue to explore!*

*I wish to acknowledge our collaboration on the Student Experience Project (SEP) in the work discussed in this presentation. SEP is a [national network](#) committed to innovative, evidence-based practices that transform the college student experience by creating equitable learning environments.*

*Funding for SEP: APLU and the Raikes Foundation*

*My amazing UNM faculty colleagues, current and former SEP Fellows and in particular, Dr Pamela Cheek, Associate Provost for Student Success.*

*Thanks to ALL at USI!*