Council of Independent Colleges and Association of College and University Educators Launch “Belong: An Inclusive Learning Community”

New four-year initiative to equip faculty and staff at small independent colleges and universities with proven practices to deepen student belonging

Washington, DC—The Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) and the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) announced today the launch of “Belong: An Inclusive Learning Community,” establishing a first-of-its-kind network across CIC member colleges and universities to equip faculty and staff with evidence-based strategies designed to deepen student belonging and make campuses more welcoming and inclusive.

Belong — exclusively offered to CIC members and with the potential of benefitting more than 2 million students over five years — responds to CIC members’ desire to strengthen campus culture with inclusive practices.

“CIC is pleased to partner with ACUE to offer this opportunity to join a community of institutions that share a strong leadership commitment to creating inclusive and equitable learning environments,” said CIC President Marjorie Hass. “Belong provides a cost-effective way for faculty, staff, and administrators to develop new skills and to work together toward shared goals.”

Members of the Belong network have the opportunity to credential both faculty and staff members through ACUE’s new offering “Fostering a Culture of Belonging” and gain access to live webinars for all employees, on-demand engagement resources, and a community of practice.

“Belong is about taking action,” said Matt Trainum, vice president of networks and strategic partnerships for CIC. “Campuses have made commitments to address inclusion, and this community is another way to deliver on those commitments, equipping faculty and staff with training, resources, and a network that improves the student experience and ultimately helps students stay.”

National studies show that students taught by ACUE-certified faculty engage at deeper levels, complete more courses, and are retained in greater numbers, with greater equity by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

“As the saying goes, students only care about how much you know when they know how much you care,” said Bacari Brown, ACUE partnership director leading Belong. “Today, we could...
not be more excited to partner with CIC to ensure no student encounters bias or is subject to microaggressions and so that each knows that they belong in their classrooms and campus. Transforming a campus culture to meet the needs of its diverse community does not happen overnight—it takes a village deeply engaged and committed to making equity and inclusion everyone’s responsibility."

“We’re proud to partner with CIC to deliver on exactly the rigorous, meaningful, and inclusive education one would expect from our nation’s small colleges and universities,” said Scott Durand, ACUE’s chief executive officer. “A sense of belonging is one of the most important predictors of student retention and success—and every faculty and staff member plays a pivotal role. When students know they belong, they stay and succeed, and ultimately go on to become the future leaders our country needs.”

Belong will begin in early Spring 2023, with online pre-registration opening this week. Member benefits include:

- **Nationally Recognized Credentials:** Annual credentials for faculty or staff members in “Fostering a Culture of Belonging,” ACUE’s nationally recognized course on issues of bias, microaggressions, and inclusivity.
- **Cornerstone Webinars:** Unlimited access for faculty and staff members to attend live quarterly webinars that address issues of inclusivity and belonging, and recommend practical approaches that can be implemented right away.
- **On-Demand Engagement Resources:** Open access for all faculty and staff members to proven practices through curated, best-in-class strategies on how to create an inclusive community that leads to higher satisfaction and student success.
- **Community of Practice:** Online opportunities for shared learning and networking on DEI issues and best practices for campus leaders.

Learn more at [cic.edu/programs/belong](http://cic.edu/programs/belong).

**About CIC:** The [Council of Independent Colleges](http://cic.edu) (CIC) is an association of more than 700 nonprofit independent colleges and universities, state-based councils of independent colleges, and other higher education affiliates, that works to support college and university leadership, advance institutional excellence, and enhance public understanding of independent higher education’s contributions to society. CIC is the major national organization that focuses on services to leaders of independent colleges and universities and state-based councils. CIC offers conferences, seminars, publications, and other programs and services that help independent institutions improve educational quality, administrative and financial performance, student outcomes, and institutional visibility. It conducts the largest annual conferences of college and university presidents and of chief academic officers in the United States. Founded in 1956, CIC is headquartered at One Dupont Circle in Washington, DC.

**About ACUE:** The [Association of College and University Educators](http://acue.org) (ACUE) is on a mission to accelerate student success, belonging, and equity through quality instruction. In partnership with colleges, universities, higher education systems and associations, ACUE prepares and credentials faculty in the evidence-based teaching practices that lead to higher retention and achievement, deeper learning, and closed equity gaps. Numerous and independently validated studies confirm that students are more engaged, learn more, and complete courses in greater numbers—more equitably with their peers—when taught by ACUE-certified faculty. ACUE’s online, cohort-based credentialing programs are delivered through institutional partnerships and open enrollment courses endorsed by the American Council on Education.