

## Symposia Abstract Book - Main Abstract Book with Submissions and Programme (All Symposia)

Belonging to and beyond higher education in transformative times ( 0256 )

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**Rationale Text:** Fostering a sense of belonging is regularly recommended in policy reports exploring student success and retention in higher education (e.g. Thomas et al., 2017). Many pedagogical models include belonging as essential for student success and retention (e.g. Tinto, 2017). Research has also considered the nature of belonging. Bowles and Brindle (2017) report that culture of the institution, positive peer and student–teacher relationships, and campus involvement, influence a sense of belonging. There is significant work on how international students stay connected and belong to family throughout their degrees (Glass et al., 2015). However, these insights focus on the social dimensions of belonging with limited consideration of how materialities constitute belonging for students. Dominant ideas of belonging are also problematic in the context of a diverse undergraduate population (Read, Archer, & Leathwood, 2003). For example: Students from working class backgrounds may be less secure in their belonging, whilst fearing that they have lost touch with their original communities, resulting “in an ongoing sense of belonging nowhere” (Bunn, Threadgold, & Burke, 2019, p. 6). We suggest that it is now especially important that we consider the experiences of those students who may not wish to, or who find it difficult to belong. Higher education has experienced much disruption in recent times resulting in acceleration in the uptake of educational technology and social change. Such acceleration can engender alienation in relationships, which, in turn, can lead to instrumental educational processes, where the focus is on pre-determined ends, rather than deep and transformative experiences (Rosa, 2019). To avoid such instrumentality, relationships of student belonging to space and time and to buildings, objects, interactions, forms of practice – and, therefore, to forms of knowledge – need to be closely examined. This symposium will present three papers each of which intend to expose the nuances of belonging in order to problematise the ways in which belonging is considered and constructed. In doing this, a more relational, dynamic and processual view of belonging is defined that draws upon a diversity of theory and research. Paper 1: Belonging to and beyond the digital university: belonging as situated practice. Karen Gravett University of Surrey, Guildford, United Kingdom Paper 2: First year students’ longing and belonging during the pandemic. Rola Ajjawi Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia Paper 3: Considering ‘entitlement’ and ‘belonging’ in the pandemic age: The art of persistence for first in family university students. Sarah O’Shea Curtin University, Perth, Australia

**Linked Submissions:**

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| Belonging to and beyond the digital university: belonging as situated practice ( 0096 )

| Karen Gravett<sup>1</sup>, Rola Ajjawi<sup>2</sup>

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| **Research Domain:** Student experiences (SE)

| **Paper Abstract:** It is increasingly understood that concepts of belonging, and connection, are&nbsp;closely related to students&rsquo; well-being and&nbsp;success at university. And yet, the disruption to higher education, as a result of&nbsp;Covid-19, means that belonging can no longer be understood in the same ways. Such times we suggest&nbsp;offer openings in which belonging can no longer be taken for granted as uniform and, as located within fixed times and spaces. Extending the international research attending to belonging, we engage concepts from the work of Massey,&nbsp;Braidotti, and Adam, in order to propose a reframing of belonging as situated, relational and&nbsp;sociomaterial. We suggest that discussions surrounding belonging often omit a consideration of those students who may not wish to, or who cannot, belong, as well as a questioning of the very boundaries of belonging. The session will&nbsp;offer insights for educators seeking to develop belonging, and offer suggestions for further research.&nbsp;

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| Considering the impact of 'entitlement' and 'belonging' on student persistence within the pandemic university ( 0258 )

| Sarah O'Shea<sup>1</sup>

| <sup>1</sup>*NCSEHE, Curtin UNiversity, Perth, Australia*

| **Research Domain:** Student experiences (SE)

| **Paper Abstract:** <em>Generating deep understanding of the ways in which learners persist in higher education (HE) is vital as higher education sectors navigate a way through a continuing health crisis. This paper considers how students, all of whom were first in their family to come to university, articulated belonging within the HE environment and how understandings of entitlement played into this conceptualisation. Bourdieu&rsquo;s concepts of field and habitus, particularly the notion of &lsquo;habitus clive&rsquo;, was drawn upon to inform these understandings. The student narratives not only revealed the emotional undercurrents and relational complexity that attending university can have for those with no generational biographical belonging to this environment but also highlighted the ways in which learners negotiated between existing and new expectations and norms. The findings from this study can be usefully applied to the current health context as students continue to face new and unforeseen pressures during university studies, with the result that &lsquo;belonging&rsquo; is both difficult to enact and also, sustain.&nbsp;</em>

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First Year Students' Longing and Belonging During the Pandemic ( 0259 )

Rola Ajjawi<sup>1</sup>, Chie Adachi<sup>1</sup>, Margaret Bearman<sup>1</sup>, David Boud<sup>1</sup>, Susie Macfarlane<sup>1</sup>, Harsh Suri<sup>1</sup>, Vivek Venkiteswaran<sup>1</sup>, Karla Wells-Duerr<sup>1</sup>

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**Research Domain:** Student experiences (SE)

**Paper Abstract:** Eighteen months into the pandemic, educational practices at university have been disrupted and have fragmented students' sense of belonging. This context affords studying how students connect with others and materials at a time of flux. No longer can we rely on normal campus life to automatically create a space of belonging, students' experiences are diverse, multiple and more mediated by technology. Students' entanglement with a breadth of nonhuman actors is made more visible within a digital context. The paper considers how do first year students experience connection and belonging in disrupted times? Experiences of belonging were heterogenous, dynamic and constituted through sociomaterial arrangements. Whilst belonging fluctuated for students, they all described reaching out and making efforts to connect. Understanding students' diverse ways of responding to disconnection, and the work of connecting (which sometimes is possible and sometimes not) is useful to illuminate the subtle ways in which students may be marginalised.

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