The following discussion prompts which were given either in class or for self-reflection helped students explore identity and belonging.

**Introduction (Discussion board):**

What are your key identities (e.g. racial, spiritual, familial, gender-based, sexual, professional, educational etc.)?

Is there a difference between how you see yourself and how others see you?

What are the key values (e.g. respect, empathy, hard-work etc.) that follow from these identities?

Read the posts from other students and describe how similar or different your identities are from that student.

If possible, post a picture of something that represents your identity or that you connect with in any way.

**Fostering connections (Discussion board):**

There is a great deal of loneliness and feelings of isolation among people today.

How connected do you feel with others around you?

Describe some ways that you can promote a sense of belonging among your classmates this semester?

What are the ways you could foster a sense of connection with the people you work with (clients, colleagues)? Respond for yourself and to a classmate's post.

**Systems (Assignment and in class writing):**

One problem with the child welfare system is that it can become adversarial and fail listen to the families that it is meant to serve. Let's think about systems and institutions. All of us interact with multiple systems/ institutions (e.g. familial, educational, political, economic, religious, courts, child welfare, cultural, medical etc.) every day of our lives.

Choose any two of these systems/institutions and describe ways that these systems could make you feel a sense of belonging or alienation.

The following are an excerpt from some student responses:

*“My first system/institution would have to be religion . . . Being a homosexual was looked at as something of an evil sort. Times have changed and more and more people as well as religions have been accepting but it needs to be worked on more.*

*The court system and prison system would be my next. Historically, males have been ostracized just due to the social standing that females are better and capable of dealing with the "family" aspect.”*

*“Politics can definitely alienate people from one another. Having a different political stance than one of your friends or family members can tear you guys apart. I know in my own family many people do not speak to each other because they believe in different ideologies.”*

*“Religion can definitely bring people together. It creates a form of community because you all believe in the same thing. This creates almost a second family where you are helping people in your religious community.”*

*“As a New York resident, i am afforded to opportunity to attend BMCC without paying tuition. I had only lived in NY for one year which qualified my application so that created a great sense of belonging for me.*

*Back in my country of origin, after an entire semester in college i was denied the ability to take my finals as I had an outstanding balance on my tuition which was equivalent to $150USD. The level of alienation caused me to leave permanently.”*

*“One system that has always made me feel alienated was the church .  Whenever I did go to a church I felt judged  and like I didn't belong there due to the fact that they were never open to other beliefs or ideas that didn't have to do with their own. Their beliefs are the ones that are always valid and anything else isn't accepted . I always felt like it was hypocritical for them to say that God says not to judge others but still do what they are told not to do.”*