



Richard Bland College

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Campus Belonging Campaign

Introduction & Rationale

RBC is proud to announce the Fall 2025 launch of the **Campus Belonging Campaign**—a campus-wide initiative aimed at enhancing student, staff, and community belonging. This campaign will integrate response efforts to promote campus unity, belonging training for supervisors and faculty, and a mixed-method approach to assessing and researching the concepts and perceptions of community cohesion on campus. In acknowledging RBC's close-knit and family-like atmosphere, the initiative will explore strategies to further cultivate meaningful connections among students, faculty, and staff. The value of these connections will be demonstrated through the emergence of protective factors (e.g., supportive relationships) that enhance students' overall well-being and achievement. To that end, centering belonging as a core institutional value positions RBC to reaffirm its commitment to fostering an environment where every member of the community feels seen, valued, connected, and empowered to thrive.

Perspectives on Campus Belonging

Belonging in higher education is a fundamental component of student success, faculty engagement, and institutional effectiveness. Defined as the feeling of being valued, accepted, and connected within a community (Strayhorn, 2012), belonging has been widely recognized as a critical factor influencing persistence, well-being, and achievement. Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs positions belonging as a psychological necessity, highlighting that individuals must feel connected before reaching higher levels of personal and professional growth. Similarly, Tinto's (1993) model of student departure emphasizes that integration—both socially and academically—is essential for student retention. When students, faculty, and staff experience a strong sense of belonging, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and committed to their institution's success.

For students, a strong sense of belonging leads to higher retention rates, academic achievement, and mental well-being (Strayhorn, 2018; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Research by Walton and Cohen (2011) demonstrates that interventions reinforcing belonging significantly improve academic outcomes, particularly for underrepresented students. Similarly, Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that a positive campus climate fosters a sense of belonging among students of color, contributing to greater persistence and success. Faculty and staff also benefit from belonging, as it enhances job satisfaction, collaboration, and institutional commitment (O'Meara, Lounder, & Campbell, 2014). Hence, postsecondary educators and administrators who feel valued are more effective in supporting students and fostering learning environments that inspire solidarity, intellectual flourishing, collaboration, and collective progression among their academic community members. Even so, to cultivate belonging, institutions must implement intentional strategies, such as mentorship programs, embrace pedagogy, and community-building initiatives. Harper and Quaye (2009) emphasize that fostering belonging requires structural change, not just symbolic gestures. Universities that prioritize belonging create environments where students, faculty, and staff can thrive, ultimately enhancing academic and institutional excellence. As Strayhorn (2018) asserts, belonging is not just a moral imperative— it is a strategic necessity for higher education institutions to level the playing field for students seeking opportunities to advance their achievement, retention, and progression on campus. These principles resonate with the RBC community's core values of nurturing the potential and fortitude of its members through various forms of

assistance that activate and support students' vision and determination to reach the next step in their lives. In alignment with these values, the newly formed Campus Belonging Campaign at Richard Bland College was established to foster an environment where all students, faculty, and staff feel valued, supported, and connected.

Campaign Overview

The Campus Belonging campaign will focus on four key areas that are essential to strengthening belonging at RBC:

By implementing **bias impact response efforts** and **belonging training for supervisors**, RBC will create a more welcoming environment where individuals feel safe, respected, and empowered to thrive.

Advancing Opportunity

Ensuring that all individuals have access to the resources and support needed for success will support their sense of belonging. The **Inclusive Faculty Recruitment Strategy** will enhance representation in the classroom, foster more inclusive learning experiences, while the **Access Grants** will provide funding for initiatives that expand educational pathways for underrepresented students.

Strengthening Campus & Community Connections

Belonging extends beyond campus walls, requiring meaningful relationships between the institution and the broader community. By **bringing in community partners** to engage with RBC and launching a **community book club**, the campaign will build bridges that reinforce a shared commitment to mutual growth.

Research, Assessment & Engagement

*To cultivate a lasting culture of belonging, RBC must understand current perceptions and identify areas for improvement. Through **mixed-method research and assessment**, the campaign will measure belonging across campus, while **monthly belonging programming** will create opportunities for ongoing dialogue, engagement, and connection. By focusing on these four areas, the Campus Belonging Campaign will lay the foundation for a more inclusive, supportive, and engaged campus community.*

Expected Outcomes and Impact

Expected Outcomes & Impact of the Campus Belonging Campaign

The **Campus Belonging Campaign** will create meaningful change at RBC by fostering a more inclusive and connected campus environment. The following key outcomes will serve as measurable benchmarks for success in the first year of implementation:

1. Increasing Belonging Across Campus

By integrating belonging-focused programming and initiatives, the campaign aims to increase students' and employees' reported sense of belonging by at least **10%** in annual campus climate surveys. Programs under the **"You Belong Here" or "Where You Belong" campaign** will provide regular engagement opportunities to reinforce inclusion, connection, and support.

2. Expanding Faculty Diversity & Inclusive Hiring

A strategic **Inclusive Faculty Recruitment Strategy** will be developed to improve hiring and retention of diverse faculty. The goal is to increase the percentage of faculty from underrepresented backgrounds by **5%** within the first year, ensuring that students see themselves reflected in the classroom.

3. Improving Learning, Retention, & Graduation Outcomes for Historically Marginalized Students

A strong sense of belonging is directly linked to student persistence and academic success. Through targeted interventions—such as **belonging training for faculty and staff, expanded support programs, and access to opportunity grants**—the campaign aims to improve **first-year retention rates by at least 5%** and increase **graduation rates for all student populations, especially first-generation college students**, over time. Research has shown that when students feel a sense of belonging, they are more engaged in their coursework, leading to better academic performance and degree completion.

4. Providing Training & Certification in Belonging & Inclusion

At least **five annual training courses** on belonging will be offered to faculty, staff, and student leaders, equipping them with strategies to foster inclusive spaces. A **Campus Belonging Certificate Program** will be established, allowing participants to earn a

certification upon completion of multiple sessions, reinforcing a long-term commitment to building a campus community that promotes belonging.

5. Launching a Grant Program for Belonging Initiatives

A new **Access & Opportunity Grant** will fund at least **five programs or initiatives per year** that promote belonging and student success. These grants will empower faculty, staff, and student organizations to develop innovative projects that enhance campus belonging.

6. Establishing a Bias Impact Response Team & Framework

A **Bias Impact Response Team (BIRT)** will be created to address incidents of bias and discrimination on campus. This team will implement a structured **reporting and response framework**, ensuring transparency, accountability, and restorative action. By the end of year one, RBC aims to process and respond to **100% of reported incidents** through this system.

7. Developing a Campus-Wide Book Club & Common Read

A **Community Book Club & Common Read Program** will be introduced to engage students, faculty, staff, and community members in meaningful conversations around belonging. The goal is to have **at least 200 participants** in the first year, fostering dialogue and shared learning experiences.

8. Strengthening Community Ties Through Expanded Family Reunion Event

RBC's **Family Reunion** will expand to strengthen relationships between the college and the greater community, including local government, businesses, and civic organizations. The goal is to **increase community attendance by 20%** and forge new partnerships that enhance student engagement and career opportunities.

9. Sustaining Belonging Efforts Under the "You Belong Here" Initiative

The **"You Belong Here"** campaign will continue to host ongoing programs, events, and initiatives throughout the year, maintaining a strong and visible commitment to belonging at RBC. Success will be measured by event participation, student and faculty feedback, and increased collaboration across campus departments.

By tracking participation rates, retention and graduation data, climate survey results, and program engagement, RBC will ensure that the **Campus Belonging Campaign** drives measurable and lasting impact in its first year and beyond.

Call to Action

The **Campus Belonging Campaign** is more than an initiative—it is a commitment to fostering a campus where every student, faculty, and staff member feels valued, supported, and empowered to thrive. Achieving this vision requires collective action from all members of the RBC community.

We invite **students, faculty, staff, and community partners** to actively engage in this campaign by attending events, participating in trainings, joining the **Community Book Club & Common Read**, and supporting initiatives that enhance campus belonging. Departments and organizations are encouraged to apply for the **Access & Opportunity Grant** to launch programs that promote inclusion and connection.

Next Steps:

1. **Formalize the Bias Impact Response Team & Framework** – Develop policies and procedures for addressing bias-related incidents on campus.
2. **Launch Inclusive Faculty Recruitment Strategy** – Establish targeted recruitment and retention strategies to increase faculty diversity.
3. **Roll Out Training & Certification Program** – Implement at least five belonging and inclusion trainings per year, leading to a certification for participants.
4. **Kick Off Mixed-Method Research & Assessment** – Conduct campus-wide surveys and focus groups to measure belonging and inform future strategies.
5. **Initiate Community Engagement Efforts** – Expand the **Family Reunion** event, build local partnerships, and introduce new opportunities for community involvement.
6. **Host Monthly Belonging Programs Under the "You Belong Here" Campaign** – Organize events that foster dialogue, engagement, and a sense of connection across campus.

Together, we can build a stronger, more inclusive RBC—one where **everyone knows they belong**. Join us in making this vision a reality. **You belong here.**

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