

## PART I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

Early models (Spady, 1970, 1971; Tinto, 1975,1993) of college retention have implicated the role of belonging as a key ingredient to students' success in post-secondary education. Students entering university for the first time may be experiencing a seismic shift in priorities, values, beliefs and behaviors as they come to terms with their separation from life (hometown, family, etc.) to college. Learning and acquiring behavioral norms on how to navigate college life can be a source of stress. Forming and maintaining meaningful relationships with others within school settings enables students to become socially integrated to the institution and as result increasing their likelihood remain in school and graduate (cite)

One important predictor of academic success and retention across all levels of learning, including in higher education, is student school belonging (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Kim & Lundberg, 2016; Thomas, 2002; Tinto, 2017). For many students attending university, feeling a sense of belonging is directly connected to their likelihood to persevere through rigorous university experiences and complete a university degree (Kim & Lundberg, 2016; Tinto, 1997, 2017; van Herpen et al., 2020). It is imperative that we learn more about the experiences of Pacific Island university students in the United States, and what matters for promoting school belonging in institutions of higher education. Because of its significant role in school success, exploring cultural and context-specific ways that individuals experience belonging and social acceptance in school is a critical area for future research (Allen, et al.,2021). This report provides findings from an IRB-approved study exploring how Pacific Island students experience belonging in college. More specifically, the report offers an insider perspective of how Pacific Island students at BYUH 1) experience school belonging and 2) describe factors that both undermine and promote their experiences of belonging at BYU Hawaii. Additionally, the report aims to increase BYUH staff and leadership awareness of how their roles and responsibilities can influence Pacific Island students' sense of belonging to the institution.

The goal of this study was to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How do Pacific Island students at Brigham Young University Hawaii describe what matters for achieving a sense of belonging at the school?

**RQ2:** What do Pacific Island students at Brigham Young University Hawaii say undermines their experiences of belonging at the school?

**RQ3:**What do Pacific Island students at Brigham Young University Hawaii say promotes their experiences of belonging at the school?

**RQ4:** According to Pacific Islander faculty and staff at Brigham Young University Hawaii, how can the University help Pacific students feel more connected at the University?

**Table 1 Summary of Key Findings**

**RQ1: What matters for achieving a sense of belonging at the school?**

**Main Themes:** *Notions of Belonging; Negotiating Belonging in the Context of Cultural Background*

Students described belonging at BYUH in ways that include feelings of connection, acceptance, authenticity, affiliation, status as a non-visitor, and feeling known. Students talked about negotiating belonging in the context of their Pacific Islander cultural backgrounds, including cultural factors (respect, traditional hierarchies, gender roles) that influence how they negotiate belonging. Western notions of 'belonging' are challenged.

**RQ2: What undermines experiences of belonging at the school?**

**Main Themes:** *Language as a Barrier; Institutional Barriers; Cultural & Ethnic Discrimination; Lack of Cultural Representation on Campus; Transitions – Culture Shock; Not Connected to Instructors*

Students described how language could sometimes act as a barrier to belonging. Lack of proficiency in English undermined experiencing belonging academically. English and native languages could act to exclude students from full social participation or lead to misunderstandings among peers. Students described cultural and linguistic discrimination, at institutional and individual levels, that undermined experiences of belonging. Lack of cultural representation on campus and lack of connection to instructors were undermined belonging. Finally, students described the overall transition of coming to BYUH from the Islands as a culture shock and as unexpectedly difficult and overwhelming as they navigated different school systems and expectations while experiencing feelings of being homesick.

**RQ3: What promotes experiences of belonging at the school?**

**Main Themes:** *English as Unifying; Role of Heritage Language; Connected to Instructors; Social Ties; Institutional Supports; Cultural Self-Representation; Church Membership as Unifier*

There were many ways that Pacific Islander BYUH students described experiences of belonging on campus. English was as a unifying language and speaking native languages was important for social connection and maintaining ties to their ethnic communities. Instructors were instrumental in facilitating belonging experiences when they connected to their students and built bridges for academic success. Paramount for experiencing belonging were friendship and social ties across campus, which provided academic and social support. Extracurricular activities provided ways to participate on campus and culture clubs specifically facilitated many experiences of belonging through social connection and authentic cultural representation. Finally, membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was identified as an important aspect of campus life that facilitating belonging experiences.

**(RQ4) How can the University help Pacific Islander students feel more connected at the University?**

**Main Themes:** In Process

In Process

## PART II: INTRODUCTION

---

Roy and Baumeister (1995) proposed in their seminal work, "The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachment as a fundamental human motivation", that humans have an innate, powerful need to form and maintain bonds with other people. The authors posit that human emotions and behaviors can be explained by a pervasive drive to form and maintain lasting and positive relationships with others. Creating and maintaining social bonds may have offered adaptive advantages for early humans. For example, the formation of social bonds would have increased our early ancestors' reproductive and survival fitness. Group membership allowed early humans to find potential mates and have children. Increasing the survival rates of the next generation required group cooperation to ward off predators, hunt much larger animals for food, and provide care to the sick and wounded. Nature may have favored the survivability of early humans who managed to create meaningful social bonds with each other and, as a result, increased the chances of their offspring reaching maturity and reproducing.

Although a growing body of research on belongingness have emerged since Roy and Baumeister groundbreaking work (Roy & Baumeister, 1995), belonging as a basic human need was advanced more than 50 years earlier by one of the most influential psychologists of the twentieth century, Abraham Maslow (1943) in his influential paper, "A Theory of Human Motivation". Maslow proposed a framework that ranked human needs in a hierarchy of relative prepotency – that is, the most pressing human needs will "monopolize consciousness" (p. 394) and therefore all goal-directed activity is focused on satisfying this need. Maslow argued that physiological needs are the most basic of all human needs. For example, hunger is a physiological need that will monopolize an organism's consciousness and direct the organism to engage in food-seeking activities before satisfying other psychological needs to regain energy homeostasis. All other human needs like safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization are pushed to the background until the physiological need of hunger is satisfied. The need for love, affection, and belonging is the third pre-potent human need in Maslow's hierarchy of needs and is the focus of this report. Although the need to feel accepted and belong to a social group is not necessary for survival, humans have acquired a sensitivity to the psychological effect of social rejection. Studies in the field of neuroscience revealed that stimulation of neural networks associated with physical pain are also activated when humans experience social rejection (Eisenberger et al., 2003; MacDonald & Leary, 2005), suggesting that the psychological distress of social rejection are consequential and are perceived as life-threatening. As such, humans are motivated to engage in activities that increase their social value to be accepted and feel included in a community, thus satisfying this innate drive to belong.

### **Why belonging is important in school**

Sense of belonging, however, is a complex and multifaceted construct (for example, differences between social belonging, belonging to a place, belonging to culture, etc.) with various components. At its core, belonging is a fundamental need to feel accepted and belong to a group that humans are driven to satisfy. Over the last 29 years since Roy and Baumeister's

influential work, numerous studies have highlighted the benefit of belonging and emotional well-being (cite), positive educational outcomes such as academic success (Abdollahi et al., 2020), less absenteeism (Sanchez et al., 2005), and students' psycho-social adjustment in school (cite), to name a few. The most used definition of belonging proposed by Goodenow and Grady (1993) within the educational context is "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment" (p. 80). This broad definition provides multiple features of how students experience belonging within a school environment. More importantly, school belongings are formed and nurtured through social interactions with other people.

Early models (Spady, 1970, 1971); Tinto, 1975,1993) of college retention have implicated the role of social integration as a key ingredient to students' success in post-secondary education. Students entering university for the first time may be experiencing a seismic shift in priorities, values, beliefs and behaviors as they come to terms their separation from life (hometown, family, etc.) to college. Learning and acquiring behavioral norms on how to navigate college life often requires them to seek advice from trusted others. Forming and maintaining meaningful relationships with others within school settings enables students to become socially integrated to the institution and as result increasing their likelihood remain in school and graduate (cite)

### **Why this study**

One of the more pressing areas for future research on school belonging is exploring cultural and context-specific ways that individuals experience belonging and social acceptance (Allen, et al.,2021). This report provides findings from a recent IRB-approved study at Brigham Young University Hawaii exploring how Pacific Island students experience belonging in college. This report offers an insider perspective of how Pacific Island students at BYUH 1) define school belonging and 2) describe factors that both hinder and promote their sense of belonging to BYU Hawaii and to college in general. More importantly, this report aims to increase awareness among staff and leadership of how their roles and responsibilities can influence Pacific Island students' sense of belonging to the institution.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

---

This research project offers important information for university services and the faculty community on ways to better support Pacific Island students' experiences of belonging at BYU-Hawaii.

**RQ1:** How do Pacific Island students at Brigham Young University Hawaii describe what matters for achieving a sense of belonging at the school?

**RQ2:** What do Pacific Island students at Brigham Young University Hawaii say undermines their experiences of belonging at the school?

**RQ3:** What do Pacific Island students at Brigham Young University Hawaii say promotes their experiences of belonging at the school?

**RQ4:** According to Pacific Islander faculty and staff at Brigham Young University Hawaii how can the University help Pacific Islander students feel more connected at the University?

## PART III: METHODOLOGY

---

This study employs focus group interviews following the Oceanic or pan-Pacific research tradition of Talanoa (Tecun et al. 2018). Talanoa has been defined as “storytelling without concealment” (Halapua & Pago, 2013, p. 1) or as informal and open speech or conversation (Fairbairn-Dunlop & Coxon, 2014) offering culturally relevant and comfortable way for participants to share their experiences without the intensity of a one-on-one interview. Talanoa may resemble or include many forms of western research methods such as interviews, personal communications, or focus groups. However, Talanoa is differentiated from these traditional methods as an Oceanic indigenous method of learning that includes love, empathy, and respect and creates and requires closeness to generate authentic knowledge when used by appropriate researchers (Vaioloti, 2006; 2013).

There were two Oceania researchers who took turns leading each focus group interview. One Oceanic focus group facilitator was a Fijian woman, born and raised in Fiji who attended university in the U.S. The other Oceanic focus group facilitator was an Oceanic male of Samoan and Tongan ancestry, who attended primary and secondary school in Tonga and Samoa. He is a U.S. citizen and an associate professor of psychology at the University in Hawaii where data was collected, and a co-principal investigator of the study. A third researcher also attended each focus group as a majority-culture co-facilitator, and co-principal investigator of the study. The deliberate approach to structuring the focus groups to be led by Oceanic facilitators, with a majority culture co-facilitator present, was deliberate to ensure participants felt comfortable sharing aspects of their sense of belonging and that cultural ways of doing, thinking, feeling,

and connecting could be acknowledged and welcomed. Focus group interviews were held in the evening in a campus classroom and lasted anywhere from 60 to 90 minutes.

Focus group facilitators were explicit that the research team would keep all information shared during the focus groups confidential and encouraged participants to do the same. All focus group interviews were video recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Focus group interviews were transcribed by two researchers from Oceanic backgrounds, This approach ensured an insider's perspective to correctly transcribe various words and phrases in Oceanic languages.

## PARTICIPANTS

A total of 97 Pacific Island students participated in the Talanoa sessions. Approximately 29 percent of research participants were Fijians, 21 percent were Tongans and 18 percent were Samoans (Table 2). Research participants also indicated if they have more than one Pacific Island heritages.

**Table 2. Race of study participants**

Race <sup>a</sup>	Count	Percent
Cook Islander	3	2.6
Fijian	34	29.3
Hawaiian	9	7.8
Maori	9	7.8
Melanesian	4	3.4
Micronesian	3	2.6
Rotuman	6	5.2
Samoan	21	18.1
Tahitian	3	2.6
Tongan	24	20.7
Total	116	100.0

Notes. a = Some participants reported multiple races

Seventy two percent of the research participants were female (Table 3). Approximately 90 percent of participants reported that they were born in the Pacific geographical region and about 6 percent were born in the continental United States. Majority of participants were between 21 to 25 years old (58.8%).

**Table 3. Gender, Place of Birth and Age range of study participants**

Demographic	Count	Percent
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	70	72.2
Male	27	27.8
<i>Place of Birth</i>		
American Samoa	1	1.0

Demographic	Count	Percent
Australia	2	2.1
Cook Islands	3	3.1
Continental U.S.	6	6.2
Fiji	35	36.1
Guam	2	2.1
Hawai'i	7	7.2
Melanesia	1	1.0
New Zealand	9	9.3
Papua New Guinea	3	3.1
Samoa	11	11.3
Tahiti	1	1.0
Tonga	13	13.4
Other	3	3.1
<i>Age</i>		
18-20	6	6.2
21-25	57	58.8
26-30	23	23.7
31+	8	8.2
Not indicated	3	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## PROCEDURE

Research participants were recruited primarily through the Student Leadership Service cultural club leadership at BYUH. Additionally, the research team implemented a snowball sampling technique to recruit other Pacific Island students. A member of the research team created an online sign up sheet with dates and times between June 2022 to July 2022 for students to sign up and participate in the Talanoa sessions. A total of 18 Talanoa sessions were held during the summer of 2022.

Research participants met with the members of the research team in the Center for Learning and Teaching conference room on the dates they signed for the Talanoa session (Figure 1). The research team reviewed the consent form with each group and informed them about data confidentiality and encouraged each member not to discuss the conversation outside the Talanoa session. Participants filled out a survey before the start of each Talanoa session. The survey included demographic questions about age, ethnic identity, place of birth, place of parents' births, and place of high school attainment. Talanoa sessions commenced after the research team addressed research participants questions and concerns. In keeping with the tradition of Talanoa, dinner was provided for participants during each focus groups interview in this study.



Focus group discussions centered around the following questions:

1. What does it mean to you to feel like you belong at your school? How do you know when you feel a sense of school belonging?
2. When do you feel most connected to what is happening at school? (in classrooms, with teachers, at lunchtime, with other students, after school, etc...)
3. Can you describe the times you have been able to share your perspectives and feel a part of the school? If so, in what ways have you done so?
4. What role does language play in your sense of belonging at school?

**Figure 1. Dates and times of Talanoa sessions**

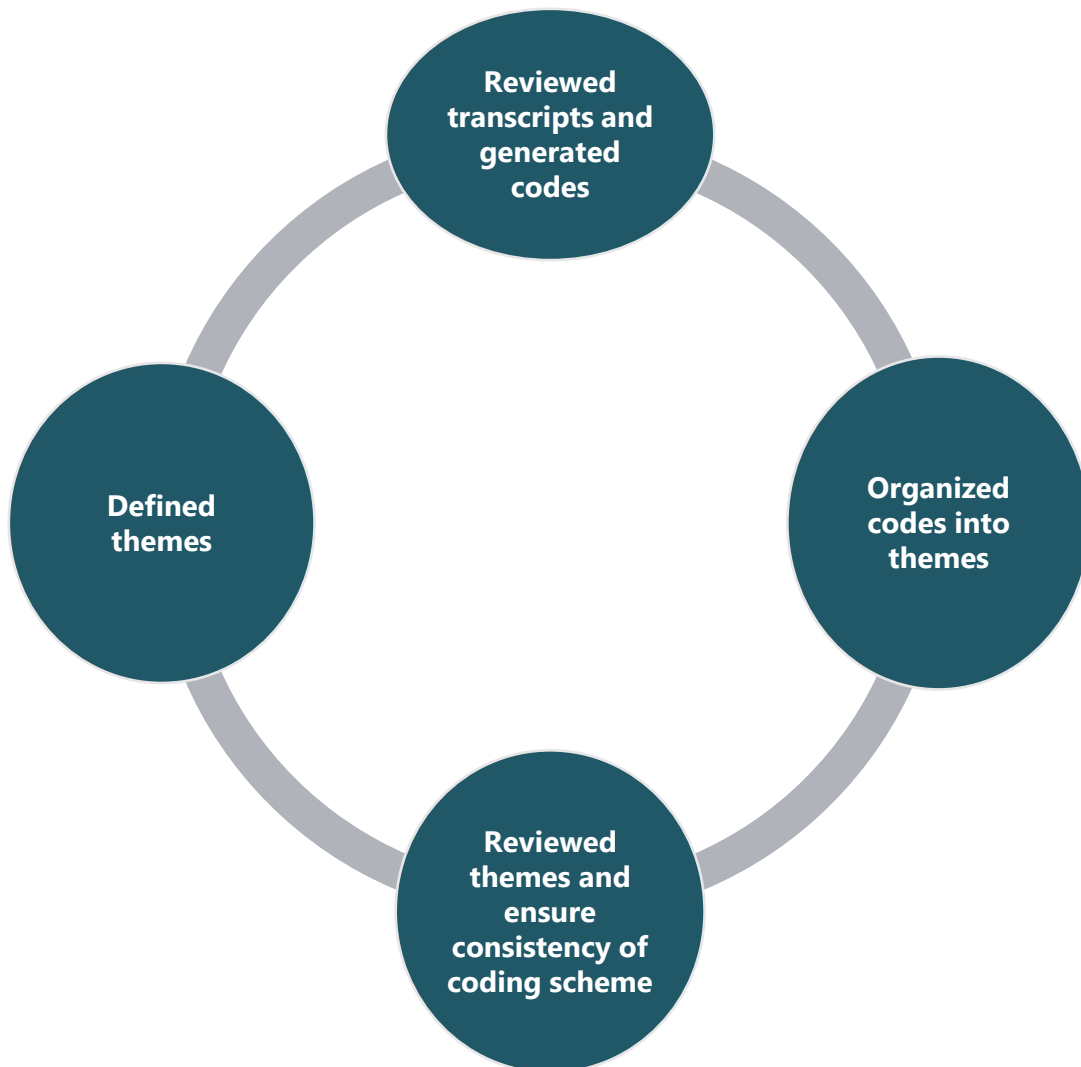
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>June 2022</b>						
4	5	6	8 5pm Talanoa 7pm Talanoa	9	10	11
12	13	14	15 5pm Talanoa 7pm Talanoa	16 10am Talanoa	17	18
19	20 12pm Talanoa 7pm Talanoa	21	22 7pm Talanoa* 7pm Talanoa*	23	24	25
26	27	28	29 5pm Talanoa 7pm Talanoa	30 12pm Talanoa	26	26
<b>July 2022</b>						
					1	2
3	4	5	6 5pm Talanoa	7 12pm Talanoa	8	9
10	11	12	13 5pm Talanoa 7pm Talanoa	14	15	16
17	18	19	20 7pm Talanoa	21 12pm Talanoa	22	23

Note. \* = Concurrent Talanoa sessions

## DATA ANALYSIS

The data was analyzed using an iterative analytic process. MAXQDA software was used to organize, code, and analyze the data. Data were coded individually first, then authors met to analyze interviews and discuss emergent codes for convergent agreement and to reach consensus on themes and the organization of data. A thematic analytic approach was used, employing an open coding system (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2014) to look for ways that participants talked about belonging at the university.

**Figure 2. Data analysis cycle**



## **PART IV: FINDINGS**

---

Results for this study are organized by research questions. Each section includes a summary of key themes that emerged from the data analysis and accompanying definitions that captures its essence and key ideas. This section also highlights illustrative quotes from the Talanoa session to provide context and richness to Pacific Island students experiences of belonging at BYUH.

**RQ1:** How do Pacific Island students at Brigham Young University Hawaii describe what matters for achieving a sense of belonging at the school?

Table 4 summarizes the key themes and subthemes that emerged from the transcript data analysis. For RQ 1, two major themes and 2 subthemes arose during the iterative data analysis process summarizing how Pacific Island students define school belonging. The research team counted the frequency of how each theme was mentioned in during the data analysis are indicated in the note section under Table 4.

**Table 4. Themes and Definitions on School Belonging**

Themes	Definition
<b>Notions of Belonging</b>	Feelings of connection, acceptance, authenticity, affiliation, status as a non-visitor, and feeling known.
<b>Negotiating Belonging in the Context of Cultural Backgrounds</b>	Cultural factors (respect, traditional hierarchies, gender roles) that students name as influencing what they have to do or learn to negotiate ways to belong on campus.
<i>Resiliency: Vā, Family, Home</i>	Belonging to families and island communities as a source of resiliency. The concept of school belonging is challenged as 'western' concept.
<i>In-Group Leveling Pressure</i>	Other Pacific Islander students can sometimes judge or make fun. Having to prove being 'Pacific Islander' enough to belong to certain cultural social groups.

Students described belonging at BYUH in ways that include feelings of connection, acceptance, authenticity, affiliation, status as a non-visitor, and feeling known. Students talked about negotiating belonging in the context of their cultural Pacific Islander backgrounds. All of these ways of belonging were coded in the Notions of Belonging them, which will be described and illustrated with student quotes from the focus group data below.

**Theme 1: Notions of Belonging (15)**

Students in the study talked about belonging as feeling safe to be authentically themselves without being judged and connecting with those who share similar cultural backgrounds. For example, students said:

---

*To belong means having that safe place to be who you are and not feel scared about being judged. It's a place where you're understood. I feel a sense of school belonging when I can see and be with people who are from the same place as me, who have the same language, crave the same foods understand my struggles and laugh at the same jokes (P58)*

*To feel like you belong is to be confident about your place there and friends that feel the same way. I feel like I'd have a sense of belonging when I experience this. Trusting that you are where you need to be. I think it's a personal manifestation, especially when you choose to be here (P57)*

---

Students also described belonging as being comfortable around certain people they can affiliate with, having a support group that accepts them without judgment. It is important to students in this study for them to feel known and seen in order to feel a sense of belonging on campus. For example:

---

*I view a sense of belonging as a way that helps me know that I am comfortable with who I am around a certain group of people. Everyone wants to feel like they belong because it is during the challenging times that they turn to their support group to help them get through life. I know I have a sense of school belonging when I am comfortable with who I am as a whole, and the fear of being different is one I do not worry about because the fear of being judged and misunderstood is nonexistent (P55)*

*For me personally, a clear example of maybe how I would feel if I belonged or anywhere really, is if people know me by name. I think it's a high school thing, I really appreciated that. You know me by name. You feel like, "oh they know me, they remember who I am", and so I think for me part of having that sense of belonging is (P06)*

---

## Theme 2: Negotiating Belonging in the Context of Cultural Backgrounds (20)

Students in this study referenced cultural factors that influenced how they made sense of and negotiated ways to belong on campus. These segments of student data were coded as Negotiating Belonging in the Context of Cultural Background and will be described and illustrated with student voices below. Many students talked about how cultural factors or traditional values that they brought with them from their island communities made it difficult to speak up or share their perspectives on campus, and especially in the classroom. Respect was an important Pacific Islander value that many students named as impacting how they presented themselves on campus, and influenced how they were perceived by others.

Other students talked about the traditional hierarchies and gender roles that impact how

---

*It's not us being shy, it's us being respectful. Because in the Polynesian culture you are always taught to, especially in Fiji, you are taught to respect your elders and one way we show respect is by not questioning authority. And so coming to college, one way Fijian students did that, one way they did not question authority is not to say anything. Because if we ask question, say something, it will bring us back to Fiji and we will be thinking oh, you're questioning authority by asking all the questions. Even in Fiji if you ask all the questions the teacher will say, "hey shut up, don't do that, don't act like you know it all, be quiet". So with that mindset we bring it over here and when we don't say anything it's like the teachers think "oh, you are shy". No, that is our way of showing respect, not questioning your authority. And they would say, "oh you can come to my house anytime", I'm definitely not doing that, sometimes we see our professor and oh we turn around and walk the other way. That's how we are showing our respect. (P86)*

*I feel like there's a fear of like sharing perspective. Like there's an unseen barrier where like you can't really just, I don't know, like even right now, like it's a miracle I'm like trying to share what my, my thoughts or opinions are. Cause sometimes they're, it can be backlashed or you're like, "oh, why are you speaking? It's not your turn to speak," in a sense or cause like for me, or like for where I grew up or I'm pretty sure it's the same for everyone where like, like if you had an opinion, you're talking back and that's disrespect. So you have this fear, even though you're like twenties and older now it's still like at the back of your head, is this disrespectful or what is this? (P73)*

---

students negotiated classroom spaces and interactions with instructors – again highlighting how cultural norms often made it difficult to speak up or share their perspectives and influencing the ways they felt they could belong on campus. For example:

---

*I think back home uh, most of the pacific islands have the traditional hierarchy? We have those who speak and those who listen. I think that's how we've done it back in the islands. But we come out here, it's an eye opener (P02)*

*I think all the Tongans. For example in high school, you go to class and you see the board full of notes, from left to right, and you just copy the whole thing. And then memorize it, and that's it. We don't ask questions at all...But not here. Everyone's asking questions and you see all the Tongans in the back row sitting and being quiet the whole time. I think back home it affects our schooling. I met someone, they tell me something that helped me realize our way of life. Whatever our parents say, we do it, we follow. We don't tell them, "oh I want to be a police! I want to be a doctor!" Whatever they say, you follow.*

*I think for me it's um, it's because um...when I was growing up with my grandparents, in like the home, it's always the men that have a say in the home. If you want to share your feeling on anything, you're not allowed to say anything. Being a girl (P)5)*

*When I was growing up with my grandparents, in like the home, it's always the men that have a say in the home. If you want to share your feeling on anything, you're not allowed to say anything. Being a girl. (P05)*

---

### **Theme 2a: Resiliency: Va, Family, Home (11)**

There were also two subthemes identified that emerged as important for students in terms of how they related to the cultural aspects of negotiated belonging on campus. The first theme -- Resiliency: Va, Family, Home -- includes when students spoke about drawing on feelings of connection to their family, village and home (belonging in the va) to remind them who they are

---

*For me I try to remember "\_\_\_, you're the first one in your family" and "visualize that day of graduating". So always having like a way to remember where you came from and how far you've come...that makes me want to. I have to belong. I have to fit in, I have to make it for myself and my family. (P03)*

*I feel like mostly like things that probably would seem like a challenge and would make us want to give up..., maybe like language barriers and all of that... but most of us Pacific Islanders our goals is like we were not just aiming just, so oh, can I attend school today? or can I finish the Semester? We're already thinking far ahead because we're thinking of our families at home and stuff like that. So ,we don't really think about oh, can I make it to class today? We just have to. You don't have a choice, you have to, and it doesn't matter if I can't really speak English that well or I don't even understand what's going on, you just have to do it. You just gotta do it (P18)*

---

in order to succeed and help them be successful at BYUH. Students describe belonging to their families and island communities as a primary source of resiliency for them as they negotiate their belonging on campus.

Some students specifically challenged the concept of 'school belonging' as a reality in their lives. Rather, they identified it as a White or western notion that had limited utility in their lives or approaches to how they negotiated belonging on campus. Instead of agreeing with the importance of belonging in school, these students cited the strong connection and belonging to their families as the real source of strength and motivation for them to belong and to achieve academically. For example:

---

*That's something I feel like something that would make us like probably quit school would be something that had happened to our family; most of the time, some of us Pacific Islanders will only go back home if an immediate family member passed away. Then we'll go home, but if it's anything to do with us, like oh, not feeling good today, too bad you're still going to have to go to school. School belonging, yeah, it's just not a thing! (P19).*

*So I don't think like for us, it matters if we belong or stuff like that. We feel like it's just us like um, because with our parents and stuff we wouldn't get an education and it doesn't matter if we our feelings and stuff does not really matter when it comes to BYU – Hawaii. Your family [matters], and like things you can help back at home or stuff like that. So, I don't feel like to me, a sense of belonging here at school is that...And the other thing, having to have a sense of belonging in a school is not really something we would...I mean it was not like a choice for us. Like even if you don't feel like you belong there your parents sent you to school to do it. "I don't care if you don't belong there, just do it. (P20)*

*I feel like school belonging it's more like, I want to say white, a white thing. Like, but that's what I feel like about school belonging and stuff. Because I think it has to do with how we were raised. And as Pacific Islanders, we belong. If we think that we belong in that school we can go to that school, then, we can! ... just like what she said, our parents raised us to you know a different way that you can do anything that you put your heart to so you don't have to feel like you belong there. Like when I came, I feel like, firstly, I came, I was off campus and I was homesick, so I feel like I don't belong here. But I have to do it that's how I was raised, raised, so, yeah, school belonging is not an idea that I was raised in. It's important, but not to Pacific islanders. It doesn't work that way. (P19)*

---

## Theme 2b: In-Group Leveling Pressure

In Group Leveling Pressure is the second subtheme in the larger section of Negotiating Belonging in the Context of Cultural Background. In this section, students describe having to prove they are 'Pacific Islander' enough to belong to certain cultural social groups and how other PI students can sometimes judge or make fun of them. This is a reality of their cultural context and background, which can be difficult to overcome when trying to belong both in their culture groups and in other spaces on campus. This was true for students who grew up in the Islands as well as for second-generation PI students from the US, NZ, or Australia attending BYUH.

---

*I'll be honest. When I first came to BYU, I hated it. The Maori community on campus was very uppity. As in, you had to prove you were Maori enough to be with the Maoris....I didn't realize it was a 21 questions trying to prove I was Maori, so from that experience, I didn't associate with the Maoris. Had a similar experience with the Samoans at the time. So that's why I jumped with the Fijians. And so ever since then, I've stuck with the Fijians (P32)*

*You're just afraid to, to be judged. Yeah...You're afraid. I think. And it comes from a history of like, I wanna say our people, but it's not everybody. But like, you know, we mock each other all the time. We're sarcastic about everything. And somebody does something and you always laughing making jokes about it....You don't wanna be the point of the joke. So that's why a lot of the time, you see us sitting in class. Like we just quiet because even though we do have a question, we're not going to say it unless you're comfortable.... You don't wanna say it cause you don't want to be the one that people say... time because she talks too much. She doesn't understand anything. (P04)*

*Sometimes and I don't mean this against anyone here but sometimes you do not even feel comfortable with your own people, I would say that from your own country. You find it more comfortable to be with other people from another country to be more open and explicit with them. Because I feel that if you express that with your own people, you are going to be judged because our culture can be so, you know self-constricted on different levels of how culture should be defined. But yeah, that's what I feel personally about this question (P91)*

*I feel that really, that stems from us growing up in the west where we really have to prove that we are Pacific Islander because we grew up in the west. They make an automatic assumption that cause we grew up from the west, we dunno anything. So when we come to the islands or any other similar culture context, the pressures on us, cause we have to prove to everyone else that... we already know what we are doing. And then ironically, we learn more than them. (P34)*

---



## University Hawaii say undermines their experiences of belonging

Themes	Definition
<b>Language as a Barrier</b>	The difficulties of not being able to use English well enough to participate in academic settings or social activities. Native languages can be a barrier to participation and belonging socially.
<b>Institutional Barriers</b>	BYUH policies and practices that undermine feelings of belonging on campus.
<i>Cultural Deafness</i>	When the institution of BYUH did not listen to or take up the perspective of their Pacific Islander students.
<i>EIL Classes as Barriers</i>	Having to take or pass the EIL classes as a barrier to academic success and belonging
<b>Cultural &amp; Ethnic Discrimination</b>	Accounts of discrimination or being treated unfairly because of their cultural background and group membership as Pacific Islander students.
<i>Institutional – EIL Classes as Discriminatory</i>	Having to take or pass EIL class unfairly, unequally, or only because they are 'categorized' as Pacific Islander students.
<i>Institutional – Linguistic &amp; Cultural Policing</i>	Not being able to bring important cultural and linguistic aspects of themselves or their lives to the school.
<i>Linguistic Discrimination</i>	Reports of discrimination because of actual or perceived lack of language proficiencies.
<i>Smartness Discourse &amp; Stereotype Threat</i>	Being on the receiving end of negative stereotypes and narratives. Feeling positioned deficit to those narratives and perceptions about who gets to be smart in the classroom
<b>Lack of PI Cultural Representation on Campus</b>	Noting the lack of Pacific Islander culture such as food, music, and people being equally represented across campus
<b>Transitions - Culture Shock</b>	The difficulty of transitioning from their home island to Hawaii, as well as the sudden newness of attending university. Culture shock is described as feelings of being overwhelmed, numb, and disoriented as they arrived at school the first time.
<i>Different Expectations &amp; Schooling Systems</i>	Not knowing or understanding how to navigate the different expectations and systems on campus as compared to their schools at home.

Themes	Definition
<i>Lack of School Knowledge and Familiarity</i>	Not having knowledge or familiarity geographic space or norms and customs of campus life.
Homesick or Lonely	Feelings of homesickness or loneliness. The isolation of being away from home and your people.
<b>Not Connected to Instructors</b>	Feelings of not being connected to their instructors or to being in the classroom.

The Pacific Islander BYUH students in this study talked clearly in various ways about what undermined their experiences of belonging on campus. They described how language could sometimes act as a barrier to belonging. Specifically, students described how a lack of proficiency in English could get in the way of their feelings of belonging in classroom and academically. Socially, some students described how language, both English and native languages, might exclude students from full social participation or lead to misunderstandings among peers.

Unfortunately, many students named instances of cultural and linguistic discrimination, including at the institutional and individual level. They described how experiencing policing of their vernacular languages and aspects of their culture undermined feelings of belonging on campus. Students also named a lack of PI culture represented on campus and a lack of connection to classrooms and teachers as factors that led students to feel out of place and like they didn't belong. Finally, the overall transition of coming to BYUH from the Islands was described in stark terms as a culture shock. The experience of coming to BYUH was described as unexpectedly difficult and overwhelming, accompanied by feelings of homesickness and loneliness that negatively impacted their experiences of belonging. Further, students described difficulties navigating a different school system that what they were used to and facing opaque and unclear academic expectations at BYUH. In the following section, each of these codes will be described in more detail and illustrated with quotes from the student focus group data.

### **Theme 1: Language as a Barrier**

The PI students in this study talked about how both English and their native languages sometimes acted as barriers to belonging. English was most often referenced as a barrier to participation and belonging in classrooms and in academic ways. Some students specifically named their lack of English language knowledge as a language barrier to belonging. Students described feeling lost in class because their English from their home life was different from that used in class where teachers talk fast and use unfamiliar vocabulary. They noted how this made them feel different from the Caucasian students in their classes. For example:

---

*...the language barrier, like that's it. We don't know all the vocabularies and it takes us a while for us to process things, information, in a different language. It also, it also builds a barrier that we don't feel like we're belonging in the classrooms. Like, you know, whenever you feel lost in the lecture, like, what am I doing here? Like I shouldn't be in right now. You don't feel like you belong there just because you're lost outta nowhere. Cause of, you know, how fast the teacher talks. (P03)*

*Well for me, one thing about the school belonging is the language barrier for us Polynesians ...the language barrier, although that we were taught English and we were like, not, not all the words that we know that we click right away. Like we have to look it up. And you know, this is the reality of students, of international students. We go to Google vocabularies and, you know, we don't know everything. We don't know all the words cuz we were told like, but you know, it has become a barrier. (P03)*

*I would just like to make a comment. \_\_ I was in a class where a majority of the students were Caucasian. When we were sitting in there, I feel like the islanders, how do you say it, I think it was quite difficult for use to understand the languages they would use, it was really different from how we spoke. We speak simple English back home, yeah? There's no big vocabulary and the teacher was speaking and the students were giving answers and we were sitting there just really lost (P90)*

---

PI students also referenced difficulty in using English to communicate for social purposes, noting that it was new and difficult to have to use English at all times. Students also noted times when having proficiency in the native language made it difficult to participate and engage across social situations. Some students noted how the use of multiple native languages among students gave rise to misunderstandings and between group conflict that excluded and undermined belonging on campus. For example:

---

*It was quite a difficult experience, like trying to not really difficult, but it was like new for us to try and transition to, you know, speaking English all time. Sometimes I, because most of the times, for me, like when I speak English, I think of what I want to say in Fijian and I translate it into English and sometimes it's really messed up (P26)*

*I do know that during club events, those who are not able to understand or speak the language may feel left out due to their inability to understand what is being shared on a personal level (P55)*

*We had an issue in the hales one time with some of the residents who were speaking -- well there were two residents speaking one language and laughing while another resident was walking out from a different ethnicity. She thought that they were talking about her behind her back, so that created some type of conflict between them. I think language, yes it can create a sense of belonging but also create like a lot of barriers between different groups. I've seen that happen quite often within the school (P93)*

---

## **Theme 2: Institutional Barriers (8)**

Students talked about difficulties interfacing with BYUH that made feeling secure on campus difficult and acted as barriers to feeling like they belonged. For the most part, students cited disorganization and a lack of communication as problems that led to unnecessary stress and a burden for PI students. The overarching theme of institutional barriers included more general instances of when students felt BYUH did not serve them well and led to difficulties with such things as arranging for transportation to campus as a new student, finding housing, paying tuition, registering for courses, and communicating effectively with the various administrative office across campus. Negotiating the financial aspects of campus life were cited as particularly difficult and high stakes for these students. For example

---

*We love the school, its great but when it comes to housing, payments, like school, holds on your account, adding classes, basically all the stuff you need to go to school here...The people you go to often times tell you to go to this person, you go to them, they say you go to this person. You're running in circles trying to figure out, get an answer and get in contact with somebody and you kind of don't. And then its 'oh you can't add the class because you have a hold on your account', you say 'oh I just spoke with someone about paying money and getting rid of the hold' but then there's still...I can't add classes and now its late and I can't get into the classes I want. So there's a lot, its unorganized in many ways, and that did make every semester very difficult, just trying to get started. (P96)*

*It is a mess and it's unfortunate because it's a great school, you know we have a new cafe, we have a new science and math building but it's like the main parts that make the school run are not organized, so it makes it difficult for the students and then you like, are trying to have. Like one time, I was sent like a couple of a few thousand dollars for like a scholarship thing or something, and it went into my account, and then I got an email probably like two months later, 'oh, it was a mistake, sending you the money, so you need to send it back now'. And I went to the office and I was like 'guys if i'm getting scholarship money and it's two months, I've already spent that money and I'm being asked for it back and I'm like a poor student.' And they're like 'No, sorry, there's nothing we can do about it'. I was like 'is there someone else I can talk too?'... And I just said something like 'okay I'll give the money back' and it was just like unfortunate because you know you think when you get money in your account for a scholarship that you work hard for that 'oh it's all good, but then you have to give it back like things like that that just happened a lot right so that is a little issue (P96)*

*I think BYU Hawaii is a beautiful place, but I think they have so many issues with the way that the school runs. There's very little communication to let students know what the process is what's gonna happen when they get here, how to get their visas, all of that. And so I just kind of took that on cuz I know, for me, coming here was awful and so stressful and it didn't mean to be. I just needed someone to tell me, do this...And we had a boy who landed from New Zealand that sat at the airport for like nine hours waiting for someone to pick him up because he didn't know he had to organize his own ride to campus. And so he called someone who called someone who, someone who called me and I was able to call the school and like, "what the heck? Like you've always picked up islanders, when did this change?" And so he just kind of had to sit there and wait it out until we could find someone to get him. (P03)*

---

Students specifically cited certain aspects of the iWork program that impacted student finances and freedom to travel as difficult for PI students on campus. Many students expressed gratitude for the iWork program while simultaneously noting how they felt trapped or at the mercy of the administration because they participated in the iWork program. These students felt that the program overlooked their needs and experiences as PI students, which did not help them feel like they belonged in the campus community.

---

*It's just hearing the different things that our Polynesians you know go through, like for example I-work. When I first came, I-workers was able to sort of leave for two weeks and that was free. And I think it was, we were the last ones that were able to stay free, but it's the new groups coming in and they had to start paying \$30 per day if they leave for two weeks...30 times, 14 days. How much is that? I dunno I'm not good at maths, but it was kind of sad to hear that they had to pay \$30 per night to, you know, just to go on holiday because you only allowed two weeks throughout the year to leave. You know, a lot of us that can't leave, it's because they can't afford to, to pay for it... because they haven't seen families for, you know, however long they've been here at school. And it's kind of sad that I don't know how, like, like for me just hearing that it's like, they feel like they're in prison kind of thing. And it's kind of hard at times where, you know, you know, it's not just that, you know, they're paying the \$30... but there's also other things like you know, students can't have cars or, you know, because they're under, iWork again, because if your parents can afford to pay for your car, then you can afford to pay education. It's not...I'm just trying to like find a way where I can help, you know, you guys to kinda understand where we come as students from Polynesia. Where sometimes parents send money, we can't, you know, afford things, but like they have to get a loan just to help us, you know, cause sometimes students want to go somewhere... (P50)*

---

## **Theme 2a: Cultural Deafness (21)**

Cultural deafness is a subcode of Institution Barriers and captures instances when PI students in this study felt that the institution of BYUH did not listen to or take up their perspectives or the perspectives of other PI students. Students talked about how their feelings of belonging were undermined when they felt their perspectives were pushed aside, denied or minimized. There was a pervasive sense among these students that their perspective was not valued or welcomed and this undermined their experiences of belonging as students on campus.

---

*But there have been certain times where the school has not... sometimes I feel like the school has not catered to our culture to what we are trying to portray and I feel it comes from a place, it comes from [the university's] point of view, not to sound racist but from my point of view that is not ours (P86)*

*Based on my experience, I, I honestly, I don't feel like the school has done enough to, you know, to reach out to these perspectives that are available. I mean, it's one thing to accept the perspectives that are there, but I think the school needs to do more than accept, they need to, you know, push for it to be, you know, more recognized and to put action in there. I feel like both, I don't know if this exists, maybe I'm still new to the, to, you know, campus and everything, but I feel like there should be a board of students, you know, where there's representation everywhere and you know, where our perspectives aren't just accepted and pushed onto the side, but where, you know, a change can happen and executives or people in higher positions can see what's, you know (P61)*

*You have someone who lives out in Arizona...who comes here and decides to run a school based on whatever they grew up with in Arizona. If there was effort from this person's part to actually learn the culture and integrate with the culture that would be seen and valued. Failure to do that results in, in a policy that would benefit a lot of students being rejected. And just because of the majority, they were forced to put it through. And it sad to see that happened just because of, I'm not sure if this person was ignorant to the culture or did not take the time to understand things before they actually took the job position or whoever was recruiting at that time, didn't understand how important it was for those who come here and run things, to understand where we come from and at least facilitate a sense of belonging through policies that will help us be successful (P45)*

---

Students referenced spaces on campus where they felt their perspectives were not heard, including in classes, in social clubs and at work. They also specifically cited how the iWork program did not allow for the PI perspective in the travel policy when it kept them from visiting loved ones back at home for important family events, such as funerals. These were all important examples of where students in the study did not feel like their perspective was heard or sought after, leading them to believe they weren't really important to the administration, which clearly undermined their feelings of belonging on campus.

---

*For example...the teacher talks really fast and she would, she would talk really fast. She thinks that she's okay with it [us speaking up], but she would always say, "oh, that's okay" And then she, she goes slow for like a moment. And then right back to her speed that she's comfortable with. (P03)*

*I sent out an email about discrimination on Polynesians and they had to clear the issue, it almost reached the president about that, when we had to meet with our club members. So we have over 100 students, 100 hundred Samoan students and most of them they're afraid– they're so afraid to come speak to leaders because of this. Because they think that their voice don't matter. Whether we say it or not. The expressions or whatever, we're still wrong. But that's how we feel personally. But to other people too, they feel you know. I don't know if they're thinking the same way we are. But that's how we see it. Because there was a Polynesian girl who posted on social media because she couldn't get help with housing. Then the president had to email her personally to come and see him. And then that's when it was fixed. People who were supposed to help her had to see it on social media. They may think that we're going above and beyond changing our stories, but no we're trying to look for a better solution. (P94)*

*I'm trying to think of a time have I would student orientation we call this, we were organizing the orientation. So I had, I knew a lot of like about what was happening, but every time I think sharing my perspectives, not really, but while I was in that department there, you know, you can find out one. Yeah. They know a lot. So with that, like I would be able to help the students coming to Fiji or just know a lot. And, but I know, I don't think I've really shared their perspective..It's very easy to do it. I just don't feel like they listen. I feel like they wouldn't listen. So I just, I don't yeah. (P04)*

*So going back to like you're not being heard there, people not only like myself, there are other people that are going through the same thing. When a loved one passes away. These are people that are so important to you. You never ever see them again. And they're making it so hard for us to go back and they wonder why our grades get affected and wonder why, why we don't speak. Or we don't like say anything. Cause when we do, they still don't listen to us. I love the school. Like it's the Lord's school, but sometimes there's individuals or there, there are people that need to like, they don't understand students, right? They're not just iWork students. They're actually students with actual needs that are going through struggles and sometimes they just wanna go home to family. (P44)*

---

### **Theme 2b: EIL Classes as Barriers (3)**

EIL classes were also cited as an institutional policy that acted as a barrier to belonging for some of the students in the study. Students cited the difficulty with the amount of credits that accrue taking EIL courses, as well as the reality that they can often pass their major courses but not pass the EIL course because of their different type of English or the specific requirement of an EIL that are more rigorous or just different that what is required in actual coursework.



Students felt these policies around the EIL courses acted as barriers to their overall educational experiences and undermined their belonging as a student on campus.

---

*What I was thinking of is taking EIL classes, it takes a lot of our time. I mean it's a good help but it's also a waste of time, because sometimes they will be counted in our academic record. I had to look at how many semesters international students have to take those classes over and over again, just so that they can qualify to come into college -- like I mean take their major classes. So I don't know if there's a solution...some of these students they're smart academically, but its just like speaking that's a problem.(P94)*

*Most of us speak English back home. Cause in schools it's compulsory, we have to speak English. It's English words that we use. And speaking English, it's quite different here when you speak with a native...I can speak English but when it comes to writing, it'll take time for me to try, probably like write a paragraph or something like... For example, last semester I did some of my minor units. I'm able to pass those, but I unable to pass the EIL. I, My English can't get up from...to the native standard. (P62)*

---

### **Theme 3: Cultural & Ethnic Discrimination (8)**

Students described experiencing discrimination because of their ethnic, cultural, or linguistic background. There is one overarching theme that includes when students felt they were being treated unfairly, or being discriminated against, specifically because of their ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. There were also 4 subthemes in this section that will be described in the following section – two relate to experiences students identified as discriminatory at the intuitional level and 2 relate to instances of discrimination experienced at the individual level. This section will describe the overarching themes cultural and ethnic discrimination illustrated with student voices. In this section, some students described when they experienced discrimination including in classes and at work. For example:

---

*And sometimes some of our friends would like go through like some, you know, racial comments. I mean, that's normal like we we've we've we know that that's normal (P26)*

*I have like, I had a class where they only picked on some students to answer the questions (P12)*

*When I first came to school, I didn't feel like my professors really understood who I was, you know, like cuz a professor made a comment in class. I can't remember what class it was, but they, they had said, oh yeah. 'One of my other friends who works at another university said like, oh, how does it feel to have to dumb down your exams for your students?' And I remember thinking like what? And then he turned around and he, you know, he retaliated and said, 'oh no, like it's not like that, blah, blah.' And I thought, is that how people view us?... is that how people view me? (P04)*

---

---

*So before I joined the human resources at PCC, I used to work for the Political Science Department. It's one of the most known departments at BYU-Hawaii. I used to work as their, we were called Fellows. We represented different countries and we would try and dissect the constitution and see if it's fit for everyone... I was the only Pacific Islander in that uh, in the group of five. We were the five students chosen from the Political Science Department and I was surprised I was chosen because I don't major or minor in Political Science but I do a certificate in legal studies. So, I was asked to join this group. We were paid, it was part of my work. we were researchers and every day we would have like, have a meeting and we would like, be given questions where we would ask to give their opinions and we would share what we have learned in our research so far. And, so the other four students were Caucasian and I was the only Pacific Islander and so every time I said something... first of all, I wasn't sure if should say it because I wondered if it made sense or if they would accept it, if they would belittle me or something like that only because of the accent that I speak with or even the mindset of how I grew up. Most of the time I would give my opinion, our lead would ignore what I said and just listen to the other person and this made me feel very uncomfortable. And so I kept staying there for the rest of the semester just to make sure that I get money because you know I need to pay for my school (laughs). But that is one of the examples that happened to me of how you know of how I didn't feel accepted in a particular group... I felt like I was not heard as a Pacific Islander, so I quit my job. (P91)*

---

---

*I have an experience with not expressing myself and I was being shut down. This happened last semester and i'm going to keep the names confidential. So in this class, it's a free speech class you have to speak up. The teacher want us to open our feelings. So during the discussion, the work we had to do throughout the week you have to, she gave us the criteria and I met them. When I asked, she said 'no that's a C grade when you're not meeting the requirement. That's a C grade requirement'. So I was like 'why the heck are you' <laughs>. I was getting frustrated because I tried so hard to get to reach the amount of where she was asking for, mind you it's a free expression activity. So she was giving me all these crappy grades for all this work we were doing and she literally just shut me down like no you're going to get that. Never mind because my opinion don't matter, your mind is already set. So what I'm trying to say is that its hard to express opinions, especially us Polynesians. We were taught to respect our elders and its frustrating most of the times. So all we do is leave it alone and do whatever. I kind of did that and just thinking about it now, I wish I did something more. But then you know it's going to cause a lot of trouble. So yeah, that's just my experience with not sharing my perspective on things where it really does matter, especially when it comes to grades where I feel like I deserve more than what I am getting. No matter how many times I explain, it was the same thing over and over again. So even then at a school like this, you get shut down without knowing that you are being shut down. (P94)*

---

### **Theme 3a: Institutional – EIL Classes as Discriminatory (5)**

Students named the way they were assigned to EIL classes, not only as a barrier (as in the above section) but as discriminatory in policy and practice. These data were coded separately because students talked about how they were treated differently when assigned to EIL classes, because of their background as Pacific Islanders. This discrimination occurred at the institutional level, which is why this is a subcode of Institutional Discrimination. Student reported about times when EIL instructors were themselves English learners, from different cultural backgrounds, and how being pulled away from other native speakers of English, to attend EIL courses, was actually detrimental to their improving their English. Student talked about how being automatically assigned to an EIL class because they were Pacific Islander immigrant students undermined their confidence, sets them behind in their major coursework, and made them to feel 'categorized' as different. Feeling set apart of discriminated against by this policy undermined students' feelings of belonging.

---

*And like, I think, I just feel, this is personally for myself. I feel like the classes that some of my friends taking now at EIL. I feel like there's double standards to it. Cause I know some of these students, they're very bright and they're very capable of doing good in the English language. But the system that was enforced indicate where we kept start of English classes is very double standard. That's how I feel like I, I'm a very what's the word, I advocate on things like that. Like I feel like before they hand out this criteria in order to separate the students from continuing with their regular classes and taking their EIL classes, I feel like there should be more Pacific Islanders in that system to actually identify if the students deserve to move forward with a major classes. (P33)*

---

---

*When I got here, I dunno why, but when I was categorized and like, "okay, those are here classes" and this kind I feel like why are we being like different? And morally I feel why, why, why we are categorize? why they categorizing this? Yeah, we can't speak sometimes, but yeah we can write proper English, but why don't they put us together so we can learn. the categorize lessons for the Asians and the <unintelligible> together. And how can we prove? It was difficult. (P60)*

*So when I arrived, I get some harder perspective from other students. "Why are we doing this class?" Like the non-natives or non-native language speakers... How can we learn? How can we like be better speakers or listeners, student writing, good English, if we [are] not mingling with other students? ...You have to pass like all three reading, writing pass on the next class... it was little bit kinda make students that psychologically, they feel that they can't do it. Or we, we cannot, we, we are not careful to be with them, so they're gonna put us back. So they feel that sometimes left out or they forget. "So I'm not good enough to come here." So they feel like they've been little bit degraded...Some of them, they learn language English school, the second language, like we learn Australian, it's kinda easy, little bit to understand things. But then we got here, [they] identify all students, even some of them were good in English really. But then after they take all these classes before selecting your majors and it's kinda... A lot of students, international students are put into EIL classes. Yeah. I was, but I got it waved and my brother was, he got it waived, but yeah, it's really problematic when you know, English. You know it very well, but you have to do all these EIL classes. And they're unnecessary and they drag up your school. (P61)*

---

---

*I had a friend who who's taking EIL, he speaks really good English. He was told to go to a tutor who was Asian. And by the end of the 50 minutes they had together, he was teaching her you know, the correct sentence, the grammar, how to set up the sentence correct. And yeah, just like some we've mentioned, especially... But I think when we just, like you said, categorize and throw them in there without any context of where they're at beforehand, I think, like you said, that's detrimental to their, their confidence, their self-esteem. I got my friend learning English from someone who's learning it also as the second language... Someone needs to be on a step up so they can pull you out. Right. And I think there's a danger in categorizing as if you're from Pacific islands, you take the EIL, right. As opposed to let's see where you at and then we'll make a decision whether or not you deserve to be in EIL or not (P59)*

---

### **Theme 3b: Institutional – Linguistic & Cultural Policing (8)**

Linguistic and Cultural Policing captures times when participants reported feeling like they were not allowed to bring their cultural practices and backgrounds to their classroom. The instances described in this section related to times policies and procedures at BYUH where students feel singled out because of their Pacific Islander cultural background. As this discrimination was reported to occur at the institutional level, these data are part of a subtheme of Institutional Discrimination. Students talked poignantly about feelings of having to leave or abandon their ethnic and cultural selves in order to participate fully at BYUH, or when the language they spoke and brought with them from the Islands was deemed not good enough or incorrect. These experienced clearly undermined feelings of belonging on campus.

---

*You get, get tired of <laugh>. Yeah. Like that. And it's just, I dunno, it's just, it's like, you're telling me like, okay, like leave your culture at home. Like when you come to school, like this is the culture we want you to adopt. So yeah. <Laugh> (P4)*

*like we are restricted to a lot of things that could help us further explore you know or even understand who we really are. An example, well, there are a lot of examples. Like we have certain dances that we, that we aren't allowed to do because it could be violating the honor code or it could be violating this or that. But what they don't understand is that that is traditionally valuable to us. It represents us more than how we are represented here. (P91)*

---

---

*Well, just like P91 has shared. Uh, all those times they, they sexualize our culture. Like we try to do something and they are 'oh no, no, no that's against the honor code'. But I'm not trying to do anything wrong, I'm not trying to do anything wrong... I'm not breaking any honor-code, I'm just doing my culture. You're the one who's trying to impose your idea onto me, I'm just doing my culture. I'm not trying to break anything. So, all those times again, it's coming from the perspective of a non-Polynesian or Pacific Islander. (P86)*

*I think it would be quite frustrating here. Because I also speak very good English, but it's different English. And so I think there's been definitely times in classrooms where just maybe weren't so understanding...even just the way we spell things in New Zealand, completely different to America, and I would get pulled down for that in assignments. It can be really frustrating when it's like, I don't wanna learn how to spell American, like I'm spelling the Queen's English, what we speak for the most part in the Pacific. (P03)*

*Yeah. And what you would said too about the different English, types of English. So many times like correctly, my essays, "this is spelled wrong. This is not wrong." It's really not. This's just wrong for America. It's colour. (P4)*

---

### **Theme 3c: Linguistic Discrimination (7)**

Linguistic Discrimination represents student voices when they felt like they were discriminated against because of actual or perceived lack of language proficiencies. This discrimination was experienced by individuals at a personal level, not as an institutional practice by BYUH. Most of the time this theme applied to when students felt their English was being looked down on, or they felt treated as if they were not smart or good enough – because of their language or language proficiency. There were also times when not speaking the native language was used to exclude, diminish or discriminate.

Students identified structural and historical reasons behind the linguistic discrimination. Students clearly articulated the notion that it was the speaker of the language that validated a language, not the language itself, and they felt that because of who they were as Pacific Islander students, their languages were also not valid. At BYU, American English is privileged to the detriment of students who come from Islands where British English is spoken and taught in the classrooms. Students felt this linguistic discrimination worked directly to undermine positive experiences of belonging on campus.

---

*I think that um, my whole school, four years here, I did feel like I was being...I don't know...discrimination? I don't know, I'm sure, we were taught to not do anything like that, but I still feel like it happens. Like, you can feel like you are being treated...I was treated like that because I'm from Tonga. "oh she doesn't know English. She doesn't speak well, her English is broken". I feel like I'm here, and I know I'm learning, but I feel like everyone else is here in the class and I'm here. So that's when I feel like I don't belong because I think "oh I'm not smart enough to be in this class. (P05)*

*I always thought so highly of my English, like I always speak English, but then I noticed when I talk to like Americans or anyone else, I'm like, "I don't speak English." So it's just funny...I mean, they talk to me like, "oh she's not from here, so speak simple English," And you know, the way that you can tell when someone's doing that. Like I don't know how to speak English. I, cause it it's only language I know. But then at the same time I notice is like all the Americans, if I'm talking to an American, it's like English isn't even my language. (P04)*

---

*It depends on who's feeling who's speaking, you know, it's the difference between the Pacific Islander speaking English and a palangi, sorry, haoli, you know, speaking English. it's the same language, but how accommodating it is to meet the needs of the students is a different story. That depends on who's speaking the language...it's just the difference between you [Dr. Scanlan] and Dr. Feinauer [White researcher]. You both speak English, but yeah, there is a different feeling from the learners, depending on who it comes from. (P45)*

*So I think part of the difference...is because English is the official language, but it's not the primary language used. Fijian, iTaukei language is the primary language, although officially English. And we learned British English. Right. And so for example in British English and every time I got down in, when I wrote something, because in British English to this J is G A O L, but here's J A I L that's how you spell JAIL. Yeah. So, but I always got that circled. Right. So that, that that's again, that's, that's just an effect of something wrong or like, like history, just it's rippling effects through time, down to us now. Right. Then we, and then transition. Yeah. We speak English, but then again, there's the, the different, the American English, there's the accent. And then we're in a university where everyone has different accents. Right? And so that adds to, that adds to the effect of how we we're learning English (P59)*

---

Students also talked about instances when they felt or witnessed discrimination because they didn't speak the native language. For example, the following student witnessed name calling against her friends who were not fluent in Tongan. This name calling was a way to discriminate against these two girls and to exclude them for not being truly Tongan – because they weren't fluent in the language.

---

*Like, for example, Tongan kids from Tonga kind of underestimating me cause they were shocked and they thought that I was from Tonga because I spoke really good Tongan but my two friends, they were like, "oh, they're plastic." And in a way I was like, "did they just call my friend plastic?" And like, for me it was like, it felt good to belong, but also at the same time, I kind of felt sorry for my two friends because they, they would see them two as, you know, plastic, like they understood and the language and that, but for me, I spoke and I understood at the same time. (P50)*

---

### **Theme 3d: Smartness Discourse & Stereotype Threat (5)**

Some students in this study described clearly the impact of being on the receiving end of negative stereotypes, especially in the classroom context. They described narratives and perceptions about them as Pacific Islanders that are placed on them and the ways they are positioned deficit to those narrative and perceptions. One way students describe is how they often feel like are not smart or not good, because they are not white. These stereotypes and negative discourses about who gets to be smart, and in what ways, undermines student's

---

*The stereotypes/stigma associated with each of our island nations make it difficult for each of us to create our own stories. The preconceptions and notions of what a "pacific islander" should look/do/sound like make it difficult for us to openly talk about our opinions. The culture and traditions that we are raised up with become a part of us, and by the time we are old enough to leave home our culture is us and in turn, it becomes difficult to change habits that we thought were healthy. In order to understand Pacific Islanders, it is important that we learn about how they view themselves within their own cultures. (P 55)*

*So, Liahona is in Tonga. You all know Liahona high school. So, you are expected to speak English at school. This is high school and if you don't know how to speak English you're considered dumb or just not a intelligent person. So you...I've noticed that confidence is not taught there and confidence very low even when we come here cause it's not taught before even leaving your island yourself...[it's]also considered that if you're fair or white or Caucasian that you're smarter than anybody else in the room, so we are also taught, sadly taught that. If that makes any sense. And so coming here is 2005, its almost like a fight to share our perspective or I, to show up in the classroom because of that very negative connotation that you are not a fair, so you are not white, you are not smart, therefore you have nothing to share in the classroom. (P88)*

---



confidence to share and participate in classroom and academic space and ultimately undermine ways students feel they can belong.

---

*Yeah. <Laugh> yeah. And when you first came to school, you don't want to reach out to your professor, cause you don't wanna be the dumb person in class. It, you don't wanna put your hand up and ask a question and then people roll their [eyes]... and especially like we, for people, you know, we, we are so proud of who we are. We... we've been told, you know, I don't know. Like for me growing up in Australia...I just, I felt like, and there was no specific time, but I felt like I always felt dumb. Like I always felt like in my classes, I wasn't the smartest one that I really wouldn't say anything. And so yeah. Coming to university, I still, sometimes I feel like I have imposter syndrome where I'm like sitting in a class and then I think, oh, should I really be here? Like it look at all these smart people and I'm not smart enough to be here. Like maybe it's just a, I sometimes do that with like my English, like when I'm emailing my teacher and I'm like, this sounds pretty dumb. No, I'm not gonna send it, and it goes out.(p04)*

---

#### **Theme 4: Lack of PI Cultural Representation on Campus (5)**

Student noticed places and spaces on campus where the Pacific Islander culture was not well represented. Students talked about the lack of Pacific Islander food, music, as well as people being represented on campus as undermining their experiences of belonging on campus. Students emphasized how important it was for seemingly small things, like Polynesian food, to be served on campus to help them experience belonging, as well as the importance of having PI people represented in important or influential conversations.

---

*Oh, yeah. For example, the food the cafeteria serves and let's just be honest, Asian food. I love the Asian people and I would take a dozen bullets for them, but for me to eat their food, I have other preferences. The cafeteria dominantly serves Asian food on and on and on and on and on and on. When do we, when will be the day where we see Polynesian food served in the cafeteria? (P45)*

*That's the hard part is like, even with dances, I mean, if you're talking about creating a home away from home, the dances, you know, the place that they allow or that they have is very American, you know? I know that there's editing and they have to make sure that it's within the standards of the church or whatever, but you can only listen to journey so many times as...or party in the USA by Miley Cyrus...I mean, we can have fun whenever, you know, like Polynesians will make fun, you know, add dances on any song. But if you're talking, I mean... if they're trying to get Polynesians out, it's not the music that's bringing us out. For sure (P43)*

---

Students highlighted the disappointment of lack of people represented in important conversations on campus as well in academic curricula. The lack of inclusion of PI people leads to a lack of PI perspectives which students named as undermining PI students experiences of belonging on campus.

---

*I've been a part of, you know, this is, I've been a part of focus groups like this one. Cuz recently I did one, you know, on zoom. It was for them rebranding, you know, BYU Hawaii, and what are some things that make the BYU Hawaii experience? And I, I was thinking, cuz in that focus group nine Americans three, you know, one Indian, three Asians. And I was the only Polynesian (P43)*

*And so it wasn't until I came here that I finally noticed or recognized that part where I'm different. And so when I chose my major, I think it also goes back thus I'm a history major. And so doing a lot of history research growing up, I always would be so disappointed that I can't use my oral knowledge. And so that and so I always was disappointed that I didn't know any historians or anyone that wrote books that I could, you know, cite on my history papers. And so majority of my history papers in high school were thanks to, sorry, like, two white men. Sorry. Nothing. (p03)*

---

### **Theme 5: Transitions – Culture Shock (9)**

Students talked openly about the difficulty of transitioning from their home island to Hawaii, as well as the sudden newness of attending university. They referenced these difficult feelings of transition as culture shock, and described experiences of being overwhelmed, numb and disoriented as they arrived at school the first time. They also noted how culture shock and the difficulties in adjusting to a new environment led some Pacific Islander students to experience feelings of stress and depression, undermining feelings of belonging.

---

*I didn't have a sense of belonging when I came here. I remember while leaving the airport. I didn't have any feeling like I didn't, I wasn't excited. I wasn't sad, I just felt nothing. It was until I was on the plane. And then I finally, it finally came to me. I'm actually leaving home right now. I'll see home after four years, I guess. And then when I came here, everything was new. It was all culture, shock, the weather was different (P25)*

*P88: So there's a huge cultural shock when we first...and they always bring international students a few days right before orientation. There's no space for international students to get used to Hawaii. Even though it's a Hawaiian island, it's a cultural shock and it's very different here. So it could be a month or two for a student to adjust to how the culture is here and how things are here. Then transition to classroom and orientation. But most of the time we're just brought in and boom you gotta figure it out. And then we end up just going back into our shell... (P88)*

---

---

*Actually mentioning the word stress and depression. I don't know if you guys have noticed but Polynesians have the highest number of depression students on campus... And I never realized why our students didn't come to our activities and stuff, but it was because of this issue, depression. And the reason why they're depressed; money of course the root of all evil <laugh>. But not only that they had to struggle, they're stressing out because us coming from home not knowing the curriculum, aware of the way of American college life... Yes, our international students are struggling. We may seem happy, laughing and all that but when we go home, we actually cry in bed... Not because of our boyfriends and all that <laughs>... like I know you want to hear all of these struggles right and helping out our Polynesian students. And this is why I agreed to come to this so that I can voice out what our people aren't saying. But I've noticed some of our students losing a lot of weight, they just stay in the room (P94)*

---

There are three subthemes of Transitions-Culture shock where students talked about barriers that were difficult or shocking that they experienced as specifically difficult to navigate. These difficulties undermined their experiences of belonging and will be described below and illustrated with student voice.

### **Theme 5a: Different Expectations & Schooling Systems (10)**

One of the main reasons for the difficulty of the transition to BYUH, cited by students in this study, was not knowing our understanding how to navigate the different expectations and systems on campus as compared to what they were used to in their schools at home. These differences presented real challenges and were experienced as shocking by some students. They described different expectations for learning, assessments, and ways to participate in classrooms as being difficult to understand and adapt to. Students noted how these differences undermined their feelings of belonging, especially in the classroom setting.

---

*Yeah. Culture shock, kinda everything was little bit different. And back home school is more like just paper, like reading it. Right? So coming in everything was transition from renewal to internet. You submit things on time, no more writing. you know, back home you just write, write, write papers...It's a culture thing. So coming here, everything was transitioned from, like minimal to internet work. I really find it hard to transition fast...really affected me from first semesters (P60)*

*I think the system, the way it's set up, is just a Western mindset, you know what I mean? Like you're trying to fit a specific criteria in a Western mindset... And then at the end of the day, it always comes back to Western stuff. You know what I mean?... Every, every educational system is all about Western stuff.*

---

---

*You feel like you don't belong when you can come to a classroom atmosphere that they don't even know what you're saying or you don't even understand the lessons and the interactions are not... then you know for sure you're not supposed to be there. (P21)*

*We don't have multiple choice, you know. It's either, you know, the answer or you don't, like, you know? Like you write your own question, you write your own answers to the question. And when I came here, there was so much multiple choice. I was like, "how did you do that?" Even though it's easier...but you know, like my brain was just like, "whoa. Yeah. Never seen that before." I would say...it did have a toll, my educational learning here because I didn't learn this the same way...I just, wasn't used to the atmosphere of learning here (P77)*

---

### **Theme 5b: Lack of School Knowledge and Familiarity (6)**

Students described feeling like they didn't have basic knowledge to navigate geographical and emotional spaces on campus or new systems that were required to interact within the campus community. They expressed not knowing where things were located, or how to find out crucial logistical information. Similarly, some students talked about the uncertainty and not knowing of how to interact with their instructors. They were fearful about expectations and expressed unfamiliarity with the norms and customs of campus life. This lack of knowledge and unfamiliarity undermined experiences of belonging.

---

*I feel like the first time I had the, what you call it, the calendar or the schedule of our classes, it just had the room names. I had no idea what I was looking at. I was like 'what's MCK?' 'What's this number?' yeah. I don't know how to navigate through campus even. (P07)*

*Just trying to navigate yourself through campus. Like when I first came, I, I was like, man, I still had the missionary attitude. I asked my, our RAs, so that means I have to be with my roommate all the time? (P26)*

---

---

*And then it's like, you gotta email your, your professors if you're not coming in....I've always grown up with like the mentality. Okay. Don't miss school. Even if you're sick, you're going to school. And like, sometimes like with here, sometimes you just, can't like when you have work, when you're sick and whatnot and you have school, you need to take the break. And a lot of time I'm like, I'm scared to message with my professor.... Like I'm really sick. And like at times I'm like, are they gonna believe me when I say that? Like, do I need to show up with my doctor's note?...Like I really need this kind thing. Cause I don't know how they're like, if it's like a professor like that, I'm not familiar with... If it's like the first time in class and I missed it two times already, I don't wanna be emailing them. Like, sorry, I didn't show up in your class. But I got sick kind of thing. Like to me it just, it was rude that first you don't show up in class and now you're sending them my message, like a day or two later. When do we send like an email to them? Send it before the class, send it after class, like send it when you're sick kind of thing? ...We are not aware... we don't know how do we go about doing stuff like that.? Because we've never learned about it in the, like our system back home is so different from here, but yet you gotta adapt to other system. And a lot of times they're like, why didn't you email me? Why didn't you come talk to me kind of thing? I don't ask. (P04)*

---

### **Theme 5c: Homesick or Lonely (7)**

A major part of the culture shock of transitioning to BYUH for the Pacific Islander students in this study was feeling homesick or lonely. They expressed feeling lonely in their rooms at the hales, even though they had their own space. They noted how life on campus, and in the hales, was so different from their life back home where there were people to greet them or be with them at the end of the day. These feelings of homesickness and loneliness were difficult and undermined feelings of belonging.

---

*When I first got here to BYUH I was lost and every time I would go to my hale as well I would feel lonely even though I have a room (P13)*

*like when I came, I feel like, firstly, I came, I was off campus and I had I was homesick so I feel like I don't belong here, but I have to do it that's how I was raised (P19)*

*It's kind of different like going throughout the day and then going back to your room. It's not like going back to a home, it's just going back to your room. And then having unit mates that are totally different. Like it's a good experience but it just doesn't feel the same as what we're used to back home (P07)*

---

---

*Back at home, as soon as you get off the bus and walk down the steps to go home you just hear your mum yell "eh before you get into the house, go and rake the yard". And every time I walk towards my hale expecting that as well (P13)*

---

### **Theme 6: Not Connected to Instructors (5)**

Instructors played an important role in the lives of the Pacific Islanders students in this study, as will be shown in the following section about the factors that foster belonging for students. Unfortunately, at times students did not feel connected to their instructors or to being in the classroom. This disconnection undermined their feelings of belonging, especially in academic and classroom spaces.

---

*I felt like my professors really didn't understand that what I was going through as a student (P4)*

*Because I had experiences where I, it was a lot of students, and I didn't feel like I was really connected with the professor. With, in that class, I feel like I probably lack something (P36)*

*Sometimes it depends on your TAs. Like one semester, it was almost done and I guess the TA, it was her first semester, and she was finding it difficult. She couldn't necessarily connect to the Pacific Islanders. And in that class, like the Islanders, we struggled the most compared to the Asians and like the native students. So that was a class where I, and even the professor was a little bit, little bit, not that much... but that was the class where I would come "oh do I have to go to class?? I would look at my grade and be like "my grade can take one hit, I'll be fine". I would just not go for class (P40)*

---

**RQ3: What do Pacific Island students at Brigham Young University Hawaii say promotes their experiences of belonging at the school?**

Themes	Definition
<b>English language as Unifying</b>	Being able to speak English helps students to feel part of the campus community both in academic and social ways.
<b>Role of Heritage Language</b>	
<i>Social Purpose – Connection</i>	Speaking and maintaining the heritage language helps students to make friends, connect and feel a sense of belonging.
<i>Ethnic Identity / Community &amp; Kinship</i>	Learning, speaking and maintaining the heritage language helps students stay connected to their ethnic identity and maintains kinship relationships and belonging to their ethnic and cultural communities.
<b>Connected to Instructor</b>	Feeling connected to instructors and in their classrooms. This connection made learning more interesting and accessible, and motivated them to attend and work in their classes.
<i>Pacific Islander Instructors</i>	The ease and mutual understanding with Pacific Islander instructors that facilitated their experiences of belonging.
<i>Instructors Instruct for / Accommodate for Pacific Islander students</i>	Instructors consider students cultural backgrounds, solicit their participation, and adjust their teaching to accommodate the learning needs of their Pacific Islander students.
<b>Social Ties</b>	
<i>Feels Like Home</i>	How friends and family helped them find a feeling of home on campus.
<i>Academic Peer Support</i>	The importance of social peer support for academic achievement and experiences of belonging.
<i>Social Peer Support</i>	The importance of friends to provide emotional and social support, helping students navigate campus life and difficult situations.
<i>Diversity as Social Norm</i>	Diversity fostered feelings and experiences of belonging. Students belong because difference is expected and accommodated for.
<b>Institutional Supports</b>	

Themes	Definition
<i>Extracurricular- Activities &amp; Clubs</i>	Activities and clubs are important places to find connections, support and be involved and experience belonging on campus.
<i>Extracurricular – Culture Clubs &amp; Culture Night</i>	Culture clubs celebrate Pacific Islander cultures on campus. They are important communities for Pacific Islander students. Culture night is a major event that facilitates experiences of belonging.
<i>Receptive to Feedback</i>	Students reported experiencing belonging when they noted BYUH as an institution that was receptive to their feedback.
<i>My Culture is Represented</i>	Seeing Pacific Islander culture represented and celebrated across various places on campus facilitates experiences of belonging.
<i>School Systems Foster Belonging</i>	Systems or structures of campus life that foster belonging.
<b>Cultural Self-Representation</b>	Being able to authentically represent themselves and their culture in various places across campus, such as classrooms, culture night and the PCC.
<b>Church Membership as Unifier</b>	Expressing feelings of being united in Christ and connected to others because of their membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

There were many ways that Pacific Islander BYUH students described experiences of belonging on campus. They were clear about what helped them feel like they belonged and articulate about the supports that facilitated belonging across many aspects of campus life. For example, students talked about the role of language in this multilingual context in facilitating belonging. English was described by many students as a unifying language that brought them together. By the same token, speaking their native languages was highlighted as important for being able to connect socially on campus and for maintaining kinship ties to their ethnic communities both on campus and at home. Faculty and instructors were identified as instrumental in facilitating belonging experiences for these students. Specifically, students felt connected on campus when they felt connected to their instructors, and they felt connected to instructors who tailored their instruction to their academic needs. Paramount for experiencing belonging are social ties across campus. Peer relationships were important for providing academic and social support and for helping them to feel like they were with the families they missed so much from home. In a similar way, BYUH sponsored extracurricular activities, such as culture clubs, provided ways to develop social connections and to be able to represent themselves in culturally authentic ways. Finally, it is perhaps not surprising that membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was identified as an important aspect of campus life that facilitating belonging experiences for these students. In the following section, we will describe each of these codes in more detail and provide illustrative quotes from the student focus group data.



## Theme 1: English Language as Unifying

Students described how being able to speak English help them to feel part of the campus community both in academic and social ways. They talked about how speaking English helped to unify them as students across different culture and language groups. Students spoke about English as a universal language and were very clear on how speaking English was necessary for furthering their education. They appreciated their High Schools efforts to prepare them to speak English when they arrived at BYUH. For example:

---

*I don't know, but that would be pretty hard to accommodate for so many languages. You know just because you come from a country, the school has to facilitate a language for you. I think the language of instructions is pretty universal in the sense that all, all, all, all the islands speak English. And so, I personally think that we're, we're in the right track there, but there could be other viewpoint better than that (P45)*

*I think, because we went to church school was English immersion school so we're allowed to speak our own language, and I think it was to me was a positive, It really is a positive effect on the students, because we get to speak in Tongan at home. So, I said they're trying to educate us so that when we go to university or higher education, we're able to, to talk in English because you're not always not going to be able to talk in Tongan, so, I felt like it was okay to go to our English immersion school (P20)*

---

Students also clearly articulated ways that speaking English helped facilitate social experiences and belonging across culture groups. Students expressed appreciation for their abilities to speak English especially given the multicultural context of BYUH. They noted how speaking English allowed them to belong in multiple ways with people who came from many different places. Speaking English was cited as a primary way students were able to experience belonging in social settings across campus.

---

*In Fiji, cause we were we were colonized by Great Britain, like the standard of everything was English, you know, even recently. And so, yeah, everywhere you'd go, everyone speaking English and it's, it's a universal language. And I, I went to school in a place where it was predominantly like not Fijian kids, but like White, Mixed, Indian and Chinese... And it, I think it helped me gain a sense of belonging. Cause you know, in school there's always cliques. There's those who know the language, there's those who don't know it, it's just separated. And I was with those who knew and didn't know. So, I think that role language played for me was that it helped me determine my friend circle. So now that I'm here at Uni, I don't really see, like I wouldn't immediately flock to all the Fijians. I, I'd like to get to, to know everyone else. But I think in that way, like language has helped me because I, I know it's important, but at the same time, like English is a universal language. It's important to know. (P71)*

---

---

*I think the schools like done good with how they address language, especially in English proficiency. Cause it's, it's easy. It's just simpler. You know? I mean, cause if everyone, everyone couldn't speak English, honestly like man, I wouldn't have met any of you people here because you wouldn't even know what I'm saying. People don't even know what I'm saying a lot of the time anyway. That just shows how broad language is on campus. (P34)*

*Due to the diversity present at BYU Hawaii, with different cultural backgrounds, English becomes our primary language being spoken in order to meet on common grounds. (P55)*

*But now that I think about it, I think practicing English in school, cuz it's not my first language, helped a lot. And it gives me a sense of belonging. Now that I move away from home where you speaks, where everybody speaks Samoan, and you move here to Hawaii where everybody speaks English. And so, thinking about it, I'm grateful that I was able to learn English in school ...because now you're here, and your like, "yeah, I can speak English. I can communicate with people that do not speak Samoan, which is a good thing." And it gives you a sense of belonging to know how to speak English and communicate with people that are not from where you're from. (p70)*

---

## **Theme 2: Role of Heritage Language**

Students also spoke about the importance of speaking and maintaining their heritage or native languages while at BYUH. For this theme, student data was not uniquely coded as the Role of Heritage Language. Rather, all of the student voices about speaking or maintaining the heritage language in support of belonging were coded as either Social Purpose—Connection or Ethnic Identity/Community and Kinship. These themes will be described and illustrated by student voices in the following sections.

### **Theme 2a: Social Purpose – Connection (7)**

Students reported how speaking a heritage or native language helped them to make friends, connect and feel a sense of belonging within other students who also spoke that language. Other students talked about how speaking a specific vernacular or dialect can help build connections among students within their culture group. Being able to use their native language facilitates feeling supported and like they are at home among peers on campus from the same island community. For example:

---

*I think for me personally, the role that language has played while here at school is it's helped me to connect with other Samoan students...I remember we went to our first activity, the Samoan student activity and people were just ignoring us. And so I remember like, I remember thinking like, oh how can I be friends <laugh> and so like, you know, you speak Samoan to them. Oh you can speak Samoan. And then from that, they'll be like, oh, they wanna interact with you more. But that's how I've been able to use language as a sense of belonging at school is being able to help or it's being able to like, let people know, Hey, I can, I can speak the language...that's just how I've used language. Yeah. As a way to belong in this school here. (P04)*

---

---

*I think for me personally, the role that language has played while here at school is it's helped me to connect with other Samoan students...I remember we went to our first activity, the Samoan student activity and people were just ignoring us. And so I remember like, I remember thinking like, oh how can I be friends <laugh> and so like, you know, you speak Samoan to them. Oh you can speak Samoan. And then from that, they'll be like, oh, they wanna interact with you more. But that's how I've been able to use language as a sense of belonging at school is being able to help or it's being able to like, let people know, Hey, I can, I can speak the language...that's just how I've used language. Yeah. As a way to belong in this school here. (P04)*

---

---

*But something that helps me, like, I guess, connect and feel like I belong to this school is when I'm able to like get together with the rest of the Cook Islanders. And we just, we just get together and we'll just talk like back home, and like, we'll use our like slang and like our English that we used to ...and we'll throw in our Maori words and well that helps me feel like I'm at home, away from home. Like it helps me like see that here at school, there's a, there's a community that I like belong to. And there's a group of people I can come to and talk about like things that I need help with....and that can explain it to me in a way that I would understand as well. And just because like, just those little like tweaks and the way that we speak is...it definitely helps. (P53)*

---

*It plays a big part in school for me. Even though I'm in a English immersed school just having a bunch of Fijians who can understand your accent, slangs, jokes is always so good! Makes home feel close by (P 58)*

---

Interestingly, other students also talked about how they felt a social connection to students, even if they weren't from the same cultural and linguistic group, if they were able to speak a common native language. For example, return missionaries are able to connect socially with the students who speak the language of their mission. Further, some Pacific Islander students can feel a social connection to white students if the white students learn and use even a few words of their language. Even this more token use of a native language is an example of how students can use native languages (other than English) to affiliate with each other and connect across culturally and linguistically different social groups.

---

*I think it goes back to that idea we were talking about earlier, connectivity, communication in order to connect with people who obviously helps to speak the same language or if you know that language, like a lot of Polynesians here have served in the Philippines. So a lot of them have social ties to the Filipino. They get included in a lot of their activities and whatever goes on.*

*Even, even the Palagis like if the Palagis, can just like, if they just say one word, like to the Tongans, "oh malo e lelei", instant "you in there," it's like a automatic, you know. Key in the door. There you go. And if you're able to speak multiple languages, then that's just even better.(P32)*

---

## **Theme 2b: Ethnic Identity/ Community & Kinship (11)**

The Pacific Islander students in this study talked about the importance of learning, speaking and maintaining their heritage language in order to stay connected to their ethnic identity and maintain a feeling of belonging to their ethnic and cultural communities. Proficiency wasn't necessary as a marker of connection to their culture group. Just learning or attempting to learn the language was a meaningful action for identity and culture. However, losing the language was seen as losing connection to important kinship groups and communities.

---

*We were taught a little Hawaiin, that was the only language that we had for high school and for middle school. And I did have a sense of belonging, like learning the language and being able to like speak with my teachers. I'm not fluent, but I'm able to understand more. I can't have great glorious conversations. I usually just write music in Hawaiian, but having a conversation is hard for me to keep up and stuff. Yeah, it's different here because there's only a few that speak fluently Hawaiian here. Yeah, I think it's like, what (name) said is that, you know, you're surrounded by all these different cultures here, and they're all pretty fluent in their languages, and they all kind of stick together. So just kind of missing that connection between the Hawaiians or the locals that are from here. But definitely, a sense of belonging when I was learning the language at my school. (P02)*

---

---

*Like I think [heritage] language contributes to like a sense of community sometimes. Cuz like I've had, you know, like international friends and I ask them, you know, I ask this question like, "oh, like when you meet someone from your country, do you kind of like, you know, like how do you feel? Are you like excited? Is it like sense of comfort?" And a lot of them say like, "it's nice. Yeah. To like to, when you have that connection, it's comfortable to like speak in your native language and you have something that you can like relate to them with so like," so yeah... A central belonging and togetherness. (P02)*

---

Speaking the heritage language operated to identify and reinforce student ethnic identity and kinship relationships. Students spoke about how their specific regional dialect was important for marking belonging to their families and communities – especially back on their home island. Students also expressed fear that losing proficiency in the native language would make it difficult to communicate with and stay connected to their families after university. They described deliberate efforts to maintain their native languages in order to maintain a sense of belonging to their ethnic selves, their families and communities. As noted earlier in this report, the connection to the families and kinship on island is a source of resiliency and belonging for students, even as they negotiate ways to belong on campus.

---

*Well, it's very important... we are from the Western division of Fiji and how, even though we have the same lingo, but different dialects, that is an important aspect because it identifies my kinship to their people. (P33). Yeah. So that's, so that's why language is very important to me because if we have not, if they do not speak to me, I cannot identify a relationship, but because they spoke to me in their dialect, I know, okay, I'm related to this too, in this manner (P34)*

*But for Fijian language, we are required, we are expected to speak it every day. That's the sad truth that we as Fijians struggle with every day, we have to speak it every day. Cause once we stop speaking it, we start losing the Fijian vocabulary. And then when you go back home and we speak with our families back home, they'll be speaking to us readily enough in Fijian and we'll be like, we just speak three or four words Fijian and Englishm -- they call it Finglish. So we have to, that's why you see most of the Fijians on campus. They meet up with each other almost every night. Wherever they go, they speak, and they speak Fijian because once we stop speaking our language, we start losing it and go fast. And if it's gone, our ethnic identity starts to change a bit. That's one reason why we continually speak the language. Cause everything, our studies, our classes are all in English. We stop now, we start losing our mother-tongue. (P33)*

---

### Theme 3: Connected to Instructors (18)

Instructors were cited as key people at BYUH that facilitated experiences for belonging for the Pacific Islander students in the study. We are using the term instructors to refer to any person in a teaching capacity on campus, including faculty, teaching assistants, and instructors. Students spoke about how they experienced belonging on campus when they felt connected to instructors and in their classrooms. They spoke about how being connected to instructors made learning more interesting and accessible, and motivated them to attend and work in their classes. Overall, it was important to the students that they felt their instructors cared about them and their success at BYUH.

---

*Connections in class. For example, the professors and the teachers, the students, like when you feel like you're connecting, like it's where, it's where you feel like you're like you belong. Like when the teacher asked you... and then you shared and you feel that connection... Like for the professors, we're so grateful that they they're so open minded, giving us the space to share our opinions and our thoughts that we get to feel the connections that you, I don't know, whatever that connection is, but you know, between a teacher and a student, like you...feel that sense of belonging where, you know, like "I'm in the right place." (P03)*

*I think once you find ground with your professor, that's when, like you feel more like ...more excited to be in class, you feel more energized to do the assignments, to finish your work early without waiting to finish at the end. But like yeah, as you find that common ground with your professor or someone in the class, I think that's when you find that motivation to go. (P41)*

---

*And then these professors that I really connected to, the class becomes really interesting, and I can have more like put more effort to learn in the classroom and outside of the classroom. Feeling connected with the professor (P36)*

*They don't care if you're understanding or not – that that happened to me, when I was studying at the university of the South Pacific. But then when I got here [at BYUH], that's another thing that made me feel, you know, a sense of belonging to the school cuz the professors, they really, really, they wanted to help us. And yes, and that's when I feel the most connected to the school...when I feel that connection from the professor (P27)*

*I was scared to come to university just because of, I dunno, university of New Zealand, but here at BYU Hawaii. You feel like you met us. That's how I felt coming here. Like every class that I went to, I felt like I matter to the teacher instead of being looked upon as a Maori, as a Pacific islander, that we're not getting it. So that's kind of like my experience with being here at school. That's how I felt (P30).*

---

Students specifically identified things that teachers did to connect to their students. Remembering students' names and knowing how to say their names correctly was really important to these students. They also appreciated it when teachers sought to understand their culture and made efforts to be informed, advocate for, and make space in their classroom for their perspective. Students were also clear that teachers didn't need to share the same cultural background as them in order to seek their perspective.

---

*If your teachers know you by name that's like a start. You're like, if they know me by name, it makes it easier to go ask them for help, it's like that. It's not like an ice breaker...but kind of is. It's like something that eases it for me to ask them some questions, ask for help, I know they know who I am. But yeah I think it makes it easier for me to approach people and ask them for help, especially teachers, if I know they know me then I say hello. (P06)*

*It's like you going into a room and then knowing it by name, especially if you've been in the class for like a few days or a few weeks. Even though your name is hard to pronounce, but if they make it their business to like, know you by name and you go into classes and they call you by name and they're like, "oh, do you have an answer to this P44 or P48 or P47?" if they were to do that, I feel like I'm at home, despite what they look like on the outside. If they make a good business to know you by name, and they respond to you too on campus <laugh> right away. Not like how many days later... yeah. I'll say the prayer every day because you know my name (P44)*

---

*I had a teacher that knew about my connections and the more he understood, like where I was coming from with my perspective, it helped me become more confident in addressing [a specific] issue. So just having someone that like, I guess an advocate...because of what he did, because he understood my background and he understood my culture in a sense, he helped me not just like, see that it's not disrespectful. I guess he helped me kind of like work through the way that traditions were made and said it doesn't necessarily always have to be like this. So having a support system or having someone just try to like teach it to you, like just having someone to like help you. (p73)*

*And then we have this TA this semester who like from... he's from mainland, but he like gets everything and he understands. So, we are like, instead of going to the Professor we end up going to the TA. So it depends on your TA (P41)*

---

### Theme 3a: Pacific Islander Instructors (10)

The Pacific Islander students in this study also noted that they felt more easily connected on campus when they have instructors who are also Pacific Islander themselves. They noted that Pacific Islander instructors could more easily understand where they, as students, were coming from culturally and more easily facilitate their learning. They described an ease and mutual understanding with Pacific Islander instructors that facilitated their experiences of belonging.

---

*It's not majorly based on this, but something that I notice that makes a big difference is when I walk inside the classroom and the instructor is a Pacific Islander there is a sense of understanding, unspoken understanding, that is there that otherwise would not have been there if it was someone that does not belong to, or, you know, respectfully speaking, that is not a Pacific Islander just because of mutual understanding. To say the least. There are some things that because of where we grew up with, we understand unspoken vibes with the moment that is very different from someone who does not belong to...I believe the faculty and administration has a big part in their recruiting process, [which] influences whether or not a student feels at home. And this is said with all, you know, respect to those who don't belong to those ethnic groups, it's not their fault. It's just sense of security when mutual understanding is, is based on where you come from....And you know, that look, yeah, they don't wanna say anything, but they don't understand.(P45)*

---

---

*I think it's really like, when there are professors that are from your background...I think it's easier to communicate to them regarding matters like cultural beliefs and stuff like that, especially in Pacific Island studies. I think it's easier to communicate and talk to them about these things because you feel more comfortable, I guess, as a Pacific islander around them and yeah. More than other professors that you feel like would not get you in that way, if that makes sense. (P69)*

*It was during COVID, but on his video lecture, he used an example that Polynesians can relate to and it just made it so much easier for me to, to understand. And so even in those analogies and in the teaching, I feel like, make us feel, see, cause we're like, "oh yeah. Like we can understand that." I know you're, I mean, your father-in-law was amazing, you know, at making classrooms...Dr. Wesley who was tenured, you know, here, but just, that was one of the first classes where the entire class was just validated. Yeah. He could turn, you know, and even the Americans, like we were best friends with the Americans in the class because of just the way he was able to create that environment. And using examples that we all could relate to. (P43)*

---



### Theme 3b: Instructors instruct for / accommodate for Pacific Islander students (24)

There were multiple examples given by students of instructors adjusting their teaching to instruct for and accommodate the learning needs of their Pacific Islander students. This was one of the most prevalent themes for students when they talked about what teachers did that helped them experience belonging on campus. Students noted how instructors would consider their cultural backgrounds in order to deliberately adjust their teaching to adjust their instruction. They noted how they experienced belonging when instructors solicited and made room for their perspectives in the classroom. Students felt cared for when they saw their instructors putting extra attention and consideration into their preparation and instruction. This felt especially meaningful when instructors who exhibited this care were not Pacific Islander themselves or were from a different cultural background.

---

*For me, its coming from the islands. In the classrooms, back home we are encouraged to speak up, but we don't necessarily do it, and here our professors are like, "speak, speak, come talk, come and talk." So for me, that's just like, "oh, going the extra mile, they want to hear my voice. They want to know what I'm thinking," so for me I feel that's my sense of belonging. They're going the extra mile. It's not just me going to them, they're come towards me as well. So that sense of like understanding and them trying to relate to us, like majority of them are native teachers. Like, and they haven't been like around islanders or diverse groups,...And like, "how do they relate you? They don't even know us islanders, some of them don't even know like the countries and stuff like that." But them just trying to, I guess, read up to understand how you're feeling and some, sometimes they say stuff and you're like, 'wait, how did they know this is happening?' so just knowing the fact that they're going and doing the extra mile, trying to understand what you, what you felt or what you doing at the moment. It's like, "oh, you belong to this place. I belong here" (P40)*

*Also I don't know, but my IT classes professors, they would often like ask for opinions or wanted to know more about Tonga, mainly because there were only like the few I see, three of us like in the class. (P75)*

*But also... I'm in the biology department and it's not a very popular department to, for Pacific Islanders to choose. So, when professors, you know, recognize that you bring, you know, something different to the table, a different perspective and I really appreciate it when professors encourage you to pursue and or to just, you know, continue and yeah. (P61)*

---

There were several instructional strategies that instructors used that the Pacific Islander students noted were especially helpful for them. These included checking for understanding, making themselves available outside of class, reaching out to ensure students are engaged and using accessible language. requiring participation in discussion and group projects that helped students learn how to share their perspectives. Students noted times when teachers explicitly

taught them skills for how to give oral presentation or provided opportunities to learn to participate and share in classes. Students noted how this was crucial to their learning, since this had not been required of most of them in their previous schooling experiences. For these Pacific Islander students, instructors who provided access to the curriculum and built bridges for their learning in this way were crucial for facilitating experiences of belonging, as well as academic success.

---

*It's an oral fluency class and we do a lot of speaking, and I was very shy to share my opinion and stuff. And then the professors taught us a bit of strategies to be able to, to share your opinion, you know, things like that. And now that we are approaching the end of the semester, I've seen a lot of growth on how, how, you know, just how I was able to build that confidence to speak, you know, not only be confident around my Fijian brothers, but also confident around native English speakers and those people from other countries. Just grateful for the EIL classes. (P27)*

*There's this professor, one of my classes she's really good. So, we get to present in class like every week and I guess that's something that really boosted my, my morale being able to stand up and then just to talk. And I've seen the big improvement, whenever I present, I felt comfortable. And I felt confident from where I was, when I started this semester to where I am right now, I could say that I'm learning and I'm doing as, as I go with. ...but I'm grateful. With all that. I know that I'm learning as things go by. (P25)*

---

*She taught the mental-social class once and then she moved to mainland and it was one of the hardest class for me because it has a lot of like big words, science words. But the good thing about her... she understands where I'm from and the way the system here in America is different from what we have back in Samoa. I love the way she taught that class. She understands what my struggles are and she will email me or send me the way she taught the class. Even if I struggle to say words, she will help me pronounce it right. And that is the kind of environment like learning environment that I want. (P05)*

*I do have classes where the teachers are very understandable, like they are very understanding like, "come here, I help you with all the assignments"...very patient. And then, I won't feel like that. You know...um. Like I wasn't meant to be in that class. (P05)*

---

---

*I think for me it is also in classrooms, especially when they do like projects, like group projects or like when the professor is like, "okay, find a partner, share your opinions, or your ideas about the topic," and something like that. (P70)*

*At home we were not with, like participation, wasn't a grade, like wasn't a part of grading, but then coming here. I was like, "oh no," like you had to participate. If not, you won't have any grading participation. So I feel like that helps, that really helps with me being able to share my perspective and my opinion and with my connection with the teachers, I think. Yeah. That helps me out with my comfort zone. (P75)*

---

#### **Theme 4: Social Ties**

Students' voices about how social ties facilitated belonging on campus were categorized into one of 4 subthemes: feels like home, academic peer support, social peer support, and diversity as the social norm. These will be described with quotes from the student voices below

##### **Theme 4a: Feels like Home (Friends & Family) (16)**

Students talked about how friends and family helped them find a feeling of home on campus. They described deliberately spending time with family and friends from their island communities, but also forming communities intentionally among other Pacific Islander students to create a feeling of home. These social ties facilitated belonging for students in important ways.

---

*I think for me we miss that feeling of having a family. For us, like the four of us, like P08 and her husband, they live in TVA and we all, all of us, just a few of us Fijians, we like to go to their house, and there we're able to have that feeling of family that for me personally I really love that feeling. (P11)*

*I had a Fijian family that I would always go to, to at least feel like home. Bu having the right support and group of friends made it easier for me to just belong or blend in with school. (P08)*

*It's just saying that home is not a place, it's a feeling... you know him going over to her place it makes him feel like he's at home, makes him feel like he's with family. For me I also have a sister who is in school and we're in the same hale and people would mistaken me as her. But with her being here, it does make me feel like home. Just having family around you, also having friends who also make you feel like family, like you're at home. (P09)*

*I have like other siblings; I think that really helps. I always have like someone here. Oh yeah. She's my younger sister (points to X) So I've always had someone which really helps.(P75)*

---

---

*So that was something that we had to do. If other people that came into other cultures that came into the Fijian culture, we were told to accept them, be grateful, at least someone is trying learn your own culture. So that was something that we made a decision when we first came like, "okay, whoever wants to learn? Whoever wants to hang out with us?" We let them come. We're not gonna chase anyone away. Cause at the end of the day, whoever the Fijians around whoever, any other culture that's surrounding you, that's the only family you have. So that's the decision we came up with is Fijians...where they are from here, from America or from home or anyone else. They're the only family we have here, and which four years is gonna be a long time. So, we made it the decision that that's gonna be our family. So wherever we hang out here in school, that's pretty much our family. (P 29)*

---

#### **Theme 4b: Academic Peer Support (6)**

The Pacific Islander students in this study talked about the importance of social peer support for academic achievement and experiences of belonging. This was crucial for students to feel motivation to achieve and to keep pursuing their education. Students noted how they relied on their peers to share important information resources and insider information about classes, teachers, and generally how to successfully navigate academic life at BYUH.

---

*For me it's also academic. When you are here you belong to a group that shares a common goal of excelling academically and also in every other aspect as well. That's it. (P17)*

*Just add on to what was said for me, I think it's having friends that check up on me daily, especially with whenever I'm struggling with school, we would always have that friend coming up, 'how's your grades?' 'how's this class?' 'how's that class?' and then we get to share and they get to actually help us with studies and all this stuff. Just having that type of friends, really, really something that can help. And I've seen that I've seen that, you know, having that, having specific friends can really help you with your growth academically. (P25)*

*Talking to people with the same majors about like classes...like different professors and things like that. Cause in psychology we have couple professors that are very hard with their assignments. And we talk about that. We talk about like, "oh, don't take this one with this one at the same time." Yeah. Or even students, even with Hawaiian studies, it's like, "oh you could take it from this \_\_\_\_\_. Instead of this one," like, "I like the way he teaches cause of this type thing." (P05)*

---

---

*But for me, I guess, as a minority in the classroom sometimes it's just about being comfortable and not scared. It can really help when the whole classroom is...when you have friends there that are in the same boat as you, I think that really helps make me feel like I belong there. Like I'm not the dumbest one in the room. We're all in it together. That's how I like to approach most classrooms because it's really scary. Especially when you hear "oh that's a really hard classroom" or "that's a really hard professor". So I think having a good support system is really crucial, and having friends, and not being afraid. (P03)*

---

#### **Theme 4c: Social Peer Support (20)**

Not surprisingly, friends were cited as very important to facilitating feelings and experiences of belonging at BYUH. In this theme, students talked about their important relationships with their peers who provided social support in many areas of their lives and across all areas of campus life. Friends were cited as provided important emotional and social support and helping students as they navigated campus life and went through difficult situations. Students reported feeling comforted by being able to share themselves authentically with and feel known by their friends within their various social circles.

---

*Guess it means when you find your people no matter who those people are, where they're from. But when you find your group of friends that can relate to you and I don't think that's necessarily an ethnic thing. But just feeling like this is calm.(P03)*

*I think it's the same as what I mentioned above about being around people with similar interests and backgrounds because you're more open to speaking about your own views. The more this happens, the more you'll feel like a part of the school I think. (P57)*

*When I have friends. So, I mean everybody has a friend and its good when you're walking to, for example, I always have anxiety when I go to the cafeteria or the gym by myself, but I've grown over that since I've been here I don't care anymore. Now I go to the gym and the cafeteria by myself. But at the back of my mind I know I still have friends. You know when I'm sick, there's someone there who will call. People who are not blood related to you where you can, you feel where you're is struggling you can , you don't want to ask people for help -it's the hardest thing when it comes to islanders – don't send me back, something like that. It's really cool when you have someone you know and you're comfortable and helps you. (P35)*

---

---

*Something good about, like because we all served together in the same mission. We know one another, we know who's like the one lacking....cause most of us, we were companions and like we remind each other, 'always remember that those people don't know the struggle you had to go through'. And sometimes some of our friends would like go through like some, you know, racial comments. I mean, that's normal like, we know that that's normal, but we tell one another, he doesn't know or she doesn't know like the amount of sweat that you had to go through to come here. So, like only you yourself know so used that as a motivation. (P26).*

---

Students in the study name the various geographic spaces on campus that served to provide opportunities for social connection. Social peer support was found in classrooms, in social clubs, at church, at work, in the cafeteria and the library. Students talked about forming friends in these formal and informal spaces, across culture groups, as well as across time, noting the importance of the permanency of these social relationships. The pervasive and important nature of peer support facilitated student feelings of connection and experiences of belonging across many contexts on the BYUH campus.

---

*I felt that is when you create that connection in the classroom, as well as like the extended friends that you have outside of that classroom. That's when you do feel a sense of belonging in the school. It's called networking, when you create your icon of like network kind thing, like, "oh, you in this class online?" Okay. So like you have this kind of connectivity in the class and you can help me out, I can help you out. And you see like another person or person that you work with, that's in a same process here. So, you kinda have that connection as well. So, I feel like once you make those kind of connections and you make it work... then I feel like that's when the sense of belonging comes or then it's like a, feels more like a permanent thing... not just for that semester. So, you're looking at it more like a long-term thing than just for the semester kind of friends that you want (P41)*

*The classroom and also in the workplace. People from different cultures and you develop friendships in the classroom and work, and also like even at the cafeteria, which brings us all together. That and we get to know them and we see things from their perspective and which is quite similar to ours...and then we have something in common, like with activities or the same ward. And that is how we develop friendships and how we are connected to what is happening around school. (P52)*

---

---

*I feel most connected to what is happening at school when attending activities hosted by the various clubs in school because it allows me to find similarities, and meet people I have a personal connection with. (P55)*

*Not the new, cause the old caf [cafeteria], it was so small. You know, everyone would go there. We were just talking about this tonight. Everyone would go there after PCC, six o'clock the whole of PCC would be there. And it's like every village, like all your friends are there and you're all just like jumping around tables and doing random stuff. And now the new caf's so big. Like you can't even see at the other end of it, which is great for the rest of the school. But I think the caf, the library, pre-COVID, like used to be where everybody hung out and like made relationships and now like no one goes there and (P03)*

---

#### **Theme 4d: Diversity as Social Norm (8)**

Many students reported that the diversity at BYUH was actually what fostered feelings and experiences of belonging. They reported feeling like they could fit in and belong, precisely because everyone was different and difference was expected. They could count on their views being accepted, listened to and expanded, which in turn led to experiences of belonging. Some students also noted how the diversity among Pacific Islanders solidified their positioning as part of the larger Pan-Pacific islander group.

---

*I feel so connected to students, especially in the classroom and also to my teachers, because it's the way of them viewing things differently from you. And I always find it very interesting that, you know, like we may be different from one another. They may come from Asia, I know students from America, from the mainland and know the Pacific islanders, but there's one thing like I always like is that we're all different. That makes everyone very unique and they keep their own answers. That made me wonder "I never thought it thought of it that way. Like, I couldn't think of that". So, like not only they helped me increase my knowledge, but in a way I can see things differently, not just one-sided (P 51)*

*I think as well as the similarities is having a common purpose. I think the coolest thing for me was the differences in all the cultures coming together like P96 said. that's what made me feel like I belong. I think, to me, personally I think that's how most of the students feel. Like international students include the mainland students, they can come here with the individual cultures and beliefs and values, and they can come here knowing that everybody will accept each other and opinions and be open to learning more about each other's cultures. I think that the differences within each of us and our ethnicities and our backgrounds that help us all find a place where we found can find our personal individuality in our individual cultures. If that makes sense (P93)*

---

---

*I think having people around you where you don't feel like you have to be someone else but you feel confident to be around them and be your own self. And not just tend to be within your own ethnicity but having people outside of your ethnicity. Like for me that's how I feel like I am in school, just being around people which are not part of my own ethnicity I have that ability outside of my own ethnicity, so that's where I felt like I belong better and more confident with my own self...I had to venture out and find a way (P36)*

*And so it was nice to feel like I was, felt like I belong and I worked in the Fijian village, the Tongan village and it made me realize how, like, to me, I belong to like the Polynesian group. It felt so good. (P50)*

---

## **Theme 5: Institutional Supports**

Institutional Support includes themes that relate to how the BYUH facilitates belonging, as articulated by the students in the study. There were not data coded exclusively in the Institutional Supports theme, rather there are four subthemes that will be described below. Extracurricular activities were the most named, with many students specifically highlighting the importance of culture clubs and culture night for fostering experiences of belonging on campus. Students further talked about how they felt like they belonged when they experienced BYUH as receptive to their feedback and when they saw their culture represented in various spaces on campus. Finally, some students talked about specific systems or aspects of campus life itself that fostered their experiences of belonging. These will be discussed further below and illustrated with selected students quotes

### **Theme 5a: Extracurricular – Activities & Clubs (20)**

Students name extracurricular activities on campus as places to find connection, support and to experience belonging on campus. There were a variety of extracurricular activities named, highlighting the many ways activities and clubs were places that fostered belonging for the students in the study. For example, students mentioned clubs, club leadership, sporting events, church activities, and service projects. They also described how activities and clubs provided opportunities they could leverage for social connection, academic learning and ways to engage with the world around them. Students mentioned campus wide events like graduate or new student orientation that built a sense of community and a BYUH identity. Students experienced belonging by contributing to and participating in these events, activities, and clubs. All of these opportunities and purposes supported and facilitated experiences of belonging for the Pacific Islander students in this study.



---

*I don't think like we, we can just go to class and find connections. Like you have to find ways to connect yourself. And one way for me is take part of like clubs....But the good one way that really helps me to find connection to school is finding my opportunities. So, I served in the social work president club presidency. I was also in the service committee for this school. Those are like opportunities for me that I can find connections. And with that connections, it really helps me to find more opportunities for my success while here. So for me, those are ways that students can really take part of to make your connections. (P05)*

*Just being able to voice out, hearing the voice of the school through clubs and all these activities that go around school. I was part of the human rights club for a semester and even though that club is associated with political majors, and even though I wasn't a political science major being part of that club made me learn certain things about human rights and how our lives can be violated if we do not know, just basically learning about lives and having a voice of your own and then to be more confident, putting yourself out there in the world and things like that. (p36)*

---

*The fact that we have clubs, like it, its almost like a venue where you can express, you know, your perspective. Yeah. So like it doesn't have to be your own club. Like because you are from Fiji you have to be part of the Fiji club or the Samoan club. You can go out and be part of other clubs. There are more than 20 clubs here on campus and other activities that go around, I think it helps people come out from their shell and they should be able to learn. (P36)*

*Another area where I feel the most connected too is when we engage in extracurricular activities happening around the school. Rugby. Yes... just feel more connected to our teammates and develop that love for one another, as we, as we play. And then as we, you know, gather together cheer, stuff like that. And yes grateful that the school have all these resources just makes us feel, feel connected. You know, we feel happy while, while studying. (P27)*

*A sense of belonging, but I know how to explain it. Like I'm when I go to volleyball, I feel like I belong, you know? (P04)*

*I guess for me it's like, so the school has like service projects. Like they have the service center and whatnot. Yes. And every now and then they like schedule like service projects where like a bunch of clubs or like anyone in like school can like sign up to go for service project. And I guess that's it for me because you get to go on the bus with all these people and other people you've never seen (P02)*

---

---

*I think for me it would have to be times I would to volunteer for something that I actually believed in and would show like what my values were and what my beliefs were. So, for example, the mental health walk or activity that happened. I'm currently studying social work ... so I was volunteer participate in the mental health walk or the activity that went on campus and other activities as well. I think that really helped me Just like show me some of the people around me who also had the same interest in mental health. That helped me find connection with other people. <(P95)*

*I, I, I think it's nice cause like there's certain things or like there's a purpose behind every service project that they do and whatnot. Like I remember there was one time they did like Kahuku medical center and they like had to repaint like the stuff at Kahuku medical center. And I don't know, it just gives you that sense of like giving back to like the community that's given so much to this goal and you know, it's like, it just makes you feel appreciative. It like appreciative of like the people's off cuz so many times like people in this community have fed like hungry students <laugh> cause they know how broke you are. Right. And so like, like it just gives that sense of giving back. And that sense of like, even though you don't know all these people, like you're all put in a bus and you go over for a purpose to like give back to. So I think that's one thing you use straight up giving service, sorry, (P04)*

*Graduation. That's where I feel the most connected to this school really. Its where I feel the most grateful for the opportunity to be here. (P95). Making a thousand leis for people you don't really know <laughs> Graduation is so good (P94)*

*Holomua programs. Ho'okele. Right now they're having the holomua on campus and I feel like that builds information for new students with the college students as well, so FSJ last week. They were cheering on campus and we were cheering as well so that's where we make them feel a part of us and us accepting them. Especially the new student orientation, they welcome us with open hands. Not just the students on campus, but the department managers and faculties. It's pretty cool. (P94)*

---

## **Theme 5b: Extracurricular – Culture Clubs & Culture Night (10)**

The most important extracurricular activities for fostering belonging for Pacific Islander students seemed to be organized through the Culture Clubs. These clubs provide a place for Pacific Islanders to join and belong to a group of people who share a similar background. These clubs also provide important mentoring programs and informal student orientation to the campus.

---

*I feel like a great thing the university has done so far is creating clubs. You know like different cultural clubs which leads to cultural night. Uh, one thing they do is they have the cultural clubs like Samoa, Tonga, Hawaii, the cultures here but even like the Business club. I think the clubs, especially the cultural clubs, they tend to be a safe haven for most of the students that are from the Pacific Islands and one really cool thing about this is that not only Fijians join the Fijian club, not only the Tongans join the Tongan club, we can join as much clubs as we want and we get to explore other cultures you know, what similarities we have with other cultures. Um, so that helps me personally and I know I also know helps my other friends to belong to an established institution (P91)*

*One thing that made me feel so welcome was when the I think the, the presidency of the Fijian chapter when they assign each new student, a mentor. And my mentor has been like he's been so good. I served with him and he just made me feel so, so welcome in school on my first day he showed me around everything and I just feel like I, I belonged to the place. Yes. I think the, the leaders made a really good decision and like choosing a mentor for every new student. And that has actually helped me to belong. (P27)*

---

Culture clubs also are heavily involved in putting on the annual Culture Night. Culture Night stands out specifically as a time and place where Pacific Island culture is celebrated and students have chance to both represent and explore their Pacific Island culture and others. This event, organized and facilitated by the Culture Clubs, is a highlight of the year and is a major event that facilitates experiences of belonging for Pacific Islander students on campus.

---

*Ah, cultural night. Brigham Young University – Hawaii, every year they put together a night where all the cultures, the university comes together and portray our culture. And it has been cool because it gives us an opportunity to talk about our culture outside of the Polynesian Cultural Center to tell all your fellow classmates or what not who want to take part in your culture. (P86)*

*Yeah. So, and then my first culture culture night in 2019, it was, it was so nice to be, to feel like even though I didn't do Tongan culture night. I just did New Zealand and New Zealand and Fiji, it was because I also got to know my great grandfather's side, who was also Fijian. So I kind of like, "man, I'm experiencing all these different cultures from my, from my, my mom who's like full Tongan, but my dad's, dad's dad was Fijian and Tongan too," so it was kind of like, I'm like, I feel great to be in a diverse way. I can learn not just about my Tongan, but also my Fijian side of my, and my great grandfather. So it was nice to, to know that I'm in a place where I'm like, I feel I belong somewhere. (P50)*

---

---

*Culture night at school. Seeing everyone join other groups and the clubs on their own. You can see how nervous they are to join a new group to learn about a new culture, but that's nice because members are, from that they are very welcoming, welcome them and reach out to them (P95)*

*Because with the school at cultural night or when they have Fiji day or Samoa day they have the traditional food. You know the food fest. It's the school's way of showing that we're happy to have your culture here, you are welcome to be involved and we don't want you guys to do your own thing (P16)*

---

### **Theme 5c: Receptive to Feedback (5)**

Students reported experiencing belonging when they noted BYUH as an institution that was receptive to their feedback.

---

*I feel like when you're sharing and when you're actually heard, and they do what you ask of them, that's when you're like okay "I was actually heard and my opinion matters here" That's when I feel more like, yeah, I belong here, I matter to you. [For example]... I work as a TA for the Business Department, um, and I am in charge of making notes and changing them. When I see them do that, or that they are making those changes suggested by students and they make sure that those things happen I feel, not that it is my job but I feel [validated](P92)*

*And I would say that this place is very open to that feedback. It has not always been well-worded or kind for me because of the things that students have struggled with because of the way our school runs. But I would say like I have always been listened to and have had things that needed to be escalated were escalated. And so I think that that's really important about the space is that we have leaders, I guess. (P03)*

---

### **Theme 5d: My Culture is Represented (9)**

Pacific Islander students experienced belonging on campus when they saw their Pacific Island culture deliberately represented. They mentioned various places on campus that they saw their culture included on campus. For example, students mentioned experiencing belonging when they saw political and historical representation of their people in classes and at the Polynesian Cultural Center. They also mentioned the importance of including traditionally Pacific Islander sports, like netball and rugby, included in intermural and other sporting activities. Culture club, again, was mentioned as a time when they saw their cultures represented and celebrated. This representation of Pacific Islander culture across campus is meaningful to the Pacific Islander students and facilitates experiences of belonging.

---

*I feel like when school recognizes, you know, who you are, your culture and your place there, it's really important. And I feel like they've been doing that a lot lately, especially with the focus towards the target area. I really appreciate that. (P61)*

*I think it's kind of different to feel like you belong to your school. For me....I look at a whole, like if the school like respects my, my culture or traditions, you know, not just like in a way of what do you, how do you say it, in a way of behavior or religion, not religious cultural traditions. I feel like, yeah, I belong to the environment or stuff...of my culture practice, I feel like I belong. (P09)*

*It wasn't until I took the Hawaiian studies history class... it was explained about, you know, Queen Lili'uokalani and all that, and this American, this American family, I think I, three times, and I asked this family, I was like, "what was the, your favorite part? And you know, why?" And the one thing that stood out to me was the answer that I had, I'll never forget is, "I'm embarrassed to be an American because of what they did to Hawaii or not just Hawaii, but also just the history of the", and you know, as a Polynesian, it's like, I was, I was kind of shocked. But because of what they did to the Hawaiians, you know, they took over and, you know, locked up the queen. I think of, that's how I'm like, you know, I'm not just connected to, you know, Tongan, but I'm connected throughout the Pacific as a Polynesian. And that's how I kind of, you know, that's how I feel is that I feel connected not just to the Tongans, but just throughout the Pacific is that I'm helping you understand who we are as Polynesians. And that's how I feel connected (P50)*

---

---

*I mean, if not just the teaching. But I know it took us a while to get netball going here and that's an island sport, you know? And I remember when we first proposed this in 2017, netball. they had like, my parents, you know...they both, you know, were alumni of this school, but both of them, of course, I was going to netball tournaments as a little kid watching, you know, my mom play stuff... but for a long time, there was no netball. And in 2016, I remember we tried to get it going. And at the time, I mean, I'll just say Alison Whitey, who was over activity. She didn't think that there would be an interest in it, but all the Islanders, we were all geared to, you know, geared up and ready for that. Finally, you know, the push in 2018 with a lot more students, you know, from the islands. And we had our first tournament and I think they were all kind of like surprised at the turnout cuz every Polynesian club came out, but not just one team, but like three teams, you know, even Cook Islands, which is not even, a you know, it's a small club. They had, they were represented by three teams. And that is just that's one example that I can think of, not even in just the, but the fact to see netball, an island sport, you know, represented here at a school where there's a lot of that for me. I remember crying after the tournament, just looking at like the representation that we finally got netball here. (P43)*

---

---

*Ah, cultural night. Brigham Young University – Hawaii, every year they put together a night where all the cultures, the university comes together and portray our culture. And it has been cool because it gives us an opportunity to talk about our culture outside of the Polynesian Cultural Center to tell all your fellow classmates or what not who want to take part in your culture.(P86)*

---

### **Theme 5e: School System Fosters Belonging (11)**

Students were enthusiastic about several aspects of campus life that they cited as fostering experiences of belonging. These students felt very much a part of campus life, and also appreciated the systems that helped them to know how to navigate campus life. Students talked about school systems or structures that helped students feel like they were not visitors, but rather helped them to engage authentically as part of the school community. For example, students appreciated being able to live on campus with other students as a feature that created connection. They also appreciated small class sized, organized study groups, the ward organization and other systems that created connectedness and opportunities to interact and share with people across diverse perspectives. For example:

---

*I think the school provides a unique opportunity largely because -- an example is this room we all signed up and came from different places. A more common example would be your study groups, your research groups, your classrooms, your ward, the school, the school, the school is, the set-up opportunities for us to come from different places and share unique perspectives and takes on things. And, and it's, and I, I think one thing that's interesting is that based on where we are from, you know, our ethnic backgrounds and how we grew up, we can, we can look at what may seem very simple topic and totally disagree. Although it may seem like we agree. And that's okay because that's, that's what the school has allowed. And that's where I feel like I belong, where I feel like I belong, where even though my perspective is different, it's accepted. Right? It doesn't mean if you're from the exact same place, you can have the same perspective...It's just the school. (P59)*

*Yeah. I think living on campus too. There's something that creates connectedness. I've just moved off campus [Uhhuh.] So I don't have so much to do with everyone here. I still feel connected, but like it's not like you're seeing everyone every day anymore. So yes. (P03)*

*I think the setting that we have here at BYUH allows us to do that. Just cause the classes are a bit small. Back home, secondary school, there was like 50-60 people in one class. It wouldn't give you enough time to have those moments with the instructor or professor that's teaching. I attended a few units in USP in Fiji, it's a university there. Their lectures used to hold around 300-400 people in a lecture together, which we don't do here which is amazing for us. We have time with our professors to have one-on-one questions and answers (P02)*

---

Students also named simpler organizational or tactical features that helped them experience belonging because these helped them be informed about and navigate campus life. Regular email communication and receiving a student ID were simple yet powerful tools for students to feel like they were part of the wider community, could be involved, and could know how to participate in campus life. For example:

---

*When they email me <laughs> doesn't have to be an important email, just any email. I feel like, know what's happening around the school with an email. Yeah. Because if there's like in classes, teachers don't really do any sort of announcements, its just connected to the class and like the assignments or exams that are coming up. But like the email is the one that connects me to like, oh, this person is giving a devotional soon," or like, "this person or something's happening at their CAC," or gym or something. I think that emails are annoying, but like very helpful. (P41)*

*Yeah and also because the picture shown on our student ID it was the picture of the flag circle, and not a picture of the admin office and not a picture of the TVA or the temple. It was a picture of the flag circle, and we know what the flag circle represents, pretty much all the flags of students from those countries. So, receiving that and seeing all those different flags, and in the middle seeing my picture and my full given name, gave me that sense of belonging. You know I need to be here at BYUH and there's <unintelligible> and purpose for me being here in this school (P13)*

*I think for me how I know is when I am able to navigate through school life and going in between classes and stuff. (P12)*

---

## **Theme 6: Cultural Self-Representation (6)**

Students talked about how meaningful experiences authentically represent themselves and their culture in various places across campus. They reported these experiencing belonging when they felt they share their cultural perspective, teach about their culture, and represent their views as Pacific Islanders. Students mentioned this sharing happening for them in classrooms, in culture clubs, during culture night at the Polynesian Cultural Center. Students talked about how having the agency to authentically represent themselves culturally helped them to feel connected at BYUH. For example:

---

*I think for me it is when, you know, or sharing their experiences or just sharing something like it could be in the classroom. Like a lot of teachers I love when they ask, "oh, what do you guys do? Like where from your, from I know you are from here. Like, is it different in your country or..." Other people share from like where they come from. So I guess like having that openness, even if it's different, you still connect with them and you relate to them in some sort of ways.(P2)*

---

---

*I just wanna add that too, the PCC. When we have guests who come and learn about this culture, that's where I feel kind of connected because, you know, we share about us as students going to school learning, but also just sharing about our culture at the Polynesian culture center. Because a lot of these people that come up, we come across, don't know about our culture. They don't know, you know, some people have never heard of Polynesia and you know, the South Pacific and it's not, when you ask them at the end of the day, you know, "how was your tour? What did you enjoy the most?" And a lot of the times it's, it's the education that they learned about as Polynesian culture. They love the culture, they loved the music, the dancing. (P32)*

*Ah, cultural night. Brigham Young University – Hawaii, every year they put together a night where all the cultures, the university comes together and portray our culture. And it has been cool because it gives us an opportunity to talk about our culture outside of the Polynesian Cultural Center to tell all your fellow classmates or what not who want to take part in your culture. (P86)*

---

### **Theme 7: Church Membership as Unifier (9)**

An important aspect of belonging for students in this study is their membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Students talked about being able to participate in spiritual practices, such as saying prayers and sharing spiritual thoughts that helped them experience belonging. They expressed feeling comfortable to share more openly and be themselves because of their church membership and feeling united in Christ with other students, no matter their backgrounds. For example:

---

*You know, being LDS helped me to feel connected to people in the school. So I feel like I think I was able to share my perspectives how to say during like, when I was engaged with people or in certain groups of classes when they had topics about something that was related to me personally, and I feel like a lot of people (p77)*

*To be honest, I don't think so, but we try our best to feel belonged. Yeah. one experience is before every class there is an opening prayer, is a spiritual thought. And I know when we share spiritual thoughts, I feel I, I belong here because everyone is a member and you share the same one. So yeah, during sharing time, I feel that I belong. (P60)*

---



---

*I was reading the question again, and I was thinking back to when I was in high school, if you wanted to belong, you had to be a part of the "cool group". The cool guys. And coming here, it's an eye opener as well that you don't need to be that. You just need to be doing the right things. And that's the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ I would say. When you're doing the right, you will stand out and people will be drawn to you. Instead of you trying to get out getting to them. It's just our first semester and... we've been loving it so far. (P02)*

*I think it's amazing we're here, I feel that spirit. We're all from different backgrounds but we can all come together in the gospel of Jesus Christ. (P02)*

---

## PART IV: CONCLUSION

---

### **RQ1: What matters for achieving a sense of belonging at the school?**

**Main Themes:** *Notions of Belonging; Negotiating Belonging in the Context of Cultural Background*

Students described belonging at BYUH in ways that include feelings of connection, acceptance, authenticity, affiliation, status as a non-visitor, and feeling known. Students talked about negotiating belonging in the context of their Pacific Islander cultural backgrounds, including cultural factors (respect, traditional hierarchies, gender roles) that influence how they negotiate belonging. Western notions of 'belonging' are challenged.

### **RQ2: What undermines experiences of belonging at the school?**

**Main Themes:** *Language as a Barrier; Institutional Barriers; Cultural & Ethnic Discrimination; Lack of Cultural Representation on Campus; Transitions – Culture Shock; Not Connected to Instructors*

Students described how language could sometimes act as a barrier to belonging. Lack of proficiency in English undermined experiencing belonging academically. English and native languages could act to exclude students from full social participation or lead to misunderstandings among peers. Students described cultural and linguistic discrimination, at institutional and individual levels, that undermined experiences of belonging. Lack of cultural representation on campus and lack of connection to instructors were undermined belonging. Finally, students described the overall transition of coming to BYUH from the Islands as a culture shock and as unexpectedly difficult and overwhelming as they navigated different school systems and expectations while experiencing feelings of being homesick.

### **RQ3: What promotes experiences of belonging at the school?**

**Main Themes:** *English as Unifying; Role of Heritage Language; Connected to Instructors; Social Ties; Institutional Supports; Cultural Self-Representation; Church Membership as Unifier*

There were many ways that Pacific Islander BYUH students described experiences of belonging on campus. English was as a unifying language and speaking native languages was important for social connection and maintaining ties to their ethnic communities. Instructors were instrumental in facilitating belonging experiences when they connected to their students and built bridges for academic success. Paramount for experiencing belonging were friendship and social ties across campus, which provided academic and social support. Extracurricular activities provided ways to participate on campus and culture clubs specifically facilitated many experiences of belonging

through social connection and authentic cultural representation. Finally, membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was identified as an important aspect of campus life that facilitating belonging experiences.

**(RQ4) How can the University help Pacific Islander students feel more connected at the University?**

**Main Themes:** In Process

In Process