

From: [Kimberly A. Barrett](#)
Subject: Mattering at Lawrence
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Hello Lawrence Students, Faculty and Staff,

Welcome to Fall Term 2020! I am excited to add my greeting to the many I am sure you have already received. Although I always start the term with an email message to campus, determining a single focus for this correspondence was difficult given the amount of turmoil and uncertainty present in the world as we begin this academic year. I eventually found inspiration in the topic of the President's Matriculation Convocation speech to be given later this week, *Finding Home: Belonging During a Pandemic*. It seems that finding places we feel we belong is particularly important in these volatile times when we must be physically distant to keep each other healthy.

Belonging, although we all know it when we feel it and when we don't, can be an allusive concept. So I have come to operationalize it in large part as understanding that you matter. Nancy Schlossberg conducted research on mattering and what makes people feel that they matter. She identified five elements of mattering. These elements include attention, importance, ego-extension, dependence and appreciation. Based on this research I am recommending a few things all of us can do to make sure that every member of our community knows that they matter.

First, simply acknowledge others presence. Greet them and, conversely, notice when they are not around. That seems simple but how often do we ignore the new person that enters an office, classroom or residence hall? Another way that we can show our fellow Lawrentians that they matter is to be interested in what they think. Simply listening and showing concern, not necessarily agreeing, helps people feel they matter.

We should also try to show that we care whether people in our community succeed or not. We can do this by celebrating the success of others and sharing in their disappointment when they fail. This is the idea of ego-extension. And it requires that we become astute practitioners of empathy.

Mattering is sometimes described as "direct reciprocal dependence". That means that to matter is not just about being able to depend on others but to know that others are depending on you. Accordingly, another way to let people know they matter is to acknowledge, in specific terms, the ways in which they contribute. This speaks to our interconnectedness, like wearing a mask during the pandemic and voting. (By the way, if you need information about voting here are two good sources: vote.org and myvote.wi.gov.)

Our institution can achieve some of this on an organizational level, for example through

various rituals, award ceremonies and shared governance. However, mattering is deeply personal and can be most significantly expanded through the interpersonal relationships we have with each other as individuals. I hope you will join me in extending these behaviors to everyone, but especially those who might be marginalized on our campus.

Two new ways that we hope to increase mattering institutionally are through understanding the polarization that is occurring in our society that prevents us from listening to each other and deepening our practice of antiracism. We will offer a **live webinar featuring Lawrence faculty on the topic of polarization**, Tuesday September 29, 2020 from 6:00pm-7:30pm. Contact Cindy Pickart (cindy.j.pickart@lawrence.edu) for details.

As a follow up to the community conversations on race and other programming held this summer we will be offering **Antiracism Collaborative Action Circles**. These will provide staff, faculty and students who have spent the summer learning about how to be an antiracist a group of supportive individuals to hold each other accountable, share best practices, successes and challenges as they move their focus from learning to action. Please contact Shaniqua Crawford (shaniqua.l.crawford@lawrence.edu) to find out more about how to get involved in these action circles.

I will leave you with this poem by Starhawk, which sums up for me what it means to matter and belong in community.

Community: Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with passion without having the words catch in our throat. Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter, voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power. Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of healing. A circle of friends. Somewhere where we can be free.

I hope that the “somewhere” in this poem for you is Lawrence. Wishing you a successful term.

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