

# THE CBAPP BELONG SERIES: CULTIVATING ACADEMIC IDENTITY & STUDENT ENGAGEMENT TO PROMOTE RETENTION

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## ABSTRACT

Student retention is a challenge shared by universities across the United States. The College of Business Administration and Public Policy (CBAPP) Belong series was developed based on retention data that showed the biggest loss in students occurred during their first year at university, a time when many students had yet to take courses in their majors. The series focuses on creating environments that prioritize student engagement, relationship building, exposure to campus resources, and developing academic identity and sense of belonging. The CECE theoretical model, program development process, and data from student feedback will be presented and recommendations will be discussed.

**Keywords:** Academic Identity, Student Engagement, Retention, Sense of Belonging, CECE Model

## INTRODUCTION

Student retention has challenged universities for decades. The CBAPP Belong Series was launched in the Fall of 2023 to address student retention during their first year at university. This hands-on engaging series utilized Museus et al.'s (2017) Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) model, interpreted through the lens of Garcia et al.'s (2019) multidimensional framework of "servingsness" for Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Holcombe & Kezar's (2020) concept of a "unified community of support," where students are provided opportunities to learn about and build relationships with university supports from advising to student health services.

The target population for this program was selected because in CBAPP the largest drop in retention occurs during students' first year (CSU Student Success Dashboard, 2023); at time when most students have yet to take courses in their CBAPP majors. The CBAPP Belong Series anchored in the CBAPP Student Success Center and included collaboration with faculty, staff, and administrators. The whole series includes an open house, seven featured workshops, and a celebration event. The current pilot study reports the results from student feedback forms from the first three workshops in the CBAPP Belong Series offered in September, October, and November 2023, respectively. The results reflect students' satisfaction with the workshops in terms of topic, structure, fun level, and engagement level, as well as qualitative responses about what they learned and what can be improved in future workshops.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study used three feedback forms (short online surveys) that were presented to workshop attendees at the end of the individual workshops. Participants could complete the survey within the 24 hours following the workshop. Student participation was voluntary, and they were not compensated for completing the survey. The survey included four questions on student satisfaction in terms of topic, structure, fun level, and engagement level, that utilized a 5-point Likert scale (from 1= extremely dissatisfied to 5 = extremely satisfied). In addition, the survey asked three open-ended questions: 1) What was one important lesson you learned from this workshop? 2) Do you have any suggestions for improving future workshops? 3) Do you have additional comments? All workshops were advertised to approximately 650 students, which included all freshmen who had declared a major in CBAPP and all students at the university who had not yet declared a major. Twenty-six students attended the “Design Your CBAPP Journey” workshop, ten students attended the “Writing for Social Justice” workshop, and 50 students attended the “Work-School-Family Balance” workshop.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the mean level of satisfaction for each of the four items for each workshop. Overall, students’ mean level of satisfaction was between somewhat satisfied (4) and extremely satisfied (5) with the topic, structure, fun level, and engagement level of the workshops. Qualitative responses suggested that the students were learning specific content related to the workshops, the importance of collaboration, and how many resources were available on campus. Some suggestions were to include more activities to encourage making friends with their peers, add additional visual aids, and allow students to bring a friend so they would feel more comfortable.

**Table 1: Mean Satisfaction Levels for Survey Items**

Satisfaction (on 5-point scale from 1 = extremely dissatisfied to 5 = extremely satisfied) with:	Workshop #1	Workshop #2	Workshop #3
<b>The topic of this workshop?</b>	4	4.1	4
<b>The structure of this workshop?</b>	4	4.7	3.8
<b>The fun level of this workshop?</b>	4	4.4	4.6
<b>The engagement level of this workshop?</b>	4	4.7	4.4
Mean	4	4.5	4.2
N-Size	6	9	12
Response Rate	23%	90%	24%

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the preliminary results show that students who choose to attend the CBAPP Belong Series workshops are satisfied with the topic, structure, fun level, and engagement level of the workshops. Student suggestions will aid in improving the Spring 2024 portion of the workshop series.

## REFERENCES

Available upon request.