

EDITORIAL

It is with great pleasure that we welcome the Australian Conference on Science and Mathematics Education back to Canberra, in this the 30th year of ACSME!

The ACSME 2024 theme "Belonging: the Centre of the Student Experience" has emerged from the challenges and opportunities arising from the manner in which students currently engage with tertiary education. With an increasing emphasis on flexibility, individualised learning journeys and bespoke educational pathways, students' expectations and priorities are evolving. ACSME 2024 will be an exploration of ways in which we are responding, a sharing of experiences (both fruitful and frustrating!), and a discussion of whether we are meeting students' needs.

The conference theme of 'Belonging' resonated with the organising committee as we recognise the impact of emotional and social factors on student success. With the rapid evolution of educational environments and the growing diversity of student populations, creating a genuine sense of belonging has never been more critical.

The emotional and social connection students feel toward their educational environment, peers, and the institution as a whole, have a huge impact on student outcomes. It's about more than just being physically present in a classroom or on campus; it's about feeling valued, included, and integral to the academic community. Research consistently shows that when students feel a strong sense of belonging, they are more likely to engage deeply with their studies, persist through challenges, and achieve higher academic outcomes.

ACSME conferences bring together a strong community of university teachers, educational researchers, tutors and students who all strive to improve science teaching at university level. We hope that the discussions and collaborations at this conference have the potential to drive meaningful change and contribute to a more inclusive, supportive, and engaging educational landscape. Let us move forward with a shared commitment to fostering belonging and making a lasting impact on the lives of our students.

Bringing a conference like this together is no small feat. We give a heartfelt thanks to the organising committee for their energy, commitment and enthusiasm, including Hilary Coleman, Grace Constable, John Debs, David Hartley, Merryn McKinnon, Simon Murphy, Adam Piggott, Nici Sweaney and Matt Thompson. A special thanks to Susan Howitt from the ACDS for her continued support and words of wisdom. We are grateful to Deborah Jackson for the management of all matters pertaining to the proceedings, and to Glenda Key for providing executive support.

We hope that you find ACSME 2024 stimulating and inspiring! Speaking of "In Spring": if you have time be sure to enjoy the spectacular Floriade displays while you're here!

REFERENCES

- Mtshweni, B.V. (2024). Perceived social support and academic persistence among undergraduate students: Mediation of sense of belonging and intrinsic motivation. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 34(1), 36-43.
- Strayhorn, T. L. (2020). Sense of belonging predicts persistence intentions among diverse dental education students: A multi-institutional investigation. *Journal of dental education*, 84(10), 1136-1142.
- Strayhorn, T.L. (2018). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis group.

Dr Adrian Dusting and Dr Sara Rapson
Conference Co Chairs
The Australian Conference on Science and Mathematics Education 2024

Proceedings of the Australian Conference on Science and Mathematics Education, The University of Canberra, 18–20 September 2024, page 1, ISSN 2653-0481.