

***“Being Seen. Being Heard.”***

What learning and teaching activit(ies) can help create a culture of belonging for International students within Creative Business Post Graduate Courses?

Dr. Nina Van Volkinburg

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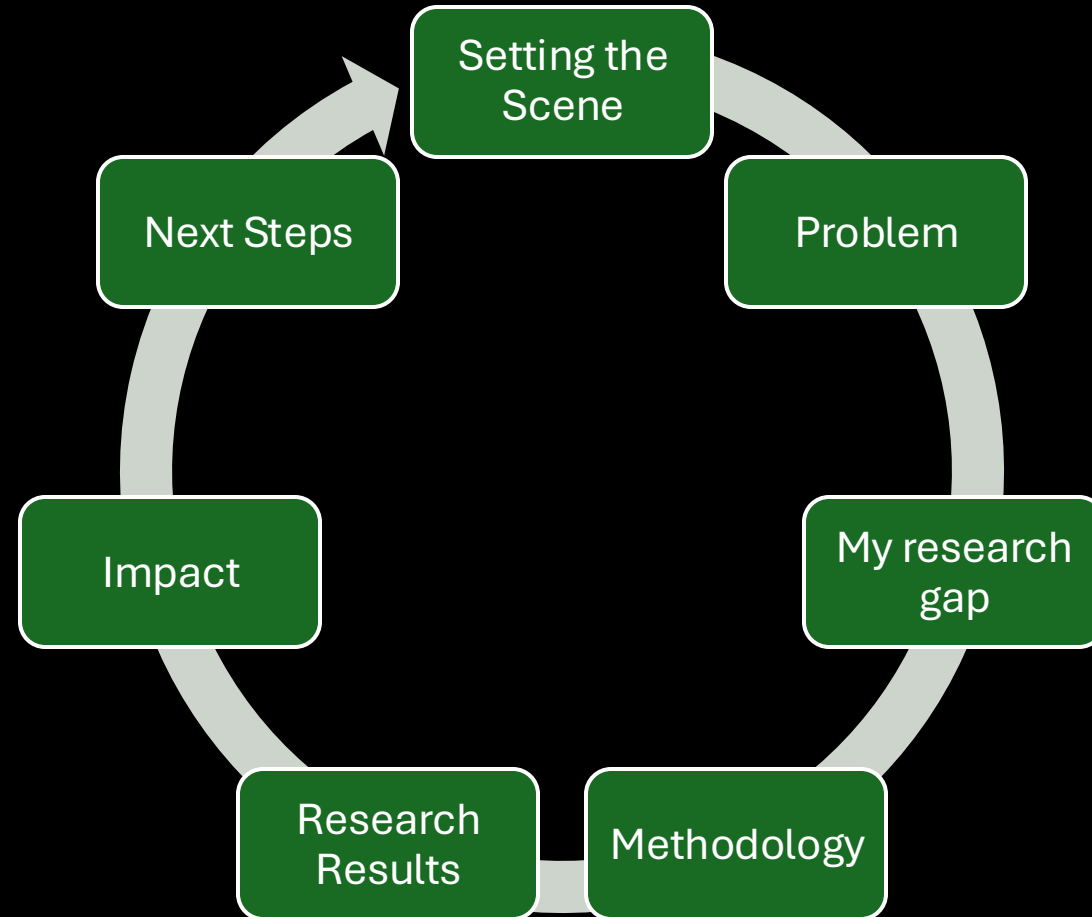
# Hello!

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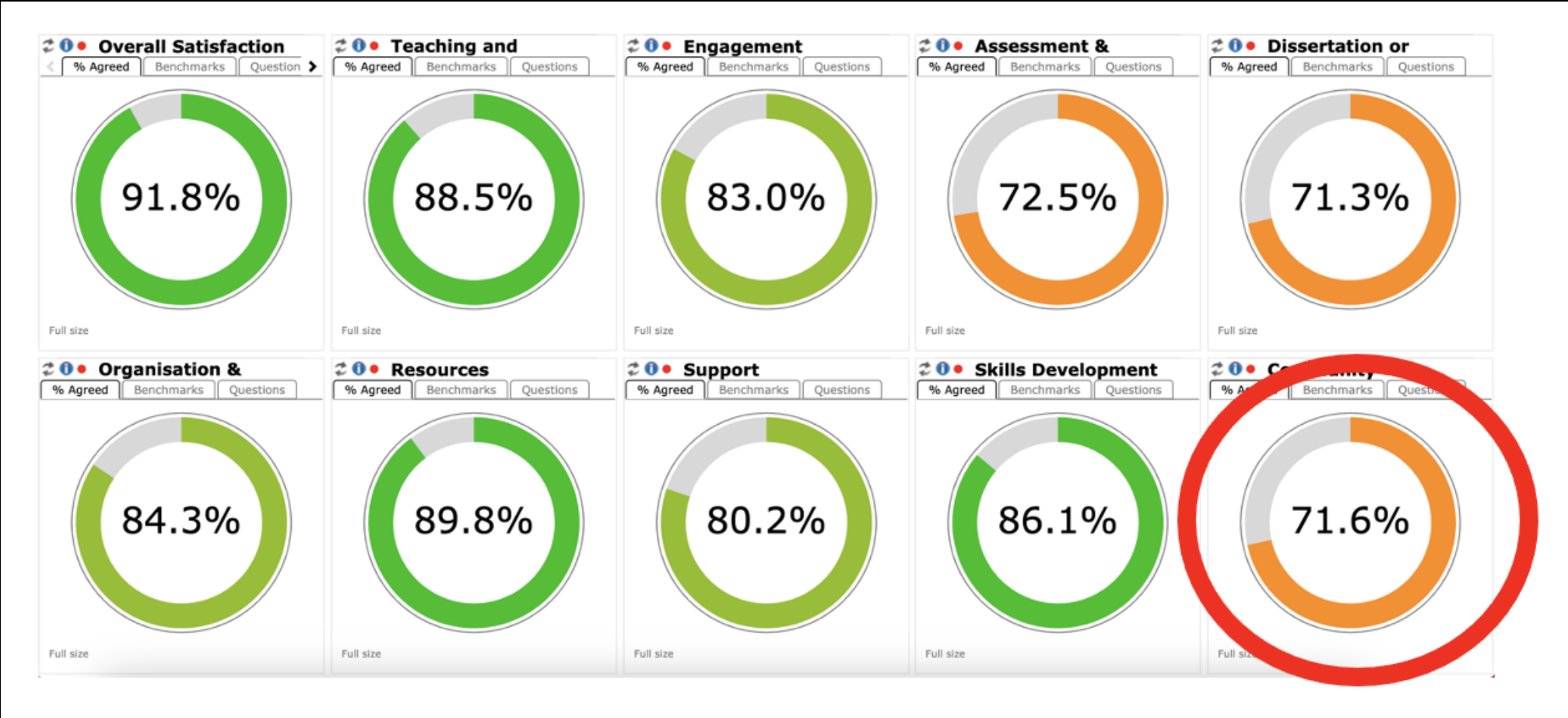
- Teaching at LCF since 2019
- Course Leader of MA Strategic Fashion Marketing
- Alumna of MA Strategic Fashion Marketing
- Research Focus: Value Co-Creation within Creative Ecosystems
- Grew up in 5 Countries
- Expat in UK



# Today's Agenda



# Setting the Scene: MASFM PTES 23-24 Results





# Setting the Scene: MASFM PTES 23-24 Freetext

- I've struggled with feeling isolated and unwelcome at this college. Despite my efforts to communicate and engage with my classmates, I consistently felt like an outcast, which has taken a toll on my mental health and left me feeling lonely.
- I've not connected well with other students.
- Joining the course three weeks late put me at a disadvantage, as everyone had already formed groups and friendships. Despite my hesitation, the lack of welcoming gestures from my peers exacerbated my feelings of alienation.
- Unfortunately, I've found [the lack of community] to be the most challenging aspect of my life, socially speaking.
- Other students seems overall really busy outside of this MA
- Many students have commitments outside of the classroom.



# Setting the Scene: Macro-Environment

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*“Some Chinese students also felt the universities treated them as revenue sources rather than as valued members of the community” - December 12 2024, The Times*



69% of students agreed they belong at their university, while 9% disagreed

Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI)



Students with below-average mental health scores were less likely to feel a sense of belonging; only 52% of these students felt they belonged, compared to 80% of those with average or above-average mental health.

Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI)

# Why is a lack of belonging a problem?



## **Cultural and Social Adjustment Challenges:**

International students often face cultural differences, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with the UK educational system. (Owusu-Agyeman, 2021) → **isolating and overwhelming**



## **Academic Performance:**

Feeling disconnected from others can lead to decreased engagement in classes, group work, and discussions (Taff and Clifton, 2022) → **poorer academic outcomes.**



## **Mental Health Issues:**

A lack of belonging is strongly correlated with feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Morris, 2021) → **Vulnerability**



## **Reduced Professional Development:**

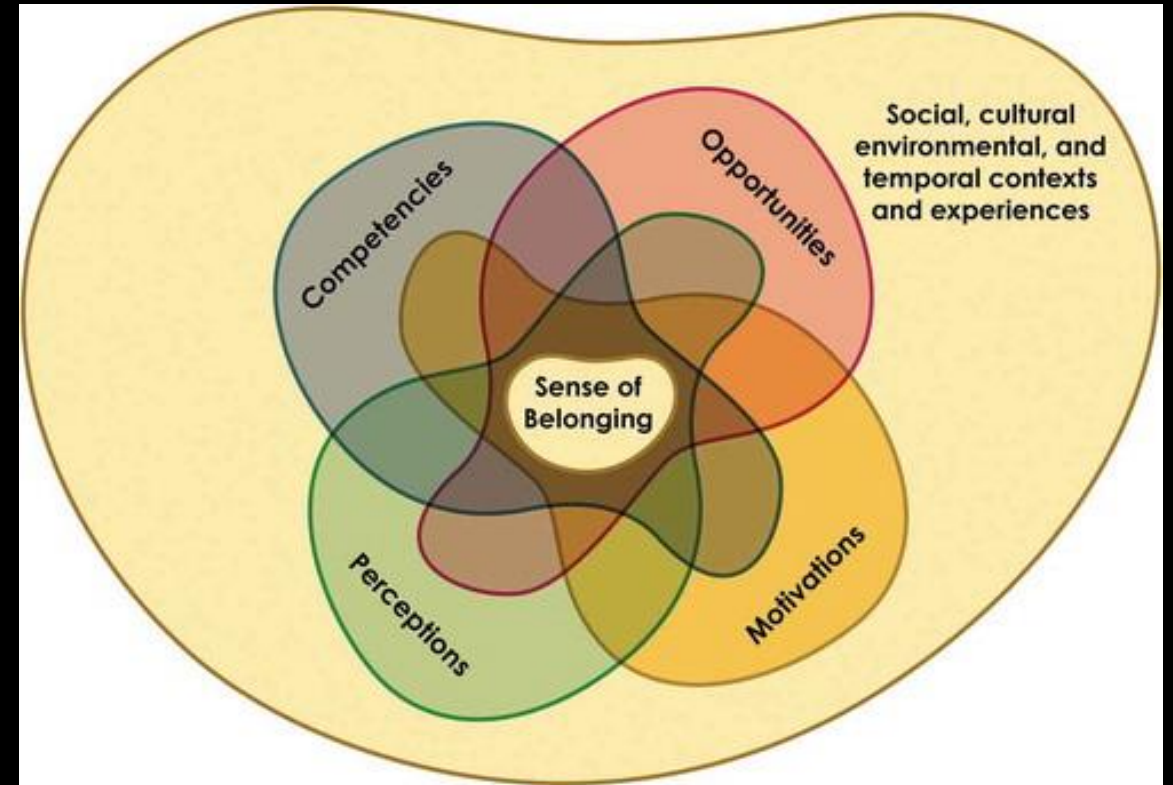
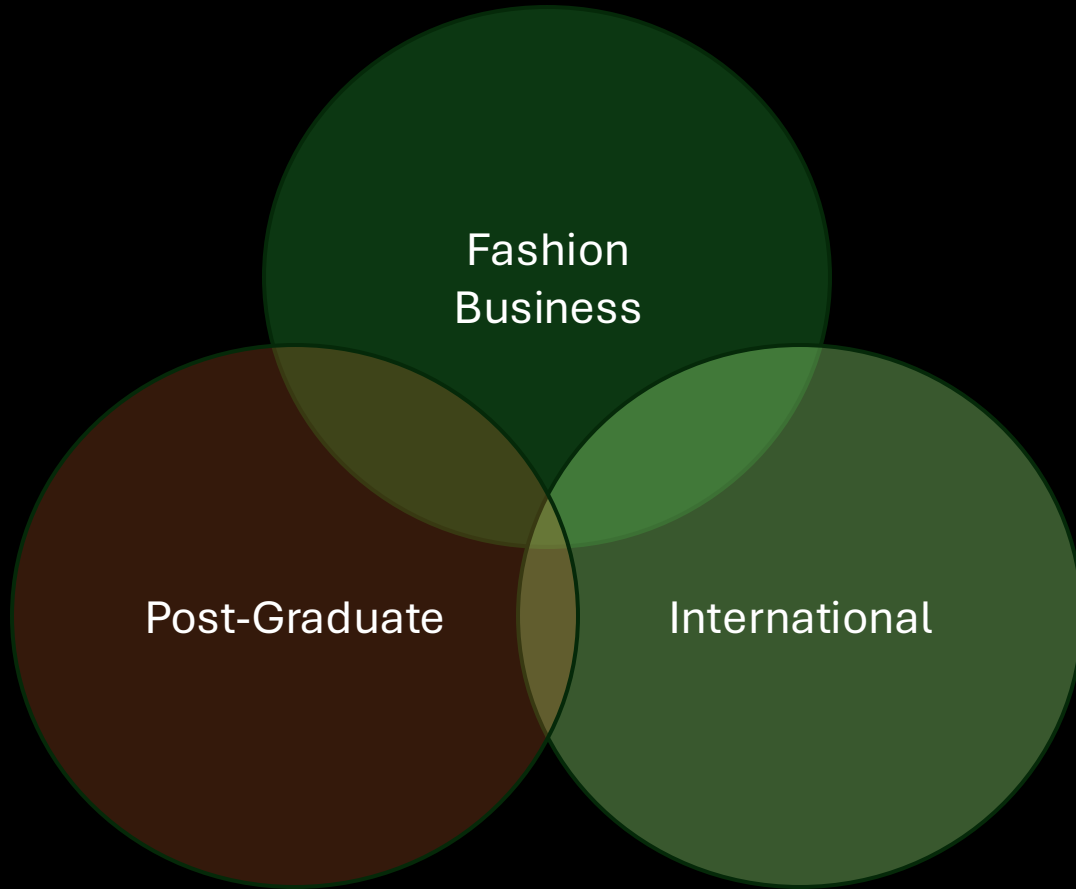
Students who don't feel a sense of belonging may miss out on extra-curricular and career development opportunities (Cena, Burns, and Wilson, 2021).



## **Student Retention and Satisfaction:**

A lack of belonging can lead to dissatisfaction, reduced retention, and poor word-of-mouth (Zawada, 2024). → **PTES**

# Stakeholder Focus: Research Gap on Lack of Belonging is NOT 1 size fits all



Allen et al., 2021





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# Impact on Social Justice

*Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities. ([National Association of Social Workers](#))*

## **1. Inequitable Access to Opportunities leading to Uneven Playing Field**

- Lack of opportunity to fully participate in group work, networking events, or academic discussions.

## **2. Marginalisation of Diverse Voices**

- A reluctance to share ideas reduces the diversity of perspectives in classroom.

## **3. Fostering Power Imbalances**

- Home students may dominate social and academic spaces, leaving international students as “outsiders”.

# Methodology

Research Question: What learning and teaching activit(ies) can help create a culture of belonging for International students within Creative Business Post Graduate Courses?

- Qualitative Exploratory
- Inductive
- Interpretative
- 1 survey via Microsoft Forms(10 Questions)
- Sample: 11 MASFM students (current and 23-24)
- Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

# Core Themes

## 1. Actively Listening

- “Belonging is very connected to being respected and not scared to voice your thoughts.”

## 2. Offering Collaborative Opportunities

- “More social and informal activities outside classes” and “collaborative challenges helped me find my group of people.”

## 3. Celebrating Diversity

- “Cross-cultural exchange activities would really help create a stronger sense of belonging.”

## 4. Creating Safe Spaces

- “Speak under a chill mood: removing stress can help me express myself slightly better.”

## 5. Communicating Shared Values

- “Belonging means feeling that my values are in sync with what the institution stands for.”
- “Dismissive attitudes towards sustainability left me feeling disheartened.”

## 6. Support from Staff

- “Lecturers willing to help wherever they can increased my feeling of belonging.”

# Actions from Research Project:

## BLOCK 1: Induction (September 2025)

1. **ACTIVITY 1: Co-Create Course Code of Conduct and Values (linking to UAL Values):** Group activity acting as an ice-breaker and taking responsibility of their role as students and collaborators
2. **ACTIVITY 2: Creative Communication Workshop:** Working with the Language Development Team implement creative workshop to brainstorm and share skills for industry-relevant communication, such as pitching ideas or storytelling for marketing.

## BLOCK 2: (March 2025)

1. **\*ACTIVITY 3: Fashion Cultures Day:** Students showcase their cultural heritage through artefacts, garments, or storytelling.





# Action: Fashion Cultures Day

*A one-day event designed to celebrate the cultural richness of the cohort while connecting it to fashion marketing principles.*

## Objectives

1. **Celebrate Cohort Diversity:** Showcase the diverse backgrounds, traditions, and perspectives within the MA Fashion Marketing cohort.
2. **Enhance Course Learning:** Tie cultural narratives to fashion marketing strategies.
3. **Enhance Community Spirit:** Create an informal, engaging space where students can connect beyond the classroom, fostering collaboration and a sense of belonging.
4. **Practice Presentation Skills:** Offer students a platform to present their ideas and practice articulating them in a creative and professional setting.

*\*More detail on Blog or ask me more details!*





# Being Seen. Being Heard... is Everything!

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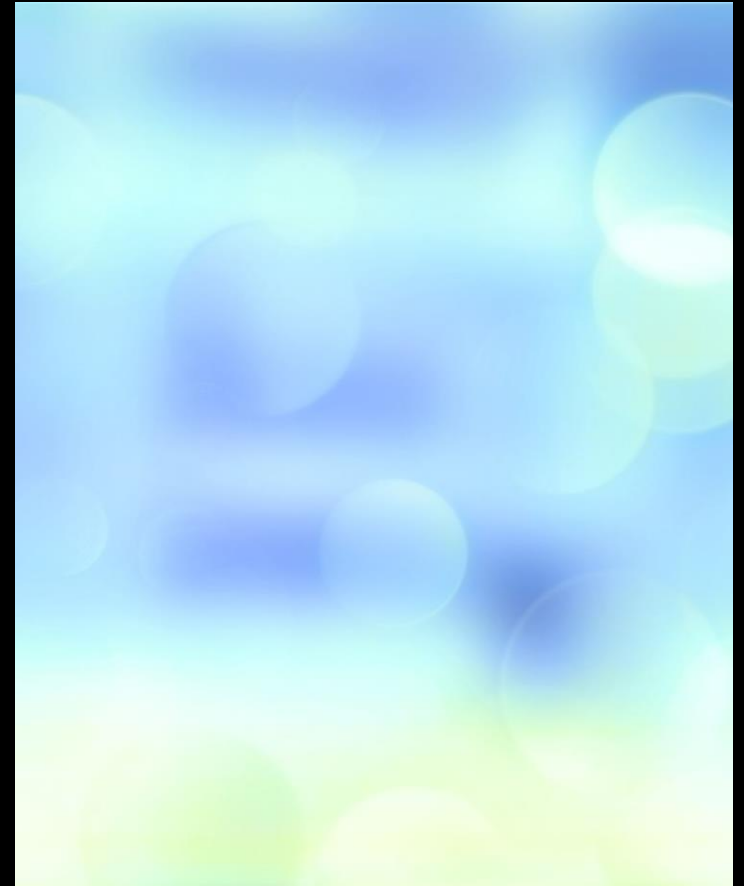
Belonging is essential in meeting goals for a variety of stakeholders

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Transferred from Research to Teaching Pathway

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Using hours for generating Belonging across the Marketing and Branding Programme → Cohort has doubled in 3 years



# Reference List

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