

The upcoming [CMS Think-Tank Summit- Catalyst: Moving Words into Action](#) has four distinct pillars from which we will steer our conversation in music higher education forward. These four pillars are Belonging, Creativity, Technology, and Arts Advocacy. Last month, you may have noticed I reflected on the concept of Arts Advocacy to make a case for how we will need to pull together to make a case for the importance and value of music education. This month, I'm diving deep into what it means to have an organization centered on the concept of *belonging*.

“True belonging doesn't require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are.”

— **Brené Brown, [Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone](#)**

To me, belonging is everything. It is where our sense of mission comes from, our understanding of identity, and our confidence to be ourselves and to fearlessly create. Belonging is different than fitting in. Fitting in says, ‘We accept your difference in our group.’ Belonging says, ‘We value you as you are, and that difference makes us stronger.’ It says you are an integral part of the community; your presence and voice are essential in defining who we are, and we would miss you if you were not here.

We in CMS are committed to cultivating a community of belonging within our organization and continually supporting and impacting music higher education. Belonging includes fostering an environment of joy, respect, compassion, empathy, and professional conduct among the members and guests of this community. We value the following principles through our attitudes, work, and actions to nurture our spirited communities. We aspire to create and cultivate our schools as places to learn, grow, and make music and meaning together.

Here are three aspects of belonging that I have been thinking about. These are clearly my opinions and articulations, but I'm writing from the perspective of these ideas as manifested in our ethos and values as I view them as President of CMS.

1. MUSIC FOR ALL

We are a wide-ranging community of musicians, artists, and people, collectively striving to embrace our similarities and celebrate our differences. The varied perspectives of our members in CMS and our institutions are vibrant and exciting places to learn and work. We can foster belonging through open-mindedness and empathy, which enhances our learning and working experience, deepens our artistic expression, and widens our perspectives. CMS can support curriculum and programming that represents our diverse creative and musical traditions by encouraging the celebration of historically marginalized voices.

“Never underestimate the power of being seen.”

— **Brené Brown, [Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone](#)**

2. A SAFE PLACE TO FLOURISH

In addition to building schools where musicians can hone their craft and flex their creativity, we believe deeply in the support and development of well-rounded humans. We strive to create and grow safe communities for all our members, faculty, staff, and students, and we believe accountability on the individual level is vital. We commit to holding ourselves and our community accountable so that any obstacles to our core values may be acknowledged and addressed immediately.

3. COURAGEOUS GROWTH AND LIFELONG LEARNING

We embrace courageous growth for ourselves and others through a commitment to lifelong learning. Creating a place of belonging requires understanding, humility, and courageousness on the part of ALL members of our community. It means being free to make mistakes, free to grow as musicians and as humans, free to develop thoughts and divergent ideas, and free to try and to fail, for this is how we grow and learn. Courageous growth requires self-reflection for oneself, our organizations, and the communities around us. We cultivate our lifelong learning by being curious, seeking to understand, asking questions, being open to multiple perspectives, and embracing uncomfortable conversations.

Again, I don't know what this means in practice. But I do know that it doesn't happen by accident. I do know that we must be intentional. I do know that if we get complacent, we hurt people, and we hurt ourselves. We can *all* create space for this. I call on all of us to reflect on the role we can play in the various corners of our lives. Our sense of belonging impacts every lesson, every audition, every assignment, every discussion, every rehearsal, every performance.

CMS is working to explore, nurture, understand, and act on belonging in our organization and within music education. This month, the CMS Board is reviewing a *Student Bill of Rights* for adoption proposed by our Student Advisory Council. This document aims to name the aspects of the student experience that create safe places to thrive, a way

to be seen, and a healthy way to build community. I look forward to sharing the document with the whole CMS community soon.

We have several opportunities for you to join our conversation on *Belonging*. Come to the National Conference in DC this November! Come to our Think-Tank Summit—Catalyst: Moving Words into Action this January!

BC

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'B', 'k', and 'C' in a stylized, cursive font.

Brian Kai Chin
President, College Music Society