

Fostering Belonging and Wellbeing in College Students Impacted by War and Crisis

On November 18th, 2025, CARRE together with Texas A&M University, DePaul University, and Hamilton College, joined the [Presidents' Alliance](#) for a panel discussion titled, "Fostering Belonging and Wellbeing for Refugee and Displaced Students in U.S. Higher Ed." This event explored how refugee and displaced students are experiencing campus life during a period of global uncertainty, offered guidance on how anyone in higher education can support students facing instability, and highlighted current examples of comprehensive support programs.

Several critical themes emerged, including research from [Texas A&M University](#) on psychological integration, safety, sense of belonging, and students' perception of campus welcome, such as:

- **Seventy-nine percent of students interviewed reported that their campus feels welcoming**, though fewer felt the same level of welcome within the surrounding local community.
- **Forty percent described experiencing racial tension**, often linked to broader national dynamics and perceptions of tension across the U.S.
- **Although students generally sensed high levels of respect on campus, respect related to immigration background or status was rated the lowest**, indicating an area where students still feel particularly vulnerable.
- **Students reported feeling relatively safe on campus**, noting that campus communities often function as a protective and stabilizing environment during uncertain times.
- **Students observed that the campus climate for diversity is experienced most personally in smaller settings**, such as within individual classes or in interactions with specific instructors.
- **Students also perceived a decline in peer-to-peer interaction across differing perspectives or backgrounds**, contributing to feelings of social fragmentation.

Examples shared by the panelists on ways campuses can provide practical and meaningful support include:

1. Preparing peer mentors to support students with lived experiences of war, crisis, and displacement, ensuring that mentors are trained on cultural responsiveness, sensitivity, and an understanding of the unique stressors students may carry.
2. Cultivating environments that offer stability, community, and opportunities for rebuilding, as highlighted by [Hamilton College](#). This includes sharing accessible resources, leading trauma informed story circles, offering structured orientation experiences, and providing opportunities to meet with counselors. These exercises

help students better understand the U.S. context, clarify their personal goals, and strengthen their sense of belonging. They also encourage students to develop skills, values, and confidence in advocating for themselves.

3. Offering both individual and skills-based group support, such as [DePaul](#) University's Afghan Women Wellbeing program. These groups provide a space to connect with peers, explore meaning making tied to cultural and religious values, discuss challenges, and also reflect on sources of hope and excitement.
4. Establishing strong lines of communication and coordination across campus units or agencies to ensure that existing resources and networks can be leveraged effectively and that students receive consistent, comprehensive support.

The continuation of this work, as emphasized by CARRE, centers on key areas of Psychological First Aid (PFA) – a non-intrusive, compassionate approach to supporting students who may be experiencing immediate or anticipated distress amid ongoing uncertainty, compounded by experiences of war, crisis and displacement.

Because students express stress or process their experiences in different ways, PFA serves as an accessible tool to help foster safety, connection, and hope. When applying PFA, providers can remain Trauma-and Uncertainty-Informed by:

1. Maintaining a compassionate, calming, empathetic and non-judgmental presence, prioritizing active listening and creating safe, confidential spaces where students feel respected and understood.
2. Helping students connect with practical support and coping strategies, ensuring that they continue to access social, physical and emotional resources that can strengthen their wellbeing.
3. Supporting students in maintaining or regaining a sense of control through self-determination and agency. When offering guidance – particularly in situations where students or families are making important decisions– prioritize the self-identified needs of students and their family while also emphasizing their strengths.
4. Staying within your professional scope and expertise. When students share needs or concerns, validate their experiences while offering appropriate referrals where available. Be transparent when answers aren't known and acknowledge limits with honesty and care.

For more information and ways to stay connected with Presidents Alliance and the Welcome Campus Network, please visit the following:

1. [Welcome Campus Network](#)
2. [Refugee & Displaced Students Resource Hub](#)
3. [Guide: Supporting Mental Health Amid Uncertain Immigration Status: A Higher Education Guide](#)