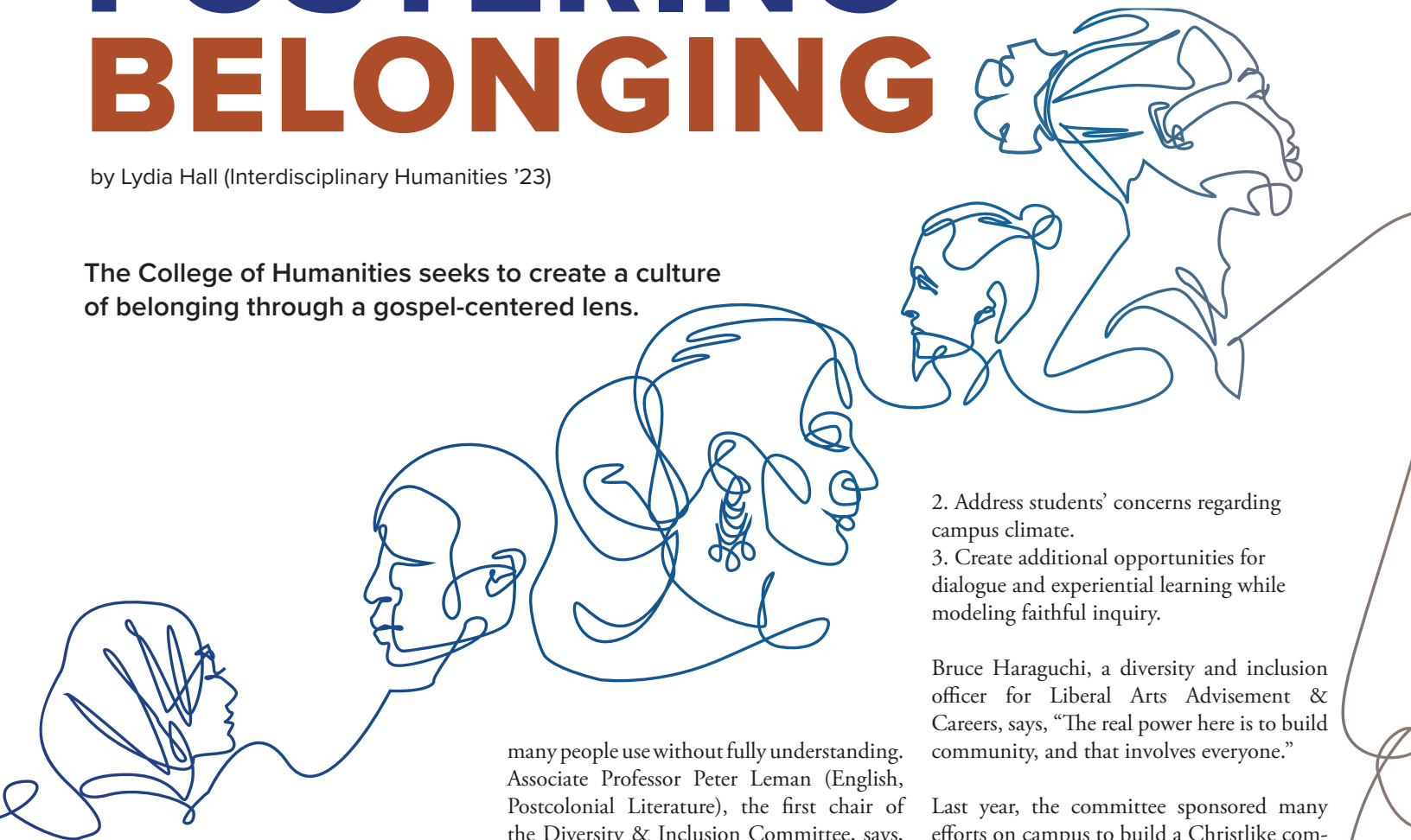


FOSTERING BELONGING

by Lydia Hall (Interdisciplinary Humanities '23)

The College of Humanities seeks to create a culture of belonging through a gospel-centered lens.



Immediately after President Worthen announced that the Committee on Race, Equity & Belonging completed its campus survey in February 2021, the College of Humanities created the Diversity & Inclusion Committee to implement the suggested changes. In the two years since the survey was published, the Diversity & Inclusion Committee has overseen and facilitated efforts across the College to create spaces where students of all backgrounds feel safe, know their value, and learn from one another's unique experiences in humility and love. As disciples of Christ and participants in BYU's mission to "reflect devout love of God and a loving, genuine concern for the welfare of our neighbor," members of the College of Humanities choose to foster unity when much of the world focuses on division.

Many universities, including BYU, use the terms *diversity*, *inclusion*, and *equity*. These terms are often used without being defined; as a result, they have become buzzwords that

many people use without fully understanding. Associate Professor Peter Leman (English, Postcolonial Literature), the first chair of the Diversity & Inclusion Committee, says, "Diversity is a way of recognizing the beauty of difference, of unique experiences and qualities across the human race. Inclusion and belonging, then, are where we make an effort to not let our differences divide us."

To promote a spirit of unity, BYU chooses to use the word *belonging*, which is meant to organize diversity, inclusion, and equity within the context of our shared identity as children of loving heavenly parents. Leman says, "We are told that the Lord looks on the heart¹ and that all are alike unto God.² To me, this is the standard for how we should see other people—not through the distorting lenses of stereotype and prejudice but the clarifying light of God's love and wisdom."

To that end, the committee's efforts the past year have addressed these objectives:

1. Promote belonging, diversity, and inclusion as expansive topics, ones that move beyond surface-level attention and reach true engagement.

2. Address students' concerns regarding campus climate.
3. Create additional opportunities for dialogue and experiential learning while modeling faithful inquiry.

Bruce Haraguchi, a diversity and inclusion officer for Liberal Arts Advisement & Careers, says, "The real power here is to build community, and that involves everyone."

Last year, the committee sponsored many efforts on campus to build a Christlike community that promotes belonging, kindness, curiosity, and understanding. In fall 2022 semester, five students with autism, ADHD, or social anxiety shared their campus experiences and the kinds of social and academic support they found helpful. Educating neurotypical students about neurodivergent experiences—including executive dysfunction, oversharing, or stress induced by seemingly small events—can help neurodivergent students feel more comfortable connecting with others or sharing when they have challenges. This panel allowed students to discuss their individual challenges, which may not always be visible from the outside.

In winter 2023, two sets of Muslim siblings addressed a packed auditorium, explaining connections that brought them to campus and how they practice their faith at BYU. Haraguchi says, "They made it really clear that they don't speak for all Muslims. That balance of hearing an individual perspective without it being representative of the whole group was a valuable reminder to us."

The Intersection, a club run by student fellows of the Diversity & Inclusion Committee—Madelaine Gonzales (Interdisciplinary Humanities '23) and Natércia Ribeiro (French Teaching '25)—also participates in the effort to foster belonging. The club's weekly meetings bring students together from across the College and provide a lighthearted environment for students to explore one another's cultures. The Intersection has organized a backpack drive, a poetry slam, presentations by Native American students in association with the Tribe of Many Feathers, a workshop on self-care and stress management, and discussions about the cultural significance of Black hair in conjunction with the Black Student Union. Their efforts to connect individuals and serve others reflect the personal nature of gospel ministering, meeting people where they are, and helping everyone feel welcome.

In response to student focus groups, faculty members have made significant efforts to diversify curriculum to include artists, authors, and ideas that have been overlooked in the past. One project reexamined assumptions about Shakespeare's work and the narrow interpretations that have been made of certain characters or relationships. Diverse curriculum builds well-rounded individuals who can understand complex concepts and parse difficult, real-life situations with empathy. Haraguchi explains that the College of Humanities provides funding to professors and research assistants to review and revise

portions of curriculum “to see how they might be approached with a more inclusive lens.”

Respectful relationships among individuals of diverse beliefs, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and other experiences are the foundation of belonging in the College of Humanities. Building that foundation requires patience and humility as we learn to live together in love. “Only when we show humility toward one another and recognize each other's unique identities and experiences can we create an environment of true belonging,” Leman says.

The mission of belonging in the College of Humanities includes listening to and learning from the individual experiences of those who surround us at work, school, and elsewhere, as well as strengthening our common bond as children of heavenly parents. Haraguchi says, “We have all this enriching difference among us, and we share powerful commitments to God and to each other. They're not always understood or expressed the same way from person to person, but that's what drives us. That's what binds us,” he concludes. “Unity and diversity are not opposites.” **H**

ENDNOTES

1. 1 Samuel 16:7
2. 2 Nephi 26:11

