

**Belonging: A Qualitative Descriptive Study Exploring the Experiences of Adjunct Faculty
Who Teach Remotely at Higher Education Institutions**

Dissertation-in-Practice Manuscript

Submitted to National University

Sanford College of Education

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

by

EMILY J N SPRANGER

San Diego, California

June 2025

Abstract

The problem this study addressed was the lack of belonging adjunct faculty teaching remotely at higher education institutions experience, leading to job dissatisfaction, high attrition, a decrease of effectiveness in the classroom, and feelings of isolation. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how adjunct faculty who teach remotely in higher education institutions experience belonging. By listening to the perceptions of adjunct faculty, strategies for cultivating adjunct faculty belonging were formulated. A qualitative methodology guided the investigation, with Allen et al.'s belonging framework serving as the conceptual foundation. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom and online questionnaires administered through Qualtrics. Following Braun and Clarke's six-phase process, which was supported by NVivo software, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Three themes emerged for the first research question: (1) adjuncting is isolating, online adjuncting is even more isolating; (2) being included; and (3) relationships can only be built when two entities want to connect. Two themes emerged for the second research question: (1) recognition is the biggest motivation; and (2) feeling like you are valued. Recommendations include reducing isolation by fostering inclusion and enhancing communication; creating both formal and informal virtual opportunities to connect; intentionally inviting adjunct faculty into decision-making processes; offering faculty development that supports belonging-related competencies; implementing structured recognition programs; increasing leadership visibility; and establishing spaces where adjunct faculty feel valued and connected to the institution.

Acknowledgements

As a young child, I never could have dreamed that I would one day complete a doctoral degree. What an incredible journey it has been. To my loving husband, Ken, your encouragement, unwavering support, and steady presence have been an anchor throughout this process. I love you and am so grateful to have you by my side. To my mother and father, I find it hard to find the right words to express just how thankful I am for your support over the years. I have not told you this yet, but your birthday card to me four years ago was the spark that ignited this doctoral journey. It was a simple birthday card that reiterated what you have so often told my siblings and I, “You can do whatever you set your mind to.” And off I went, embarking on this program. Dad, a special thank you for reading every single word of this dissertation, including the reference section! Mom, your strength is an inspiration to our family. To my brother and sister, thank you for holding my hand and supporting me as you have always done. To my friends and family who consistently asked me how my program was going, your check-ins often gave me the push I needed to write the next sentence of my dissertation. To my dear colleagues at work, your support over the last four years has been invaluable. I am deeply grateful to each of you. I could not get through this process without my dissertation committee's wisdom, guidance, and support. Thank you for believing in me. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all those who have supported me throughout the journey of completing this dissertation. Lastly, to our girls, I hope you know that your father and I will always be in your corner. We will continue to hold your hand, listen when you need us, and carry you in our hearts for all the days to come. Kylie and Adeline, if you have a goal, a dream, or a wish, know that, as your parents, we believe you can achieve it—*carpe diem*.

Table of Contents

Section 1: Foundation	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Purpose of the Study	4
Research Questions	5
Conceptual Framework.....	6
Definitions of Key Terms	10
Review of the Literature	11
Ethical Assurances	42
Summary	44
Section 2: Methodology and Design.....	47
Design and Method.....	48
Population and Sample	52
Instrumentation	54
Data Collection and Analysis.....	57
Assumptions.....	62
Limitations	63
Delimitations.....	63
Summary.....	64
Section 3: Findings, Implications, and Recommendations.....	65
Findings.....	66
Evaluation of the Outcomes.....	107
Implications and Recommendations for Practice	113
Recommendations for Future Research	124
Conclusions.....	126
Appendices.....	148
Appendix A IRB Approval	149
Appendix B Social Media Post.....	151
Appendix C Informed Consent Form	152
Appendix D Interview Protocol.....	154
Appendix E Questionnaire.....	156

List of Tables

Table 1 Participant Demographics	68
Table 2 Coding Scheme for RQ1	75
Table 3 Coding Scheme for RQ2	91

List of Figures

Figure 1	Conceptual Framework for Belonging	9
-----------------	--	---

Section 1: Foundation

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have long represented the pinnacle of a person's educational journey. People attend universities for many reasons, including learning a skill, improving employment prospects, increasing earning potential, and other professional benefits. With technological advances, students can complete coursework entirely online. While distance or online education has been around for decades, the current trend across the country shows an increase in adjunct faculty teaching online courses (Cottom et al., 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Adjunct faculty who teach remotely make an essential contribution to online education's sustainability, effectiveness, and quality (Cottom et al., 2018). The crucial role adjunct faculty perform in online education, coupled with the growth and continued persistence of online higher education, warranted a deeper look into the influential role of adjunct faculty at higher education institutions.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in the fall of 2020, more than 5 million United States (U.S.) students were enrolled in at least one distance education course (NCES, 2023). Furthermore, approximately 47% of these students took distance education courses exclusively (NCES, 2023). With roughly half of the student population engaged in distance or online education, many researchers are interested in what is happening in these educational organizations. The adjunct faculty member's role is a central cog in higher education institutions' structure. According to the NCES, part-time faculty accounted for 44% of the U.S.'s 1.5 million faculty at postsecondary institutions (NCES, 2023). Depending on the HEI, there may be more adjuncts than full-time faculty. Considering that approximately half of the student population is taking courses online, coupled with 44% of part-time faculty, we can assume that online students will likely gain postsecondary education from an adjunct faculty

member working remotely (NCES, 2023). A large population of highly skilled individuals are working for HEIs as temporary, as-needed employees.

Adjunct faculty are not guaranteed employment, yet they are vital to the student experience and the university environment (Buch et al., 2023). For decades, the literature has indicated that adjunct faculty's working environments and experiences are sub-par, even though adjunct faculty comprise nearly half the faculty population (NCES, 2023; Sam, 2021). Adjunct employment conditions may contribute to a lack of connectedness, isolation, a lack of a sense of belonging, and lower levels of job satisfaction (Buch et al., 2023; O'Grady, 2021; Sam, 2021). These sub-par experiences for nearly half of an institution's faculty members could impede the students' experience. Maslow's hierarchical needs point to belonging as a critical piece of human needs (Maslow, 1943). This fundamental human need has both negative and positive ripple effects.

Adjunct faculty were often excluded from institutional discussions and lacked access to professional development opportunities, support systems, connections, community, and, ultimately, a sense of belonging (Danaei, 2019). Many factors influence an adjunct faculty member's decision to teach and remain at an institution, most of which are related to job satisfaction (Sadagheyani et al., 2022). Nestled within job satisfaction is the concept of a sense of belonging. In their own interests, HEIs should explore ways to foster better relationships with adjunct faculty members who teach remotely to cultivate an environment that supports an adjunct faculty member's sense of belonging.

Prior studies have focused on students' sense of belonging at higher education institutions (Ferencz, 2017; Pedler et al., 2022). Specifically, one study's findings showed that students who experienced a sense of belonging also exhibited higher levels of student academic motivation

and enjoyment (Pedler et al., 2022). A quantitative study by Ahn & Davis (2023) confirmed that a student's sense of belonging in higher education correlated strongly to retention and institutional success. If a sense of belonging was critical to the student's experience, it could be argued that a sense of belonging is also essential for adjunct faculty serving at HEIs offering online courses. Considering the volume of research that has been conducted to understand the implications of a student's sense of belonging, research should be conducted to understand how adjunct faculty experience a sense of belonging in the online educational environment (Ferencz, 2017; Gravett & Ajjawi, 2023; Prodggers et al., 2023). A deeper understanding of adjunct faculty's experiences of a sense of belonging may yield important institutional insights and improvements.

Distance education has become an important modality in higher education. Technological advances have allowed educational institutions to continue offering and accelerating online education offerings (Garret et al., 2023). Student demand moved more higher education institutions to provide multi-modal approaches and online learning (Garret et al., 2023). With this current and forthcoming demand, it is essential to recognize the critical role adjunct faculty held in the formula for student success and, ultimately, an HEI's success in generating a sense of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely.

Statement of the Problem

The problem this study addressed was the lack of belonging adjunct faculty teaching remotely at higher education institutions experience, leading to job dissatisfaction, high attrition, (Batiste et al., 2023; Buch et al., 2023; Olson, 2021), a decrease of effectiveness in the classroom, (Blankinship, 2022; Wojcik, 2017), and feelings of isolation (Batiste et al., 2023; Blankinship, 2022; Rahmat, 2024). A lack of belonging contributes to myriad adverse effects,

including faculty who complete tasks but do not engage students in a stimulating educational learning capacity, decreased feelings of value, and diminished self-efficacy and well-being (Batiste et al., 2023; Blankenship, 2022; Buch et al., 2023; Rahmat, 2024). Furthermore, a lack of belonging has been linked to increased risks for mental and physical health concerns (Allen et al., 2021). Remote isolation and disconnection can adversely affect the well-being of adjunct faculty (Rahmat, 2024). These challenges negatively impacted adjunct faculty and jeopardized the success of academic institutions and student learning outcomes (Rahmat, 2024). Higher education institutions that invest in a greater sense of belonging for faculty will likely improve productivity, engagement, and retention (Terosky & Heasley, 2015). A lack of belonging may contribute to a complex set of interrelated negative possibilities. Considering the fundamental human need to have a sense of belonging (Maslow, 1943), higher education institutions that find ways to improve a sense of belonging may benefit the adjunct faculty member, the HEI, and the students interacting with a valued, productive, and engaged instructor. If a lack of belonging is not addressed, and adjunct faculty's experiences with belonging are not explored, universities may experience poor instruction, high turnover, and employees with higher risks of mental and physical health issues.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how adjunct faculty who teach remotely in higher education institutions experience belonging. By listening to the perceptions of adjunct faculty, strategies for cultivating adjunct faculty belonging were formulated. Taking into consideration the fundamental human need of belonging (Maslow, 1943), the rise of online courses (Cottom et al., 2018), and the large population of adjunct faculty who teach remotely at HEIs (NCES, 2023; Rahmat, 2024), the purpose of this study was vital to

the educational landscape. The population of participants consisted of adjunct faculty members who had taught remotely for an HEI for at least two years and within six months preceding their participation. All of the participants resided in the United States. The sample size for this qualitative descriptive study included 10 adjunct faculty. The recruitment strategy for this study utilized both criterion sampling and snowball sampling. Criterion sampling consisted of a predisposed set of criteria for participants (Bloomberg, 2023). Participants were recruited through social media posts on Facebook and LinkedIn pages. In addition to criterion sampling, snowball sampling was used to gather more participants who fit the needs of the study (Bloomberg, 2023). This combined recruitment strategy assisted with achieving data saturation.

This study explored the experiences of belonging for adjunct faculty who taught remotely using an open-ended, semi-structured field-tested interview and a questionnaire. The interviews were captured on Zoom and the questionnaire was completed through Qualtrics. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis process, with in vivo coding conducted using NVivo software. Reflexive practices were maintained throughout the data collection and analysis process. The findings contribute to educational practice by offering insight into the experiences of belonging and the needs of adjunct faculty to improve belonging. Ultimately, this study provides recommendations to improve the working environment for adjunct faculty who teach remotely.

Research Questions

RQ1

How do adjunct faculty who teach remotely experience belonging at their higher education institution?

RQ2

In what ways do adjunct faculty who teach remotely believe their sense of belonging could be cultivated by their higher education institution?

Conceptual Framework

Qualitative studies use conceptual and theoretical frameworks as foundational lenses to view a problem (Bloomberg, 2023). Varying perspectives on what it means to belong have hampered the growth and understanding of how belonging could be assessed, cultivated, or conceptualized (Allen et al., 2021). Therefore, a dynamic and integrative model provided a robust framework for exploring the multidimensional nature of belonging in this study. Allen et al. (2021) identified four components of belonging to serve as an integrative framework to assess, better understand, and cultivate belonging. The components to assess belonging were built from different perspectives of belonging, including competencies for belonging, opportunities to belong, motivations to belong, and perceptions of belonging (Allen et al., 2021). The integrative framework was derived from decades of research on belonging (Allen et al., 2021). Allen et al. (2021) argued that assessing belongingness through these four components will enhance understanding of belonging and contribute to how belonging may be cultivated, improving human health and resilience.

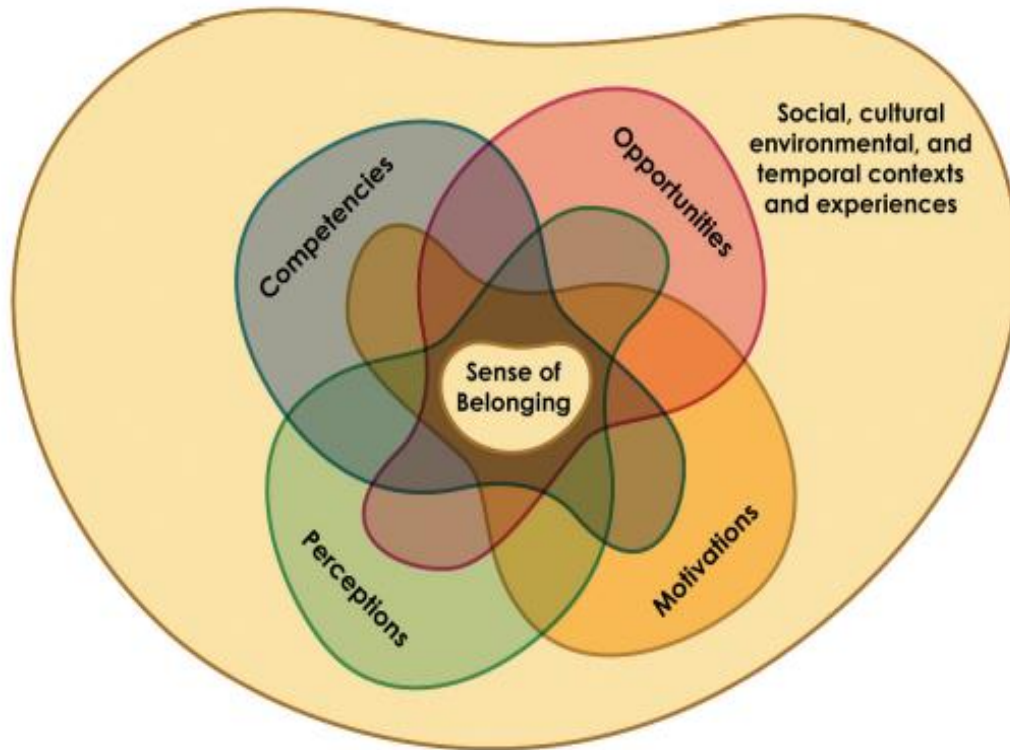
Competencies related to a person's ability or skill to belong (Allen et al., 2021; Chaharbashloo et al., 2024; National Institute of Health, 2024). Over the last two decades, competencies for online teaching have been researched (Baran et al., 2011; Martin et al., 2021). An adjunct faculty could have many competencies that may help with belonging in an online learning environment. Chaharbashloo et al.'s (2024) systematic search for competencies of

online teachers included 77 eligible articles with a total of 107 competencies that were identified for online faculty in higher education. Some of these included a faculty's ability to empathize, create a friendly learning environment, teach with compassion, knowledge of the Learning Management System (LMS), administration requirements, and ability to adjust (Chaharbashloo et al., 2024; González et al., 2023; Martin et al., 2021). An adjunct faculty teaching remotely requires diverse skills to engage with students and institutions effectively (Martin et al., 2021). A person might possess multiple abilities or skills to belong in a remote working environment, which may contribute to their experiences or feelings of belonging. Therefore, understanding what an adjunct faculty's competencies are was important to this study.

Opportunities to connect can only occur if individuals are given permission or are provided with an option to meet, connect, or interact (Allen et al., 2021). An adjunct faculty who does not have access to a physical campus to interact with their colleagues organically may experience constraints on their opportunities to belong. Reduced face-to-face access to interaction with leaders, colleagues, and students may impede an adjunct faculty's ability to belong (Batiste et al., 2023; Perrotta & Bohan, 2020). Providing opportunities to interact socially, bond, and network may help increase feelings of belonging at a HEI (Batiste et al., 2023; Perrotta & Bohan, 2020). Perrotta and Bohan (2020) noted in their reflective study that online instructors often felt like *outsiders* and that the lack of regular interactions caused faculty to feel disconnected. Perrotta and Bohan (2020) provided recommendations on what kind of professional development or mentorship programs could be implemented to assist with the support and guidance of online faculty. These recommendations highlighted the importance of examining how faculty interact with one another and the resulting impact on various aspects of HEIs.

Leary and Kelly (2009) explained that belonging motivation is a person's need to seek social interactions and connections. Motivation focuses on an individual's wants or influencing factors that encourage or discourage a person to belong (Allen et al., 2021). Context and individual differences are central to understanding a person's motivation to belong (Allen et al., 2021). Despite the varying contributing factors to being motivated to belong, scholars such as Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggested that even people who have a traumatic experience can still be motivated to connect with others.

The last component in the Allen et al. (2021) conceptual framework is perceptions of belonging. Perceptions are the subjective experiences of a person that may influence that person's feelings of belonging (Allen et al., 2021). Baumeister and Leary (1995), Walton and Brady (2017), and Allen et al. (2021) argued that most humans consciously or subconsciously evaluate if they fit in or belong with the people around them. These perceptions of belonging could influence the desire to connect, self-confidence, and self-efficacy (Allen et al., 2021). Walton and Brady (2017) argued that a person's experiences of feeling accepted, respected, and included directly affect a person's perceptions of belonging. Considering perceptions are subjective, creating a study that explored the qualitative experiences of adjunct faculty provided a deeper understanding of how perceptions of belonging influence adjunct faculty who teach remotely. Figure 1 demonstrates the overlapping components dependent upon context for the Allen et al. (2021) belonging framework.

Figure 1*Conceptual Framework for Belonging*

Note. Four components of belonging highlight the complexities of a sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2021).

By listening to the perceptions of adjunct faculty, strategies for cultivating adjunct faculty belonging were formulated. Allen et al.'s (2021) conceptual framework grounded in understanding a person's competencies, opportunities, motivations, and perceptions of belonging provided a deeper understanding of the problem investigated in this study. Considering that each adjunct faculty's experiences are unique, using the Allen et al. (2021) multidimensional integrative framework provided a deeper insight into the experiences of adjunct faculty.

Definitions of Key Terms

Adjunct faculty

Faculty who are hired as part-time on a course-by-course duration (Liljergren, 2016).

Asynchronous online learning

A learning environment where students can access all learning materials online at any time, the teaching and learning environment is flexible, and interactions occur at alternating times (Amiti, 2020).

Belonging(ness)

Belonging is a multidimensional social psychological need to which relatedness is integral—feeling a part of something having an affinity to a group or place (Getz, 2021).

Community

A community can comprise a heterogeneous or a homogeneous group of people, such as professionals, schools, or organizations (Blum, 1996).

Contingent faculty

Faculty with a limited contract that may or may not be renewable often exchanged with the term adjunct faculty (Jo & Ardoin, 2020).

Connectedness

Connectedness is a multidimensional psychological basic human need for relatedness, a desire to experience relationships with a person, place, or thing (Loukas & Ripperger-Suhler, 2018).

Distance education

A form of teaching and learning where the student and faculty or instructor are not in the same physical space (Garza Mitchell, 2020).

E-learning

A learning concept where teaching and learning are supported entirely electronically (Chitra & Raj, 2018).

Hybrid courses

Courses where content is delivered on campus and virtually on an online platform synchronously or asynchronously (Nikolopoulou, 2022; Raes et al., 2020).

Online education

Online education allows students the flexibility to complete a course asynchronously and interact with their instructors, accessing course content and course resources through web-based technology (Diehl, 2020).

Remote faculty

Faculty who teach a course(s) from their home or a remote location (not on campus) (DeDominicis, 2016).

Synchronous online learning

Students and faculty meet online at a specific time on an online platform for teaching and learning or communication (Amiti, 2020).

Review of the Literature

The problem this study addressed was the lack of belonging adjunct faculty teaching remotely at higher education institutions experience, leading to job dissatisfaction, high attrition, (Batiste et al., 2023; Buch et al., 2023; Olson, 2021), a decrease of effectiveness in the

classroom, (Blankinship, 2022; Wojcik, 2017), and feelings of isolation (Batiste et al., 2023; Blankinship, 2022; Rahmat, 2024). The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how adjunct faculty who teach remotely in higher education institutions experience belonging. By using a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how adjunct faculty experience belonging, emergent themes provided a rich explanation of the current state of belonging for adjunct faculty members. This study aimed to provide recommendations to HEI leaders on cultivating a sense of belonging for adjunct faculty teaching remotely, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging (Buch et al., 2023; Ferencz, 2017). Multiple database systems were accessed to conduct the literature review.

Searches included the following database systems and search engines: Education Research Complete (ERIC), Google Scholar, Roadrunner Search, Navigator Search, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global Search, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses @ Northcentral University, Academic Research Complete, Chronicle of Higher Education, Credo Reference, Taylor and Francis Online, JSTOR Open Content, Ulrich's Web, SAGE Journals, SAGE Open, SAGE Research Methods, Web of Science, and SAGE Knowledge.

Current key searches included adjunct, part-time, faculty, professor, instructor, virtual environment, virtual, E-learning, distance, remote, connectedness, relatedness, belonging, belongingness, community, self-determination, online education, and distance education. A variety of combinations between the terms were used: belonging OR engagement OR connect* OR remote OR online OR virtual or non-tenure OR adjunct AND belonging OR connectedness and adjunct or "part-time" N3 faculty or professor or instructor AND AB connectedness or belongingness or relatedness or community AND AB virtual or online or distance or remote or e-learning NOT COVID-19 and adjunct or "part-time" N3 faculty or professor or instructor AND

AB connectedness or belongingness or relatedness or community AND AB virtual or online or distance or remote or e-learning. The search included publications ranging from 1948 to 2024.

A depiction of the emergence of online learning in higher education institutions and the complexities, historical background, and advancements underscores the expansion of HEIs. Within this broad evolution of HEIs, an examination of the proliferation of online education formats was provided. A brief acknowledgment of COVID-19 and the continued impacts were included. The escalation of student demand for online education options at HEIs was emphasized. I synthesized research on the working conditions for adjunct faculty at HEIs. To examine belonging, a deep understanding of various aspects of belonging is detailed, including connectedness, community, temporal and spatial elements, the absence of belonging, similarities of belonging for students online, a synthesis of prior research concerning adjunct faculty and belonging in HEIs, and methods of measuring belonging. Lastly, an explanation of the connection of the conceptual, integrative framework of Allen et al. (2021) was provided to explore perceptions of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely at HEIs.

Emergence of Online Learning in Higher Education Institutions

For hundreds of years, learning, research, and community service have been foundational purposes of higher education institutions (HEIs) (Olo et al., 2021). Higher education institutions continue to evolve from the Middle Ages and Renaissance eras to modern-day HEIs of varied levels and prestige (Olo et al., 2021). These learning institutions have largely contributed to higher thinking, economic development, scientific advancements, social development, research endeavors, and pioneering events (Chankseliani et al., 2021; Olo et al., 2021). Historically, HEIs primarily comprised elite individuals who contributed to humanities and science (Chankseliani et

al., 2021). Higher education institutions were for the top echelons of society. Over time, these institutions have undergone significant evolution and transformation.

Higher education institutions have developed substantially in recent decades to serve individuals from various economic statuses, demographics, and diverse backgrounds (Olo et al., 2021). Since the 1960s, there has been a push for mass education, not just for elite individuals, but rather for great diversity in socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, and age (Olo et al., 2021; Schofer, 2021). With the expansion of mass education, HEIs have also evolved into various classifications of educational institutions. The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education includes six classifications (HEIs): Doctoral Universities, Master's Colleges and Universities, Baccalaureate Colleges, Baccalaureate/Associate's Colleges, Associate Colleges, and Special Focus Institutions (The Carnegie Classification of Higher Education, 2024). These educational institutions may be public, private nonprofit, private for-profit institutions, 2-year, and 4-year institutions (NCES, 2023). Expanding the array of educational platforms and institutions has offered a diverse range of learning opportunities for post-secondary students and professionals. A part of this diversification of academic institutions is the evolution of online offerings at HEIs.

Online learning, virtual learning, E-Learning, and digital learning platforms have existed for decades (Butters & Gann, 2022). Preceding online education was distance education, a form of teaching and learning where the faculty and students were not in the same physical space (Garza Mitchell, 2020; Nduagbo, 2020). The development of the Internet and the wealth of resources on the World Wide Web came with the emergence of the opportunity for online education (Nduagbo, 2020). This boom in technological possibilities opened a cascading world of possibilities for online education.

Online education can be offered in several ways in today's HEIs, including synchronously, asynchronously, hybrid options, distance students, or students choosing to take non-credit hour courses through Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) (Nduagbo, 2020). In the United States, HEIs currently offer many online learning options (Nduagbo, 2020). Over the last eight years, enrollment in higher education has decreased (Marasi et al., 2020; Ren, 2023). Despite the decrease, online courses have continued to grow in demand over the last decade (Marasi et al., 2020; Ren, 2023). This increase shows that although fewer people are attending HEIs, there is still a growing interest in the modality of online learning.

Online education can be offered through various options. Some HEIs operate solely online, while others employ a hybrid approach. Learning on an online platform can occur synchronously or asynchronously. Depending on the HEI's model of online offerings, their faculty may or may not teach on campus. During the last decade, HEIs have increased their online modalities to meet societal demands for flexible adult learning educational options (Butters & Gann, 2022). Several factors contribute to the growth and popularity of online options, including, but not limited to, COVID-19, cost considerations, the flexible adjunct faculty workforce at HEIs, and student demand.

The Rapid Shift

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the process of providing education on a digital platform (Haffar et al., 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an almost immediate shift from face-to-face courses to entirely online courses (Johnson et al., 2020; Haffar et al., 2023). Before the COVID-19 explosion of HEIs to all-online, HEIs explored and embraced digital transformation (Haffar et al., 2023). While online modalities remained a focal point for HEIs, some institutions encountered a decrease in enrollment while others witnessed growth.

Amidst the rapid transition to online education prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, various enrollment challenges and shifts in adjunct faculty hiring occurred, further impacting the HEI landscape. A 4.2% decline in enrollment for undergraduate and graduate programs in the United States between the fall of 2020 and the fall of 2022 occurred due to the pandemic (Korotchenko & Dobbs, 2023; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2024). Crespín-Trujillo & Hora (2021) suggested that during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a decline in enrollment at HEIs, which led to a decrease in the hiring of adjunct faculty. The reduction of adjunct faculty coincided with the first full academic year of the coronavirus pandemic (NCES, 2023). The pandemic posed challenges for HEIs, necessitating a rapid transition to online learning platforms due to COVID-19.

During the swift shift to online teaching triggered by the pandemic, many adjunct faculty were already prepared to instruct via online platforms because their HEIs had implemented such platforms beforehand (Crespín-Trujillo & Hora, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated everyone to a remote working and learning space; even now that the pandemic is over, online and remote working conditions remain a new normal (Crespín-Trujillo & Hora, 2021; Fernandez-Batanero et al., 2022; Garret et al., 2023). COVID-19 revealed the possibility and probability of the growth of online education for all HEIs to serve diverse student populations (Fernandez-Batanero et al., 2022; Ren, 2023). Higher education institutions are exploring innovative approaches to expand their services through online modalities. Researchers are continuing to explore the implications of COVID-19 on HEIs, students, and faculty of all appointments.

For example, Karakose (2021), Piotrowski and King (2020), and Resch et al. (2023) discussed the implications and challenges of COVID-19 on HEIs. Karakose (2021) argued that

the COVID-19 pandemic presented the opportunity for HEIs to redesign, develop, and implement effective teaching and learning strategies online. Piotrowski and King (2020) attempted to address the gap in the literature on the impact of pandemics on HEIs. Their research highlighted the impact of using Complexity Science, which is a theoretical foundation for understanding crisis management (Piotrowski & King, 2020). Ultimately, Piotrowski and King (2020) argued that HEIs that can adapt and meet the challenges of a successful online learning structure will flourish, given the new future state of education. Resch et al. (2023) explored social and academic integration for students using Tinto's integration theory. The results indicated students experienced a significant decrease in social and academic integration (Resch et al., 2023). The sudden move to online learning caused issues with connection, social relatedness, and increased isolation (Resch et al., 2023). The findings of Resch et al. (2023) demonstrated that students are more likely to succeed digitally if instructors and students have strong relationships. Resch et al. (2023) posited that if the teacher is central to the student's experience, then the teacher's experience must also be examined and supported.

The Pearson Global Learner Survey, as highlighted by Dennis (2021), underscored the significant impact of COVID-19 on higher education, with three-quarters of learners acknowledging its transformative effects. The pandemic brought forth both challenges and opportunities for HEIs. Despite the post-pandemic return to office expectations in many industries across the United States, online education continues to be a fast-growing segment of HEIs. Students are contributing factors to the continued expansion of online education.

Increased Student Demand for Online Learning

The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2025) reports recent growth in undergraduate and graduate enrollment nearly reaching pre-pandemic enrollment levels. The

student demand for flexible learning options is perhaps the single most prominent factor contributing to the expansion of online education (Diehl, 2020; Ren, 2023). Online education provides a flexible option for learners to build upon their educational background (Diehl, 2020). In today's digital age, many students seek learning options that accommodate a fast-paced working environment, an option for non-traditional students. The non-traditional student is a student who likely has family or work responsibilities (NCES, 2025). These students may have other life circumstances that interfere with their educational goals (NCES, 2025). Given the array of adaptable online learning opportunities and the diverse nature of today's students, it is unsurprising that an online platform holds significant appeal for individuals juggling familial or professional commitments.

Flexible learning solutions, particularly among non-traditional students, have bolstered the growth of online education and are both a response to and a catalyst for significant changes within HEIs. Garret et al. (2023) and Ren (2023) posited that the upsurge of non-traditional students is a significant contributing reason to the expansion of online education. The convergence of HEIs' transformational needs for growth amidst technological advancements spurred by COVID-19 and the convenience of online attendance for non-traditional students bolstered the expansion and evolution of online education in HEIs (Fernandez-Batanero et al., 2022; Ren, 2023). Online courses provide HEIs with the advantage of competing on a global scale. Higher education institutions continue to work on trying to meet the student's desire for online classes and compete in a worldwide market (Masai et al., 2020). Considering the rise of non-traditional students at HEIs, institutions are continuing to expand online offerings, leveraging technology to remain competitive globally.

The report *CHLOE 8: Student Demand Moves Higher Ed Toward a Multi-Modal Future*, compiled by Garret et al. (2023), emphasized key insights derived from U.S. Chief Online Officers and online learning. The findings of the report highlighted significant growth in online and hybrid programs, particularly in adult undergraduate and graduate education (Garret et al., 2023). The results of these findings indicated the student demand for online learning options. Ren's (2023) qualitative study investigated instructors' experiences with non-traditional learners in an online environment. Ren's (2023) research showed that engagement between the faculty and the students was a significant indicator of student retention and success. Moreover, the findings underscored the necessity of fostering relationships and community alongside institutional support and resources for faculty to enhance future teaching practices (Ren, 2023). While the demand exists for online education, it can be argued that belonging may play a critical role in the success of the institution, faculty, and student population (Garret et al., 2023; Ren, 2023). Despite these challenges, online education continues to remain an attractive developing need at HEIs.

Online courses provide HEIs with the advantage of competing on a global scale. Higher education institutions continue to work on trying to meet the student's desire for online classes and compete in a worldwide market (Masai et al., 2020). One strategy to meet this demand is hiring adjunct faculty on a per-course basis based on the growth needs of an HEI. In tandem with the rising call for online education, an increasing number of students are opting for online courses or a blend of online and traditional options to fulfill their academic requirements. The 2019-2020 NCES report highlighted the percentage of undergraduate and graduate students taking any online courses, showing that 66% of undergraduates took at least one course online, and 64% of graduate students attending degree-granting HEIs were also enrolled in at least one

course online in the U.S. (NCES, 2023). Marasi et al. (2022) explained that 2019 enrollment decreased by 1.7%. However, despite the eighth consecutive decline in enrollment, online courses continued to provide an education option that reached a global market with a diverse student population, saved costs, and attempted to boost enrollment (Marsai et al., 2022). Given that more than half of the student population was engaged in online coursework (NCES, 2023), it remains imperative to prioritize the quality of online instructional design and delivery (Martin et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2021; Ren, 2023), a crucial aspect for HEIs today.

The Role of Adjunct Faculty in HEIs

The title of adjunct faculty can vary greatly depending on the institution. Adjunct, contingent, and part-time faculty have been used synonymously to refer to a faculty member who works temporarily or whose work contract is not guaranteed at an institution (Christopher et al., 2022; Danaei, 2019). Regardless of the terminology used to describe the appointment, these positions have generally been temporary or on a course-by-course basis (Liljergren, 2016; Jo & Ardoin, 2020). While there are many different types of adjunct faculty appointments, HEIs hire adjunct faculty to instruct, cultivate, nurture, and inspire students. The adjunct faculty member's role remains critical to the higher education structure.

The adjunct faculty position has been on an upward trend since the 1970s (Christopher et al., 2022; Danaei, 2019). Of the 1.5 million faculty in the U.S., approximately 44% are part-time or adjunct faculty (NCES, 2023). At one time, adjunct faculty were considered prestigious experts who added valuable expertise to an HEI (Christopher et al., 2022; Wallin, 2004). Over time, adjunct faculty positions have turned into fill-in positions. This economical choice sustains HEIs enrollment and has been a financial benefit to HEIs filling the teaching position without paying the cost and benefits of the full-time professor (Christopher et al., 2022; Danaei, 2019;

Wallin, 2004). While the prestigious status of adjunct faculty may have diminished over time, their role remains crucial to the sustainability of HEIs and their impact on the students instructed.

Certain HEIs possess a higher ratio of adjunct faculty compared to full-time faculty. For example, community colleges often have double the amount of adjunct faculty compared to a 4-year institution at approximately 67% of the faculty body (Crespín-Trujillo & Hora, 2021). In their translational research, Crespín-Trujillo and Hora (2021) found that 58% of all courses offered at community colleges were taught by adjunct faculty. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) released their analysis of contingent positions in US HEIs, compiled from data sourced from the National Center for Education Statistics and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), alongside comparable data from the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) (Colby, 2023). This report showed a quick snapshot of contingent, part-time, or adjunct faculty's current state. The findings highlighted that two-thirds of faculty members at colleges or universities hold contingent appointments (AAUP, 2023). These findings underscore the significant reliance of HEIs on adjunct faculty.

Dependence on adjunct faculty, lacking the same protections as full-time counterparts, could jeopardize an HEI's success and its obligations to students and society, posing challenges to maintaining teaching and research quality when adjunct faculty lack equivalent benefits to full-time faculty (Colby, 2023; Danaei, 2019; The American Federation of Teachers, 2020). Danaei (2019) suggested that the increase in adjunct faculty has contributed to lower graduation rates, while HEI funding has increasingly become dependent on receiving funding based on graduation rates. The reliance on adjunct faculty is substantial at HEIs, yet their current working conditions are often considered inferior to their full-time faculty counterparts.

Adjunct Faculty Working Conditions

Despite the sheer number of adjunct faculty, individuals working in these positions tend to experience little support, and lack decision-making choices, including being left out of institutional discussions about textbook selection, learning goals, and professional development at their HEIs (Batiste et al., 2023; Danaei, 2019; The American Federation of Teachers, 2020). The American Federation of Teachers (2020) report included 3,076 contingent or adjunct faculty experiences. In addition to disempowering working conditions, adjunct faculty tend to earn incomes below the poverty level (American Federation of Teachers, 2020). Nearly a quarter of the 3,076 respondents earned less than \$25,000, placing these employees below the federal poverty guidelines (American Federation of Teachers, 2020; Buch et al., 2023). For a position that used to be considered prestigious, earning minimal pay may contribute to the quality of instruction and affect an individual's overall well-being in an inequitable, less-than-favorable working condition (American Federation of Teachers, 2020; Batiste et al., 2023; Chistopher et al., 2022). Low-pay positions continue to benefit the HEI as a cheap labor force and adversely impact an adjunct faculty's ability to thrive economically. Minimal pay is just the tip of the iceberg regarding equitable working conditions compared to full-time faculty.

Lack of healthcare and retirement options are a reality for adjunct faculty members (American Federation of Teachers, 2020; Anthony et al., 2020; Chistopher et al., 2022). Out of the 3,076 respondents, less than half of the participants received health care benefits from their employers (American Federation of Teachers, 2020). Retirement is not an outlier to the poor working conditions adjunct faculty experience. Of the 3076 respondents, 43% contributed to a retirement fund, yet 36.5% of those who responded have no idea how retirement will be achieved (American Federation of Teachers, 2020). As the survey from The American Federation of

Teachers (2020) confirmed, the combination of low pay, lack of health care, and inability to even imagine retirement highlights the inferior working conditions of adjunct faculty.

While inadequate support accommodations for adjunct faculty exist, job stability remains a real concern for adjunct faculty. Higher education institutions can add a section of a course or cancel a course at the last minute due to low enrollment, affecting the adjunct faculty's financial stability (Blankinship, 2022; Christopher et al., 2022). Additionally, adjunct faculty may experience a lack of support due to the timing of their hiring, which impacts their ability to prepare to teach the class and ultimately affects the student experience (Christopher et al., 2022; Butters & Gann, 2022; Rhoades, 2020). Although it is advantageous for HEIs to have the flexibility to move adjunct faculty as needed, it remains an unstable employment situation for adjunct faculty.

The American Federation of Teachers (2020) mentioned the lack of voice and treatment adjunct faculty receive and experience from their HEIs. When participants were asked if everyone has a voice in decisions affecting them, adjunct faculty overwhelmingly responded, 69.7% agreed with the statement that they do not have a voice in such decisions (American Federation of Teachers, 2020). Furthermore, 41% of adjunct faculty reported not feeling treated as a member of the faculty body at the HEI (American Federation of Teachers, 2020). These are concerning outcomes for a system that was established to support learning and human development.

Dissatisfaction impacts adjunct faculty and the institutions they serve. Christopher et al. (2022) summarized key themes pertinent to the socio-cultural dimensions of part-time faculty members' daily work experiences. Christopher et al. (2022) noted that part-time faculty often indicated dissatisfaction with inclusion and a lack of acknowledgment. The researchers use the

analogy of making a comparison of adjunct faculty being “fine wine at discount prices” (Christopher et al., 2022). These findings argued that the experiences of part-time faculty can vary dramatically, and Christopher et al. (2022) was unable to draw broad conclusions due to the substantial limitations of the extant body of research. Additionally, Christopher et al. (2022) argued that if HEIs were committed to creating equitable workplaces, then the institutions must do a better job of improving the experiences of part-time faculty.

Even though adjunct faculty typically make up more than 50% of HEI’s teaching force (NCES, 2023), they continue to feel undervalued and unnoticed. Part of this equation involves workplace culture and climate, which can vary significantly among HEIs but profoundly influence adjunct faculty (Christopher et al., 2022). The behavior of leadership and colleagues toward adjunct faculty contributes to the culture and climate that shapes the experiences of adjunct faculty (Batiste et al., 2023; Culver et al., 2020). Navigating workplace politics, leadership support, and willingness to participate contribute to adjunct faculty working conditions (Christopher et al., 2022). The dissatisfaction among adjunct faculty highlights the pressing need to address the lack of inclusion, connection, and recognition within HEIs.

In addition to the impact on adjunct faculty members, student achievement is also at risk. Substandard working conditions for faculty may negatively impact student performance (Cummins et al., 2021; Sam, 2021). Cummins et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study to understand how the faculty role contributes to the academic success of students. Furthermore, the study explored how the institutions provided support, especially to their adjunct faculty population (Cummins et al., 2021). The findings of the Cummins et al. (2021) study indicated it was valuable to provide additional support for adjunct faculty, including inclusive practices for department meetings. These results suggested that inclusive practices for adjunct faculty

positively impacted student success. Sam (2021) conducted a qualitative case study exploring how the administration and faculty at West Hilltop Community College can improve the working conditions of adjunct faculty. Several themes emerged from this exploration, including the importance of feelings of belonging for adjunct faculty (Sam, 2021). The qualitative case study noted adjunct faculty who felt connected to their department were more motivated to contribute to their institution (Sam, 2021).

Further evidence suggested that if faculty members feel included, they are more likely to be engaged, thus impacting student success. Sam's (2021) case study called for more research using different methodologies to understand how adjunct faculty see themselves in their respective roles and how these experiences encourage engagement. These multidimensional, sociocultural factors complicate HEIs' abilities to fully contemplate adjunct faculty needs. Researching adjunct faculty experiences is imperative to comprehending the needs of adjunct faculty due to their significant involvement at HEIs.

Dimensions of Belonging

Belonging is complex and multidimensional and has been described as a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Baumeister & Robson, 2021; Maslow, 1943). Humans benefit from feeling connected to a group, experience, individual, or physical space (Allen et al., 2021). A person's sense of belonging contributes to a web of possibilities with physical, social, economic, mental, and behavioral outcomes (Allen et al., 2021). Researchers, including Allen et al. (2021), Baumeister and Leary (1995), Baumeister and Robson (2021), and Maslow (1943) have discussed various viewpoints, definitions, and impacts of belonging. However, there are a few commonalities regardless of discipline; belonging is a fundamental human necessity, and humans are affected by their perceptions of belonging or lack thereof.

Nestled within belonging is the concept of a sense of belonging. Belonging refers to a state of being a member of a particular group. In a general sense, the feeling of being valued, included, and accepted (Crawford et al., 2024). A sense of belonging is one's feelings or emotional experiences that emerge as a result of a specific time or an interaction in a group (Pardede & Kovač, 2023). Unsurprisingly, similarly to belonging, a sense of belonging has many definitions used in transdisciplinary literature. The conceptual framework of Allen et al. (2021) complements Hagerty & Patusky's (1995) working definition of a sense of belonging. Hagerty & Patusky (1995) explained a sense of belonging as one's personal experiences of involvement in a system, that person's ability to feel integral to the system, valued, needed, and accepted (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995; Mahar, 2013). Common threads are intertwined in the Allen et al. (2021) framework and Hagerty's (1995) development of a sense of belonging. Researchers such as Allen et al. (2021), Hagerty & Patusky (1995), and Mahar (2013) discussed concepts developed over decades of research related to a personal subjective experience with a group or space, including dynamic feelings contributing to one's psychological and social value.

A sense of belonging can fluctuate during stress or transition and is influenced by interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects (Peacock et al., 2020). A sense of belonging has psychological and social dimensions that affect an individual's experiences (Peacock et al., 2020). The mental element is rooted in feeling valued, accepted, respected, or needed, whereas the social component is tied to group, institution, and community (Peacock et al., 2020). Community, relatedness, connectedness, and relationships are all commonalities within the definitions of a sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2021; Mahar et al., 2013; Peacock et al., 2020). Belonging and a sense of belonging are complex, multidimensional, and a fundamental human need worthy of value in all spaces where humans interact. With this consideration alongside the

move to online learning platforms, exploring the time and space of belonging is essential, given that technological advancements have created an opportunity to gain deeper insights into how belonging occurs in the virtual environment.

Time and Space of Belonging

The ever-evolving landscape of technological advancements and the implementation of these advancements calls for a deepening of understanding of how belonging can exist between time and space. A revolutionary idea is Massey's (2005) concept of belonging, which revealed the notion of community as an unfixed state (Gravett & Ajjawi, 2022). Instead, space is fluid with a multiplicity of experiences (Gravett & Ajjawi, 2022). Gravett & Ajjawi pulled from Massey's (2005) innovative perspective and applied this idea to multiple versions of belonging that are dynamic, interweaving, experienced relationally, and having multiple meanings (Gravett & Ajjawi, 2022). Reflecting upon the boundaries of belonging being unfixed, these endless boundaries accentuate the idea of belonging in the digital age of HEIs. With this consideration coupled with the move to online learning platforms, exploring time and space of belonging was deemed essential (Wheele et al., 2023). Contemplating the boundaries of belonging not being fixed, these endless boundaries accentuate the need to understand belonging in the digital age of HEIs, not just the physical, traditional campus concepts of belonging.

Connectedness and Community Relationship with Belonging

Conceptually, connectedness is intertwined with feelings of belonging and one's sense of belonging to an individual or group (Wheele et al., 2023). Connectedness is a powerful need humans seek to experience (Townsend & McWhirter, 2005). Individuals experience connectedness within various community settings. Similar to belonging, humans desire to connect with others and feel like a part of a community (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Trespacios

et al., 2021). Trespalacios et al. (2021) completed a literature review to understand the extent, range, and nature of research on connectedness and community in online higher education. The literature review incorporated 66 studies released between 2001 and 2018. These studies revealed a deficiency in prior research and proposed further exploration into the potential roles of faculty, staff, and students in nurturing community and connection within online educational settings (Trespalacios et al., 2021). Consequently, it is necessary to investigate a sense of belonging among adjunct faculty engaged in remote teaching and to analyze how their suggestions could enhance connection and community dynamics.

Community and connectedness have been of interest to researchers for decades and play an important role in HEIs (Trespalacios et al., 2021). Wheele et al. (2023) conducted a narrative literature review to develop a framework for social connectedness grounded in socializing, social support, and a sense of belonging. The findings pointed to the negative impact on learning for students due to a lack of social connection in the virtual learning environment (Wheele et al., 2023). Once more, this emphasized the significant role connections and relationships play in fostering successful outcomes within learning environments. Connectedness is fundamentally subjective and is related to one's feelings of closeness to an individual or group (Ferencz, 2017; Wheele et al., 2023). Communities exist in varying environments, which change over time. Similarly, a connection may occur in flux when a person is part of a community (Wheele et al., 2023). Opportunities to connect with a community may be challenging in an online space. The motivation, competency, opportunity, and perceptions of connecting are of valuable interest concerning the adjunct faculty experience of belonging.

Adjunct Faculty Belonging in Higher Education Institutions

In the online education environment, there is a natural physical divide in human interaction (Cottom et al., 2018). In addition to a natural divide, teaching in online higher education can limit adjunct faculty's ability to feel connected to their campus, colleagues, and students, contributing to the lack of a sense of belonging (Buch et al., 2023; Cottom et al., 2018). Batiste et al. (2023) noted that adjunct faculty who teach remotely tend to experience a higher chance of diminished in-person activities, which leads to feelings of disconnection. The foundation of the study by Batiste et al. (2023) explored teamwork experiences and interpersonal constraints and predictors of attitudes and perceptions of part-time faculty. The findings indicated that teamwork was a strong predictor of a sense of belonging (Batiste et al., 2023). Moreover, lack of contact or connection with co-workers played a significant role in perceptions and attitudes (Batiste et al., 2023). Recommendations were provided to make team-based approaches among all faculty to bolster a sense of belonging (Batiste et al., 2023). However, one of the limitations of the study was the possibility of results not including the full impact of negative experiences of part-time faculty because there was only a population of 36% part-time faculty response rate; the rest of the participants were full-time faculty (Batiste et al., 2023). As a result, Batiste et al. (2023) recommended conducting interviews with part-time faculty members to gain a richer and deeper understanding of the part-time faculty members and their perceived sense of belonging at HEIs.

Another contributing factor to a lack of belonging is the opportunity to interact with others in a physical space. Even when an HEI has a physical campus, adjunct faculty who teach remotely do not generally have a designated office space on campus, furthering the divide between faculty members and employers (Batiste et al., 2023). In addition to a lack of

opportunity to interact in physical spaces, adjunct faculty members often receive a lack of recognition (Batiste et al., 2023). Further research is needed to address and improve the experiences of adjunct faculty in HEIs, focusing on issues such as lack of acknowledgment, deficit of value, exclusion from institutional decisions, insufficient interaction with colleagues, and absence of belonging (Batiste et al., 2023; Butters & Gann, 2022; Danaei, 2019; Dolan 2011). Exploring belonging may help improve feeling valued, and a stronger sense of community and connectedness online.

A healthy sense of belonging has been linked to occupational success, academic achievement, and better mental and physical health (Allen et al., 2021). Allen et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of 70 studies and concluded that the health risk associated with social isolation is twice as harmful as obesity, with additional adverse effects including depression, reduced immunity, poor sleep, rapid cognitive decline, and other detrimental health effects. Research shows that a healthy sense of belonging has multiple benefits for overall health (Allen et al., 2018; Allen et al., 2021; Hagerty et al., 1992), and a lack of belonging has many adverse outcomes (Allen et al., 2021; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). The significance of adjunct faculty's sense of belonging at HEIs should concern more than individual faculty members.

Retention and Leadership

Human resources and leadership at HEIs have a vested interest in attracting and retaining high-quality faculty members. Sadagheyani et al. (2022) conducted a meta-analysis screening 275 articles on retention between 2000 and 2021 to investigate factors affecting the retention of faculty at HEIs. The researchers found some factors affecting retention included organizational culture, peer support, leadership support, welfare and health conditions, college reputation, and workload (Sadagheyani et al., 2022). Within the 61 case studies examined, issues of adverse

workplace environments that led to faculty leaving HEIs included a lack of a sense of belonging (Sadagheyani et al., 2022). Batiste et al. (2023) conducted a quantitative study attempting to understand the predictors of interpersonal constraints or attitudes of full and part-time faculty. Key findings suggested part-time faculty who have negative experiences with their leadership tend to leave their HEIs in higher frequencies (Batiste et al., 2023). In contrast, part-time faculty who feel supported by their colleagues and their leadership tend to experience less dissatisfaction and increased positive retention (Batiste et al., 2023). Jung et al. (2021) and Reed (2021) explained that employee turnover is a problem for all businesses, and turnover costs significantly impact an organization.

Leaders and human resource departments at HEI aspire to create environments of inclusion to retain quality employees and foster an environment that students and employees want to be a part of (Canlas et al., 2022). Belonging is a key concept of inclusion (Byrd, 2022; Canlas et al., 2022). Casting the net of inclusion in the remote space may take even more effort for leadership and HR (Byrd, 2022). Higher education institutions are responsible for nurturing their remote working conditions with a sense of community and belonging (Byrd, 2022). Leaders and HR at HEIs can create conditions that support their remote adjunct faculty in the growing demand for online courses (Batiste et al., 2023). Batiste et al. (2023) posited that administrators should encourage teamwork in the virtual space that helps faculty feel valued and connected to the institution. The evolution of remote working conditions provides education leaders the opportunity to create programs or strategies aimed at fostering meaningful interactions among colleagues, developing interpersonal closeness opportunities that produce rich, fulfilling feelings of belonging, in turn impacting the student experience positively (Batiste et al., 2023; Byrd,

2022; Canlas et al., 2022). Therefore, it behooves leaders and HR at HEI to understand belonging and how to foster such perceptions of belonging in remote working conditions.

Another important reason leadership and HR of HEIs need to explore belonging for their adjunct faculty is their employees' mental health and well-being. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, it is well-known that mental health and well-being are prominent institutional needs and areas for development (Cordaro et al., 2023). Schmiedehaus et al. (2023) indicated that faculty who have feelings of anxiety, isolation, and depression are more likely to quit the profession. Adverse mental health and well-being issues have been found to impair faculty members' ability to be effective researchers and impact student achievement (Cordaro et al., 2023; Klusmann, 2016). The adverse effects of mental health, well-being, and feelings of a lack of belonging for faculty compounded by the potential impact on the student experience indicate a call for leadership at HEIs and human resources departments to focus on addressing the needs of the faculty at their institutions.

Branches of Belonging Research

Other studies do not specifically address faculty belonging; instead, they focus on topics like job satisfaction, which allude to institutional support or value experienced by faculty. Intrinsic and extrinsic factors contribute to job satisfaction. The extrinsic factors (hygiene) include pay, security, working conditions, and benefits (Nelson et al., 2020). Intrinsic factors (motivation) include recognition, feeling valued, and ability to grow at an institution (Nelson et al., 2020). Marasi et al. (2022) conducted a job satisfaction survey of 36 faculty teaching at an HEI in an online capacity, 75% of whom taught full-time online. The results of the Likert-type scale study indicated that faculty who teach online are satisfied with teaching online (Marasi et al., 2022). Although this study showed satisfaction with teaching online, it did not explore how

perceptions of belonging affected the faculty's experience at the HEI (Marasi et al., 2022). The study was grounded in Herzberg's (1968) theoretical framework centered on motivators and hygiene (Marasi et al., 2022). Of the 36 faculty members, only seven were adjunct faculty (Marasi et al., 2022). The Marasi et al. (2022) study focused on job satisfaction grounded in motivation and hygiene. Research conducted by Batiste et al. (2023) found that job dissatisfaction was increased by isolation and lack of opportunities. One could argue that isolation and lack of opportunities are directly related to motivation and hygiene, all essential components of belonging.

Similarities: Student and Faculty Belonging in Online Courses

Literature pertaining to faculty belonging in the online environment is sparse; studies on student experiences with belonging while participating in online education can shed light on some of the potential opportunities and challenges for adjunct faculty. Bull et al. (2024), Prodgers et al. (2022), and Reyes et al. (2023) pointed out the complications of the effects of student belongingness at HEIs. All three studies pointed to the complications of creating belongingness in virtual space yet validated the importance of student belonging in online education (Bull et al., 2024; Prodgers et al., 2022; Reyes et al., 2023). Reyes et al. (2023) noted that, historically, a sense of belonging occurred in a physical space at educational institutions. The researchers posited that universities have an opportunity to create a sense of membership and belonging in virtual spaces (Reyes et al., 2023). Furthermore, Reyes et al. (2023) suggested that when HEIs use integrative platforms, it can contribute to reinforcing feelings of belonging and membership. In synthesizing student online belonging, similar connections to adjunct faculty's experiences of belonging in virtual environment literature may emerge.

In contrast to using integrative platforms to create conditions of belonging, some research has noted students do not feel included or valued if they never meet the people in their learning community (Prodgers et al., 2022). Students' responses in the Prodgers et al. (2022) qualitative study indicated feelings of isolation stemming from the lack of physical proximity. Isolation resulted from a lack of belonging and connection in the virtual platform (Prodgers et al., 2022). Similarly, studies exploring faculty and belonging, like Buch et al. (2023), highlighted that retention and feelings of belonging are inextricably tied to the learning environment (Prodgers et al., 2022). Prodgers et al. (2022) explored student connection in virtual space. The findings suggested that providing students with opportunities to see each other virtually regularly benefited the learner (Prodgers et al., 2022). Prodgers et al. (2022) indicated that formal and informal get-togethers helped improve the student experience. Learning communities and interaction opportunities are beneficial online strategies (Allen et al., 2021; Buch et al., 2023; Prodgers et al., 2022). Therefore, it could be recommended that perhaps a deeper understanding of what kind of suggestions adjunct faculty who teach remotely may have for these virtual communities to enhance feelings of belonging.

Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) emerged as a tool for enhancing an adjunct faculty's sense of belonging in online environments. Buch et al. (2023) demonstrated that FLCs in online environments positively impacted adjunct faculty by fostering networking, collaboration, and skill development, ultimately enhancing their sense of belonging within HEIs. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in Buch et al. (2023) exploration of FLCs. The results revealed that adjunct faculty appreciate the opportunity to network, collaborate, and learn skills from each other, which increases the adjunct's feeling of community or belonging to their HEI (Buch et al., 2023). Adjunct faculty who participated in the FLC stated

gaining a sense of belonging, developing valued relationships, and decreasing feelings of isolation (Buch et al., 2023). Similarly to Producers et al. (2022), the Buch et al. (2023) findings showed that when faculty are allowed to engage with other faculty in online communities, the results were improved pedagogical benefits, reduced isolation, and influential connections through peer learning (Buch et al., 2023). Allen et al. (2021) argued that incorporating opportunities to belong highlights the positive outcomes of providing options to interact with one another in a virtual space. Drawing from the insights of these studies, a deeper understanding of the experiences of adjunct faculty who teach remotely at HEIs is warranted. Serious consideration of these recommendations, which were aimed at enhancing a sense of belonging within an HEI, was also deemed essential.

Furthermore, besides benefiting adjunct faculty, these outcomes directly impacted the students whom adjunct faculty instructed at HEIs (Buch et al., 2023). Bull et al. (2024) explored if students' performance was positively affected when belongingness strategies were implemented in online higher education environments. The researchers specifically looked at a lack of belonging impacting the student's ability to succeed academically (Bull et al., 2024). The quantitative study examined student performance metrics for six months in 2021 before implementing belongingness strategies and then again for six months in 2022 after implementing the strategy (Bull et al., 2024). To promote belonging the quantitative study explored five intertwining concepts: faculty empathy, student connection, sense of community, faculty/student rapport, and student connection (Bull et al., 2024). The results indicated positive effects on student academic achievement after implementing belongingness strategies (Bull et al., 2024). Furthermore, the research also confirmed a positive correlation between belongingness strategies and student retention, completion rate, and course persistence (Bull et al., 2024). The findings of

Bull et al. (2024) research corroborate earlier research conducted by Sotardi (2022) and Wilton et al. (2019), which underscored the correlation between belonging and enhanced student performance. It is recommended that similar strategies could improve the experiences of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely.

These studies explored key concepts of integrating platforms, isolation leading to a lack of student retention, and implementing belongingness strategies in the online environment (Bull et al., 2024; Producers et al., 2022; Reyes et al., 2023). Findings confirmed that instructors and students value belonging (Buch et al., 2023; Bull et al., 2024; Dolan, 2011; Producers et al., 2022; Reyes et al., 2023). The lack of belonging has potential adverse effects on stakeholders. The quantitative research of Bull et al. (2024) showed a clear correlation between online belongingness strategies and improved academic achievement. However, there is a gap in the literature exploring adjunct faculty perceptions and belongingness strategies who teach remotely.

Assessing Belonging

Belonging has been studied for decades in multiple disciplines, which has complicated understanding and agreements regarding the measurements or assessment of belonging because there is no gold standard (Allen et al., 2021; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). While there is no benchmark to agree upon to measure belonging or lack thereof, several current tools are available. *The Walton's Measure* or *UCLA Loneliness Scale* are measures used to assess trait-like or state-like belonging (Allen et al., 2021; Gründahl et al., 2022; Russell, 1996). Trait belonging refers to a more stable sense of belonging; in contrast, state belonging refers to a temporary feeling of belonging based on a thought or feeling (Allen et al., 2021). *The UCLA Loneliness Scale* is more widely used to assess a sense of belonging through a trait-like evaluation of a stable core psychological need (Allen et al., 2021; Gründahl et al., 2022). For example, if an

adjunct faculty member is motivated to belong at their HEI, has the skills and capacity to belong at their HEI, has opportunities to belong, and perceives support from others at their HEI, they are more likely to experience trait belongingness that is stable and lasting. Other instruments, such as *Walton's Measure of Belonging*, tend to assess a person's perceptions at a specific time state of belonging (Allen et al., 2021). The Walton measurement of belonging may assess perceptions of belonging in a snapshot of time. For example, an adjunct faculty member might attend a professional development event and then be asked to reflect on their perceptions of belonging because of the professional development opportunity. This assessment would focus on the adjunct faculty's state-like perceptions of belonging.

Accommodating the different kinds of belonging, one referencing a core psychological need and the other situation-specific, only deepens the complexity of understanding perceptions of belonging (Allen et al., 2021). Some tools measure a sense of belonging by considering the perceptions of belonging, while others focus on opportunities to interact with others (Allen et al., 2021; Mahar et al., 2014). Furthermore, additional measures of belonging include motivation or ability to belong (Allen et al., 2021). There are several tools a researcher can use to measure or assess belonging. However, more qualitative research is needed to better understand the perceptions of adjunct faculty members who teach remotely.

Four Components to Explore the Experiences of Belonging

After analyzing the complicated nature of belonging, the various and inconsistent terminology, and measures of belonging, Allen et al. (2021) developed an integrative framework to measure belonging and inform strategies to improve belonging. Four components arise from the various theoretical and empirical perspectives, including competencies, opportunities, motivations, and perceptions of belonging (Allen et al., 2021). An explanation of the four

components is below. Furthermore, there is a connection to previous research and responds to calls for deeper understanding of how these components of the conceptual framework support the problem, purpose, and research questions.

Considerations of Competencies

While a lack of belonging exists as a problem for adjunct faculty, more research is needed to understand whether adjunct faculty possess the ability to belong (Allen et al., 2021; Batiste et al., 2023; Blankenship, 2022; Cottom et al., 2018; Trespalacios et al., 2021).

Competencies are skills, abilities, and behaviors that contribute to a person's performance (The National Institutes of Health, 2024). Competencies may be experienced or performed in variance depending on intrinsic or extrinsic factors. For example, communication skills, self-awareness, self-management, cultural competency, planning, teamwork, teaching, and learning competencies (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), 2024; Mallillin & Mallillin, 2019). Additionally, there are competencies that aid in one being able to experience a sense of belonging.

Conversely, an adjunct faculty member may not possess the competencies to belong effectively in a remote environment. An individual's difficulty empathizing with others may stem from their family history or background, potentially creating a barrier to experiencing connection. Allen et al. (2021) posited that a person may not have the competencies to treat people respectfully, align with cultural values, relate to others, and show behavior consistent with group norms.

If an adjunct faculty member has the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors to belong and is provided with the right strategies, that could help increase one's sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2021; The National Institutes of Health, 2024). Guraya & Chen (2019) posited that faculty

vitality is the main ingredient in enhancing faculty competencies. Faculty development programs grounded in connection, collaboration, support, development of knowledge, and professional skills help foster faculty growth and improve the educational environment (Guraya & Chen, 2019). By understanding one's competencies more deeply, it could be argued an individual or an organization could identify gaps and address the needs of adjunct faculty to support, develop, or train to develop competencies needed for effective online teaching and fostering a sense of belonging.

Many strategies can assist in building adult competencies. Training or professional development programs focused on building skills in emotional intelligence may nurture competencies. For instance, opportunities for adjunct faculty to focus on professional development by exploring empathy, self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness may help strengthen, develop, or reawaken competencies that support components of belonging (CASEL, 2024). Research has examined the competencies of an online instructor (Dennen & Jones, 2022; Martin et al., 2021; Parker, 2014). However, there is a gap in the literature for competencies needed by adjunct faculty who teach online. By identifying the skills and competencies required for belonging online, leadership at HEIs can provide targeted support and training to adjunct faculty who teach remotely.

Considerations for Opportunities

The remote environment already presents challenges to connecting (Cottom et al., 2018; Fernandez-Batanero et al., 2022). Sam (2021) noted that adjunct faculty members feel ignored and forgotten by their colleagues and administration. The option to connect and increase a sense of belonging is ineffective if there is no time, space, or opportunity to connect (Allen et al., 2021). Bull et al. (2024) and Reyes et al. (2023) posited that students benefit from belongingness

strategies and opportunities to belong in the virtual environment. Adjunct faculty who often experience disconnection and isolation from their HEIs in the virtual environment could benefit from opportunities to interact with administration or colleagues (Batiste et al., 2023; Blankinship, 2021). Allen et al. (2021) posited that communities or organizations can employ inclusive belonging practices to help improve experiences of belonging.

Being given the opportunity to belong could occur in many ways: mentor programs, research cohorts, collaboration with full-time faculty or leadership, social virtual hours, etc. (Buch et al., 2023; Cottom et al., 2018; Culver et al., 2020). Packer (2019) explored a sense of connection for adjunct faculty by assimilating adjuncts to their academic community at their institution. Being given the opportunity to connect with their colleagues helped cultivate the adjunct faculty's sense of belonging (Packer, 2019). Packer (2019) contended that when adjunct faculty are provided with opportunities to cultivate a sense of belonging and enhance institutional competencies, the adjunct faculty become more formidable assets in bolstering the reputation of HEIs worldwide. Perhaps being given the opportunity to have encounters with colleagues or leadership, the opportunity to collaborate with leadership or full-time faculty, or participate in mentor/research cohorts could lead to cultivating a stronger sense of belonging (Buch et al., 2023; Cottom et al., 2018; Culver et al., 2020; Sam 2021). These suggested opportunities to belong may improve the working conditions and, ultimately, the sense of belonging experienced by adjunct faculty.

Considerations for Motivation

A person may have the skills and ability to belong, the opportunity to belong, but may not be motivated to belong because of previous negative experiences (Allen et al., 2021). Motivation to belong is inspired by one's desire to connect, be accepted, and seek social interaction (Allen et

al., 2021). Similarly to opportunity and competencies, motivations to belong may vary. The variance in motivation may be based on intrapersonal, personality type, and psychological characteristics (Allen et al., 2021). Other considerations for motivation to belong may reflect how motivated one is to belong in diverse sociocultural environments (Allen et al., 2021). Motivation is a foundational catalyst for a successful organization (Vo et al., 2022). Practical social conditions that provide positive interactions may increase the motivation to belong (Vo et al., 2022). Although people may have experiences that adversely affect their motivation, individuals may also have positive experiences that increase their motivation. How individuals feel treated may influence their motivation to belong, ability to provide quality instruction, and willingness to engage in an online community. Sam (2021) explored how the feeling of belonging may empower faculty to act. Sam's (2021) research showed that if adjunct faculty members feel a lack of belonging, motivation to act or advocate for themselves may decrease.

Another potential motivational factor for adjunct faculty is feeling seen at the institution. Extrinsic motivational factors, like recognition from colleagues, students, or higher educational administration, may encourage an adjunct faculty's sense of belonging (Byrd, 2022). Recognition may enhance adjunct faculty's motivation to belong (Byrd, 2022; Dolan, 2011; Sam, 2021). Therefore, the context of individual differences in motivation is an important component to consider in the Allen et al. (2021) integrative framework. Exploring the motivating factors for adjunct faculty who teach remotely may provide insight into strategies that cultivate belonging.

Considerations for Perceptions

The last component of the Allen et al. (2021) framework is perceptions of belonging. Baumeister & Leary (1995) suggested that most humans consciously or subconsciously evaluate

whether they fit in or belong with those around them. Perceptions of belonging are a person's subjective feelings concerning their experiences of belonging (Allen et al., 2021). Previous experiences may affect an adjunct faculty's perceptions of belonging. Furthermore, adjunct faculty may seek or not seek to belong based on their competencies, opportunities, and motivations to belong (Allen et al., 2021). Indeed, perceptions play a significant role in shaping our interactions and connections with both people and environments in which we engage. These perceptions act as feedback mechanisms (Allen et al., 2021). Positive experiences often encourage us to seek further connections and engagement, fostering a sense of belonging and attachment.

Conversely, negative experiences may lead to feelings of detachment or avoidance (Allen et al., 2021). Rejection, isolation, and lack of value are negative experiences an individual perceives that may affect their competency, motivation, and opportunities to belong (Allen et al., 2021; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Culver et al., 2020). The perceptions of adjunct faculty who teach remotely for HEIs could provide valuable insights into areas for improvement. By addressing these factors, institutions can create a supportive and inclusive environment where adjunct faculty feel valued, connected, and empowered to contribute to student success.

Ethical Assurances

A critical piece of quality research is ensuring ethical considerations are maintained throughout the research process. I adhered to the guidance set forth in the Belmont report regarding respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). To address the ethical concerns of this research, I completed the application process through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and received approval prior to data collection (see Appendix A). The Belmont

Report consists of three ethical principles that guide the law: boundaries between practice and research, basic ethical principles, and applications (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979; US Dept of HHS, 2024). I applied these ethical considerations to safeguard both the participants and myself, to conduct a humane study that would not harm the participants (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Considerations that were addressed included ensuring informed consent, maintaining anonymity and confidentiality, respecting persons' autonomy, promoting beneficence, and upholding principles of justice.

Informed Consent, Anonymity, & Confidentiality

All quality and rigorous research must consider ethical assurances (Bloomberg, 2023; Mertler, 2019). Ethical consideration was ensured by providing participants with an informed consent form. The informed consent form was a document that clearly stated the components of the study and solicited consent from the participants (Mertler, 2019). Participating was voluntary, and participants decided whether to participate (Mertler, 2019). The risk to participants was minimal to participate in this study. Respect for persons was upheld by enabling participants to function as autonomous agents, liberated from external or ethical limitations (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). I notified and reminded participants that participation was voluntary, and participants were free to leave the study or refuse to answer any questions without consequence.

Confidentiality was another important ethical consideration. I protected the identities of the participants by cleaning and coding the data in the data analysis process. I ensured the participant's confidentiality and maintained the participant's privacy. Participants have a right to privacy, whether they have their identities hidden from the researcher, anonymity, or the

researcher protects their identity (Mertler, 2019). It was my obligation to ensure that beneficence was maintained for the participants (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979; US Dept of HHS, 2023). These ethical considerations were critical because coercion is prevented, allowing the findings to represent true beliefs and experiences of the participants. Additionally, ethical considerations were vital components because these steps ensured researchers protected people from potential harm.

Researcher positionality provides a clear outline of the researcher with the research topic, the participants, and the site (Bloomberg, 2023). To be transparent, I have served in higher education roles in training and development for almost a decade. I directly work with faculty through onboarding, program development, workshops, and other higher education initiatives. While I am not currently teaching as an adjunct faculty member, I do have previous adjunct faculty teaching experience, and I aspire to teach again upon completing my doctorate. My researcher positionality is deeply connected to the colleagues I serve, and I hope to contribute positively to the future direction of adjunct faculty experiences. Therefore, I engaged in reflexive practices to prove a rigorous qualitative descriptive study (Bloomberg, 2023). A reflexive practice I used was keeping a research journal as chronological documentation of the research process. In addition to a journal, I used an auditorial capturing system that helped me process my thoughts, questions, and assumptions throughout the study (Bloomberg, 2023). Using these reflexive techniques helped reduce bias in my research process.

Summary

Technological advancements are poised to enable HEIs to expand and accelerate their online education offerings (Garret et al., 2023). With these technological advances and other factors, such as student demand and the economic benefits of hiring adjunct faculty, more HEIs

are likely to continue hiring adjunct faculty (Garret et al., 2023). In light of this growing demand, it was essential to understand how to cultivate a supportive sense of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely. Fostering a sense of belonging benefits the adjunct faculty members and the students they engage with and contributes to the success of the HEI they serve. Furthermore, research has shown the intrinsic human need for belonging (Allen et al., 2021; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943). Higher education institutions prioritizing efforts to enhance adjunct faculty's sense of belonging stand to benefit the faculty members and the institution. Moreover, students interacting with valued, productive, and engaged instructors reap significant advantages from these initiatives.

Failure to address a lack of belonging and neglecting to explore adjunct faculty's experiences in this regard could lead to detrimental outcomes such as subpar instruction, increased turnover rates, and heightened risks of mental and physical health issues among employees (Allen et al., 2021; Batiste et al., 2023; Buch et al., 2023; O'Grady, 2021; Olson, 2021; Sam, 2021). By exploring adjunct faculty who teach remotely perceptions of belonging, recommendations stemming from a lack of belonging can offer leadership valuable strategies to enhance adjunct faculty's experiences and, consequently, the student experience. The purpose of this study is to provide recommendations to leadership that cultivate an environment where adjunct faculty who teach remotely feel valued and reduce feelings of isolation. A qualitative descriptive approach was used to explore the perceptions of belonging experienced by adjunct faculty who teach remotely at HEIs and sought to foster a stronger sense of belonging.

Furthermore, the significance of the findings of this study may reach beyond the education sector. The insights gained, and recommendations proposed could benefit other industries employing part-time workers in online capacities. Researchers could replicate the

study in their respective fields to gather qualitative or quantitative data to improve employees' sense of belonging in the remote environment. Section 2 provides a comprehensive explanation of the study's methodology, including its design, procedures for data collection, and analysis.

Section 2: Methodology and Design

The problem this study addressed was the lack of belonging adjunct faculty teaching remotely at higher education institutions experience, leading to job dissatisfaction, high attrition (Batiste et al., 2023; Buch et al., 2023; Olson, 2021), a decrease of effectiveness in the classroom (Blankinship, 2022; Wojcik, 2017), and feelings of isolation (Batiste et al., 2023; Blankinship, 2022; Rahmat, 2024). A lack of belonging contributes to myriad adverse effects, including faculty who complete tasks but do not engage students in a stimulating educational learning capacity, decreased feelings of value, and diminished self-efficacy and well-being (Batiste et al., 2023; Blankinship, 2022; Buch et al., 2023; Rahmat, 2024). Furthermore, a lack of belonging has been linked to increased risks for mental and physical health concerns (Allen et al., 2021). The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how adjunct faculty who teach remotely in higher education institutions experience belonging. By listening to the perceptions of adjunct faculty, strategies for cultivating adjunct faculty belonging were formulated. The following research questions were explored in this study.

RQ1

How do adjunct faculty who teach remotely experience belonging at their higher education institution?

RQ2

In what ways do adjunct faculty who teach remotely believe their sense of belonging could be cultivated by their higher education institution?

This section describes the research design, methodology, and methods. The population, sampling methods, and a detailed description of materials/instruments are also provided,

followed by a description of the data collection and analysis procedures. Lastly, I explain the assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and summary in this chapter.

Design and Method

The research questions focused on the experience of belonging and how adjunct faculty who teach remotely believe their sense of belonging could be cultivated by their HEI. As a result, a qualitative research methodology was selected. Qualitative research is rooted in the idea that a study aims to research a problem to provide a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Bloomberg, 2023; Creswell, 2015). A few key features of this qualitative research included crafting open-ended research questions, employing purposeful sampling, producing thick descriptions from the participants, proving trustworthiness throughout the research process, engaging in a multilayered data analysis process, and engaging in a reflexive process as a researcher (Bloomberg, 2023). Qualitative research is a methodology that assists with a deepened understanding of the social context of being human (Percy et al., 2015). I aimed to understand the social context of belonging for adjunct faculty teaching remotely for an HEI. Therefore, a qualitative approach was appropriate. In qualitative research, data can be gathered directly from participants using many research methods (Bloomberg, 2023). One key feature of qualitative research is that the researcher is a primary instrument throughout the entire research process (Bloomberg, 2023). I served as the primary instrument for the design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation, and presentation of the findings. Thus, my role as the researcher was critical to this qualitative study.

In contrast to qualitative research, quantitative research seeks to test or verify a research problem (Bloomberg, 2023). Common characteristics of quantitative research design include a large population sample that is randomly selected, a pre- and post-test, the identification of

variables, predictions, attempts to support or disconfirm a hypothesis, and controlled conditions (Bloomberg, 2023; Creswell, 2015). Bloomberg (2023) noted that quantitative data collection and analysis tend to follow rigid guidelines, use scales and ranking checklists, employ deductive design, and follow a linear analytic analysis process. I had considered using a quantitative approach; however, given my interest in understanding the experiences and recommendations to improve belonging by listening to adjunct faculty, I believed a quantitative design would not adequately capture the nuanced experiences that a qualitative design permits. Scholars agree that belonging is complex and multilayered (Allen et al., 2021; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Baumeister & Robson, 2021; Maslow, 1943). Therefore, a qualitative approach was more appropriate for understanding the experiences of adjunct faculty than a quantitative approach, because at the root of qualitative studies is the goal of understanding the experiences of a phenomenon (Bloomberg, 2023).

In this study, I provided detailed descriptions of the perceptions and experiences of belonging for adjunct faculty and provided an accurate representation of recommendations to the leaders of HEIs from the adjunct faculty who teach remotely. Descriptive studies examine a person's perspectives and experiences (Elliott & Timulak, 2005). This study was framed on several common characteristics of descriptive designs. Some of the characteristics of descriptive qualitative research included in this study were purposeful sampling and individual interviews, with semi-structured questions during the interview, and comprehensive descriptive summaries from the participants (Kim et al., 2017; Sandelowski, 2000). This descriptive qualitative study aimed to provide a rich, detailed insight into the perceptions and experiences of belonging among adjunct faculty members who teach remotely (Bloomberg, 2023). The underpinnings of descriptive designs draw from philosophical perspectives that suggest reality is context-

dependent, dynamic, and perceived differently by each individual. Consequently, reality is multiple and subjective (Doyle et al., 2020). Similarly, as the concept of belonging is subjective, multidimensional, and complex, a descriptive design will capture the experiences and perceptions of each participant in the study (Allen et al., 2021; Doyle et al., 2020). I adhered closely to the participants' explicit language in alignment with a qualitative descriptive methodology (Doyle et al., 2020). This approach ensured precise, detailed descriptions, facilitating an in-depth exploration of the problem, purpose, and research questions this study aimed to describe (Sandelowski, 2000).

Triangulation is a research technique used to assist with the credibility of a study (Bloomberg, 2023). To enhance the quality and credibility of this qualitative descriptive study, I employed triangulation by collecting data through two methods: semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires (Bloomberg, 2023). Descriptive studies focus on exploring a phenomenon's what, how, or when (Kim et al., 2017). Because my focus was on understanding the experiences and perceptions of adjunct faculty, a descriptive approach that provided accurate accounts of these experiences and perceptions aligned well with the objectives of this study. To effectively capture these experiences and perceptions, I employed semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews provided the flexibility to probe or ask participants clarifying follow-up questions (Bloomberg, 2023). Additionally, the open-ended questionnaire allowed the participants to describe their experiences and perceptions in their own words (Bloomberg, 2023). Open-ended questions enabled the participants to provide short answers, long narrations, or short lists that could uncover themes of the belonging phenomenon in this descriptive qualitative study (Weller, 2018). Open-ended and semi-structured questions complemented the flexibility inherent in a qualitative descriptive design (Kim et al., 2017; Sandelowski, 2000).

I considered exploring this problem using a case study. Typically, case studies occur in a bounded system (Bloomberg, 2023; Thomas & Myers, 2015). At one point, I considered interviewing adjunct faculty who teach remotely at just one HEI. A case study may have been an appropriate design if I had taken the route of just one institution (Thomas & Myers, 2015). However, a case study was not an appropriate route because I intended to look at the nuances of varied experiences of belonging. I also considered a narrative approach for this study, designed to understand a participant's story (Bloomberg, 2023; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). Narrative research does not seek to investigate the experiences and perceptions of a phenomenon pragmatically but instead focuses on gathering insight from storied experiences (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). While I was interested in listening to adjunct faculty's stories, retelling the stories does not align with the straight descriptions of the perceptions and experiences of belonging, which a descriptive study aims to address (Sandelowski, 2000). Researching perceptions of belonging to understand the phenomenon of a lack of belonging was critical to making recommendations to improve belonging for adjunct faculty teaching remotely at an HEI.

Lastly, I also considered using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenological studies are inspired by investigating, describing, and analyzing the meaning of an experience or phenomenon (Cudjoe, 2023; Larsen, 2023). Phenomenological research examines the meanings derived from experiences, aiming to describe and interpret how these meanings emerge and are influenced by consciousness, language, cognitive and noncognitive perceptions, and our preexisting understandings and assumptions (Given, 2008). Ultimately, I decided, given the complexity of belonging and using the guiding framework that Allen et al. (2021) provided on belonging, that the focus of this study would be grounded in understanding the varied experiences of belonging and the strategies for improving belonging instead of the essence of the

phenomenon. Therefore, I rejected the case study, narrative, and phenomenological approaches for this study. Instead, I used a descriptive qualitative approach to provide comprehensive descriptive experiences and perceptions of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely.

I followed the six-phase process for thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The six-phase process is described further in the data and analysis portion of Section 2. I played a critical role as the researcher in this qualitative descriptive study. As the researcher in this qualitative study, I journaled during the analysis process to engage in reflexive practices to assist with my biases and assumptions in the research process (Bloomberg, 2023). Lastly, I was mindful of my researcher's positionality in the research process. Researcher positionality was addressed by being transparent and self-reflective. I was aware that my experiences as an adjunct faculty, working side-by-side with faculty in higher education, and my ideas about the power of belonging may have influenced my interpretation of the data in this study.

Population and Sample

The population of this study was adjunct faculty who were teaching online for an HEI and who were connected through my social media platforms of Facebook and LinkedIn or via others who shared my recruitment post. This population was appropriate because the problem described a lack of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely at HEIs, leading to diminished self-efficacy and well-being, dissatisfaction, and increased feelings of isolation (Batiste et al., 2023; Blankenship, 2022; Buch et al., 2023; Trespalacios et al., 2021; Rahmat, 2024; Wojcik, 2017). The population was appropriate for the purpose of this study because, by hearing about the experiences of adjunct faculty, I could provide a deeper understanding of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely along with possible recommendations for educational leaders.

To select participants who aligned with the problem and purpose of the study, I used criterion sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling allows researchers to gain in-depth insights into specific phenomena, perspectives, or experiences by intentionally selecting participants or cases that can provide rich and relevant data (Bloomberg, 2023). I used social media posts to recruit participants on my personal Facebook and LinkedIn pages (see Appendix B). I have worked in education for over a decade. I have served as a public-school teacher, adjunct faculty member, and training and learning specialist who assists students, staff, and faculty at several higher education institutions. I have a broad network of adjunct faculty, administration, and staff across several universities and community colleges. I was able to use my vast network to recruit participants from my personal Facebook and LinkedIn pages to meet the sample number needed for a quality study. Criterion sampling allowed me to use a predisposed set of criteria that participants met to participate in the study (Bloomberg, 2023). In addition to criterion sampling, I utilized snowball sampling in the recruitment post asking for participants to share participation requirements with other adjunct faculty who might be interested in taking part in the study (Bloomberg, 2023). Snowball sampling contributed to a wider variety of experiences from a more expansive cast of different HEIs.

Inclusion criteria are the specific characteristics that define the population required to participate in a study (Salkind, 2010). The inclusion criteria played a vital role in the study's credibility by ensuring that the sample of participants was suitable for the research, thereby enhancing its trustworthiness (Bloomberg, 2023). The sample of participants in this qualitative descriptive study included 10 adjunct faculty members. A sample size of 10 participants was appropriate for accomplishing coding, credible interpretation, and thematic analysis of the phenomenon being explored (Bloomberg, 2023; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The sample size of 10

was consistent with reaching data saturation in qualitative designs (Bloomberg, 2023; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). To be eligible for participation in the study, adjunct faculty members had to meet specific criteria. The adjunct faculty had to have at least 2 years of experience teaching remotely at an HEI. In addition, the adjunct faculty member needed to be teaching remotely or had taught remotely within the 6 months preceding their participation. Finally, the adjunct faculty member had to be employed with an HEI based in the United States.

I ensured the sample for the study was representative of the population by asking adjunct faculty to confirm if participation requirements were met during the initial contact via email. I also verified the criteria with the adjunct faculty member in the study at the beginning of the interview before I pressed record on Zoom. Every adjunct faculty member voluntarily participated and verbally verified participation in the study by confirming they had reviewed the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C). I confirmed that the adjunct faculty member had reviewed the Informed Consent Form verbally at the beginning of the interview and reminded each participant they could drop out of the study at any time before I pressed record on Zoom. Utilizing criterion sampling coupled with the snowball sampling approach helped me gather enough qualified participants to meet the saturation needs for a qualitative study. Data saturation was met and therefore I did not need to return to the IRB to introduce new data collection methods or seek additional recruitment possibilities.

Instrumentation

In this study, I used a self-developed interview protocol (see Appendix D) and a questionnaire (see Appendix E) to gather the experiences and perceptions of adjunct faculty working remotely in higher education institutions. The interviews took place via video streaming on Zoom. The interviews on Zoom were recorded to ensure the accuracy of what the participants

said during the session. The Zoom recordings have been stored securely on my private account, which is password-protected. I also used an audio recording device as a backup to the Zoom recording. The interview process provided rich descriptions of adjunct faculty members' experiences with belonging by using open-ended questions which allowed the participants to express their thoughts extensively (Bloomberg, 2023). I developed my interview and questionnaire questions to align with the practices of using open-ended questions that qualified reviewers field tested.

The self-developed interview protocol had multiple steps, including several parts for each instrument. To develop the interview instrument for this study, I first engaged in an in-depth review of the literature on belonging (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Then, I created a protocol with four parts: (a) a script for the beginning the interview; (b) open-ended questions for the interview; (c) a scaffold approach for the order of the questions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012); and (d) a script for the end of the interview. In the first part of the protocol, I read aloud a pre-written script providing contextual information about the study and details about informed consent. The second part of the protocol included developing open-ended questions focused on the experiences of belonging. The open-ended questions in the interview allowed the participants to share their personal experiences using rich descriptions of the phenomenon (Bloomberg, 2023; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The third part of the protocol outlined the development of easy-to-answer questions at the beginning of the interview, moving towards more complex or challenging questions (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The interview ended with a final question inviting participants to add any additional information deemed important for the research topic. At the end of the Zoom interview, I asked the participant to complete the questionnaire and

reminded the participant I would email a copy of the transcript from the Zoom session within 48 hours of the interview to ensure accuracy.

The second data collection tool I used in this study was Qualtrics for the questionnaire. In the questionnaire I created a protocol with four parts: (a) a script for the beginning of the questionnaire; (b) open-ended questions for the questionnaire; (c) questions that focused on the Allen et al. (2021) conceptual framework; and (d) a script for the end of the questionnaire. In the first part of the protocol, the participant read an introduction explaining the questionnaire's purpose and telling them there are no right or wrong answers. The second part of the protocol used open-ended questions to encourage detailed responses (Bloomberg, 2023). The third part of the questionnaire protocol focused on asking the participants to describe their experiences with belonging centering on competencies, perceptions, motivations, and opportunities (Allen et al., 2021). I asked questions on how the adjunct faculty believed belonging could be cultivated at their HEI, perceptual information, what motivates them to belong, what opportunities to belong exist, and a few open-ended options for the participants to expand on their experiences (Allen et al., 2021; Bloomberg, 2023). The open-ended questions in the questionnaire allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences of belonging in a format different from vocal deliberation. The fourth part of the protocol included the script at the end of the questionnaire, which thanked the participant for their participation in the study. At the end of the interview, completion of the questionnaire, and the review of the Zoom transcript, participants received a \$20 Amazon gift card as gratitude for their participation in the study.

The final step for each instrument was to complete a field test to ensure clarity and understanding of all my interview and questionnaire questions. The field testers I selected met specific qualifications. One of the qualifications was that field testers had to be adjunct faculty

members with over 2 years of remote teaching experience and hold an advanced degree. Additionally, the field testers had to have a background in research to ensure they could accurately assess the quality of the protocols. I emailed the reviewers and sent them copies of the interview (see Appendix D) and the questionnaire (see Appendix E). The feedback from the field test was crucial in ensuring the questions were clear and logical.

One of the main aspects of qualitative research is that the researcher plays a critical role in all phases of the research process (Bloomberg, 2023). As an instrument in this study, I created the interview protocol, collected data, analyzed the data, presented the findings, and made recommendations (Bloomberg, 2023). Therefore, as the researcher in this qualitative study, my role was critical in the process. To ensure rigor, trustworthiness, and quality, I engaged in reflexive practices by maintaining a journal to capture my thoughts, assumptions, questions, and ideas about the research process (Bloomberg, 2023). The journaling process fostered a deeper reflection and enhanced the overall quality of the research (Bloomberg, 2023). By integrating these practices, materials, and instruments, I produced credible and insightful findings that contribute meaningfully to the field.

Data Collection and Analysis

Before collecting any data, I completed my Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) certification, then submitted my application to the National University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. Upon receiving approval of all my research materials (see Appendix A), I started the data collection process. To collect the data, I recruited potential participants through social media sites, including my personal Facebook and LinkedIn profiles, using purposive criteria and snowball sampling methods. After receiving the potential participant's contact information through the social media recruitment form, I reached out to

schedule a Zoom interview and emailed the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C), which outlined the eligibility criteria and what to expect during the study. Each participant took part in a one-on-one interview, which was recorded via Zoom and lasted approximately 60 minutes.

At the start of the interview, I reminded the participants that I would be sending them a copy of the transcript to engage in member checking. I let the participants know they could expect to spend about 10–15 minutes reading the Zoom interview transcript. During the interview, I used an audio recorder to capture the audio of the Zoom interview as a backup in case there were any interruptions in the Zoom application. However, the Zoom application successfully transcribed the participants' words during the interview. At the end of the interview, participants were asked to spend 20 minutes completing a questionnaire on Qualtrics. During the interview, I provided a link in the Zoom chat to access the questionnaire. Additionally, I sent the participant a copy of the link to the questionnaire via email as a backup to the link in the Zoom chat room. I requested that the participant complete the questionnaire within 48 hours.

Cleaning transcripts involves removing errors or inconsistencies to ensure that the dataset is accurate (Bloomberg, 2023). Upon receiving the transcript, I reviewed them for accuracy and cleaned the transcripts of grammatical errors and removed identifiable information and repetitive filler words like “um” and “uh” (Mertler, 2019). I removed identifying information, occasionally replaced the name of a specific institution with the generic "HEI," and assigned pseudonyms for the 10 participants, to protect their confidentiality. After I cleaned a transcript, I emailed a copy of it to the participant within 48 hours of the interview. As Bloomberg (2023) noted, making use of member checks by sending the interview transcripts to the participants contributes to the credibility of a qualitative study. I used member checking to ensure that the participants believed the transcript accurately reflected what they intended to

convey, and they were able to provide additional input at that time. One participant did reply with an update and the adjustments that were made were related to filler words such as “like” and “right.”

Bloomberg (2023) explained that the data analysis process was recursive and rigorous. Furthermore, Creswell (2015) stated, qualitative data analysis is complex and time-consuming. Confirming Bloomberg (2023) and Creswell’s (2015) descriptions of data analysis, there was a large amount of data that I needed to process carefully, rigorously, and recursively in a meaningful way. Thematic analysis is a widely used approach to analyze large amounts of qualitative data. Braun and Clarke (2006) "defined thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data" (p. 79). The Braun and Clarke six-phase process of thematic analysis provided a flexible and adaptable data analysis method. The six-phase thematic analysis consisted of familiarizing myself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a report of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This thematic analysis process was a comprehensive and accessible approach to help me understand participants' rich and complex experiences, making the method a promising approach for this descriptive qualitative study (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

I used NVivo to identify codes, develop categories, and find emerging themes derived from participants' words in the interviews and questionnaires. Bloomberg (2023) and Braun and Clarke (2006) highlighted using significant statements from the participants in the thematic analysis process. Considering the descriptive research design and goal of providing straightforward descriptions of the phenomenon, I relied on significant statements or meaning units from participants' words to illustrate their experiences. This approach helped clarify what,

how, and when the phenomenon was experienced. The six-phase process of thematic analysis used in this study is detailed below.

Braun and Clarke (2006) discussed the first phase of thematic analysis as “familiarizing yourself with your data” (p. 87). In this phase, I read and re-read the data. As I read the data carefully the second time, I kept track of interpretations and ideas, noting initial ideas. I achieved familiarization of the data by reading the interview transcripts and the questionnaire data several times. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested taking note of initial thoughts or analytical interests in the first phase. I followed this recommendation by taking notes about potential initial codes during the first and second reads of the interviews and questionnaires.

The second phase Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend is “generating the initial codes” (p. 87). To complete this step, I imported the interview and questionnaire data into the coding software NVivo. Using NVivo, I generated potential codes pulled directly from the participants’ words. Bloomberg (2023) stated that coding the data is an essential multi-step process that enables the indexing of a large amount of data from the answers provided in the interview and the questionnaire. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that it is important to work through the entire data set, systematically identifying interesting aspects, especially repeated codes. Some of the repeated codes later became categories and themes. Bloomberg (2023) suggested keeping a clear audit trail of the data analysis process contributes to the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. I engaged in reflexive practices and maintained an audit trail throughout data analysis.

Once all the data were coded in NVivo, I started the third phase outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), “searching for themes” (p. 87). In this phase, I began to sort codes based on similarities and differences, organizing the codes into categories. I used inductive analysis and in vivo coding methods to complete the data analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended

remaining flexible throughout thematic analysis. I followed this recommendation, understanding that I needed to think critically about the relationship between the codes. I used words or phrases pulled directly from the participant's voice to create categories and grouped coded data under corresponding categories with similar features. During the third phase, I began to have a sense of the significance of individual themes by noticing the frequency of codes in categories and potential emerging themes from the data set.

The fourth phase in Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis is "reviewing themes" (p. 87). During the fourth phase, I reviewed themes and refined the initial set of categories and themes. At this point in the thematic analysis, it became more apparent that some initial themes would not be a final theme because there were not enough data to support the initial theme. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend re-reading all the codes within subthemes to consider whether the patterns are coherent and clear. When I completed this process, I discarded some codes and grouped others into more appropriate categories. Additionally, some new categories were created during this phase based on the codes. As a result, I engaged in a recursive process to ascertain whether the data set codes supported the theme and whether anything was missed in the earlier coding stages. The fifth phase of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) is "defining and naming themes" (p. 87). In the fifth phase, I defined the themes by going back to the data sets and organizing themes into a coherent description of the theme.

Finally, the sixth phase of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) is "producing the report" (p. 87). Section 3 presents the full report of the data and themes through an analytical narrative. The analytic narrative outlined in Section 3 highlights more than just the description of the data. I present why the themes demonstrate relevance to the problem, purpose, and research questions this study aimed to explore.

Triangulation is a strategy used in research to strengthen a study (Bloomberg, 2023). I collected data from multiple sources, using 10 participants, with different data collection methods, including an interview and questionnaire, and this step helped demonstrate triangulation in this descriptive qualitative study. As Bloomberg (2023) and Patton (2014) noted, using a strategy of collecting data from multiple participants and using two data collection methods assists in uncovering contradictions, confirming findings, providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, and demonstrating triangulation. I used data triangulation coupled with methodological triangulation strategies. Using multiple methods in this descriptive qualitative study mitigated the weakness of using only one method in a study. Therefore, using methodological triangulation with data triangulation assisted with illuminating the different experiences and perspectives of the problem, purpose, and research questions this descriptive qualitative study aimed to address.

Assumptions

Assumptions are statements or uncorroborated facts that a researcher believes to be true (Bloomberg, 2023). One assumption was that the participants provided me with accurate accounts of their experiences of belonging. Another assumption was that the participants intended to answer honestly and could articulate their experiences both verbally and in writing. In addition to the responses from participants, it was assumed that the questionnaire and interview protocol used as instruments elicited reliable responses. After participants reviewed the informed consent form, it was further assumed the participants chose to participate freely in the study.

Limitations

Limitations are aspects that constrain or restrict the outcome of a study (Bloomberg, 2023). Bloomberg (2023) stated that limitations may be weaknesses or flaws that may threaten the trustworthiness of a study. A limitation of this study was its small sample size of participants, which is typical for descriptive research. The population size was supported by Hennink and Kaiser's (2022) evaluation of data saturation in qualitative studies. However, since feelings of belonging are inherently subjective, another potential limitation was that while the sample size sufficed to address the research questions, it might not have captured the full spectrum of perspectives on belonging. Another limitation of this study was the participant population. Since I recruited participants through my personal Facebook and LinkedIn pages, the data I collected may be limited to adjunct faculty from specific institutions. Consequently, their experiences may not fully represent those of adjuncts across all institutions.

Delimitations

Delimitations are decisions made regarding the parameters and conditions of the study (Bloomberg, 2023). I made choices about the study's design, the population to interview, and the data collection and analysis methods. There were several delimitations for this study. The study population did not include full-time faculty, students, staff, or administration at an HEI. In addition to the population, I selected participants using specific criteria. I did not include the experiences of adjunct faculty who may have taught for many years; faculty who had not taught within the last 6 months preceding the interview were excluded from participation. Additionally, faculty who did not teach at a university in the United States were excluded from the study.

Another delimitation of this study was using the conceptual framework from Allen et al. (2021) to guide my interview protocol and questionnaire questions. The questions were inspired

by competencies, opportunities, perceptions, and motivations to belong (Allen et al., 2021). Using this framework was a choice because each adjunct faculty's experiences are unique. To better understand these experiences, this study used these components to guide the questions, providing a deeper and more holistic insight into the experiences of belonging.

Summary

In Section 2, I explained why a qualitative approach was selected for this research methodology. I provided an overview of why a descriptive design has been chosen to understand the experiences of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely. I also discussed why other methods and designs were unsuitable for this study. I described the sample, including the target population and the sampling method. Additionally, I outlined the materials and instruments planned for exploring the problem and purpose of the study; summarized the data collection and analysis methods; and detailed the study's assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. In Section 3, I will present the findings, implications, recommendations, and conclusion.

Section 3: Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

The problem this study addressed was the lack of belonging adjunct faculty teaching remotely at higher education institutions experience, leading to job dissatisfaction, high attrition, (Batiste et al., 2023; Buch et al., 2023; Olson, 2021), a decrease of effectiveness in the classroom, (Blankinship, 2022; Wojcik, 2017), and feelings of isolation (Batiste et al., 2023; Blankinship, 2022; Rahmat, 2024). The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how adjunct faculty who teach remotely in higher education institutions experience belonging. By listening to the perceptions of adjunct faculty, strategies for cultivating adjunct faculty belonging were recommended. A lack of belonging contributes to myriad adverse effects, including faculty who complete tasks but do not engage students in a stimulating educational learning capacity, decreased feelings of value, and diminished self-efficacy and well-being (Batiste et al., 2023; Blankinship, 2022; Buch et al., 2023; Rahmat, 2024). A descriptive qualitative approach was used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the varied experiences and perceptions of belonging among adjunct faculty who teach remotely. This approach complements the framework on belonging proposed by Allen et al. (2021) that navigated the complexity of understanding belonging through competencies, perceptions, motivations, and opportunities.

Limitations for this study included a small sample size and participant recruitment through my personal Facebook and LinkedIn pages. Given the complex and subjective nature of belonging, the small sample offered a limited view into the experiences of remote adjunct faculty. Despite the small sample size, the data gathered provided a clear sense of the key factors related to belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely at HEIs. Saturation was met in this study when no new codes, categories, or themes emerged, indicating that the data collected was

sufficiently rich and exhaustive for understanding the participants' experiences (Hennick & Kaiser, 2022). The limitation of a small sample size was mitigated by using in-depth, open-ended questions and reflexive practice throughout the research process (Bloomberg, 2023).

In addition, to the small sample size, recruiting through my personal social media pages could have resulted in a sample bias toward faculty within my professional network, potentially limiting the diversity of institutional contexts represented. To mitigate these limitations, I employed several strategies. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions facilitated rich, detailed responses which were grounded directly in participants' lived experiences, reinforcing the authenticity of their perspectives. Transparency in acknowledging this limitation also helped mitigate the limitation by demonstrating honesty and reflexivity, allowing other researchers to interpret the findings within contextual boundaries.

Section 3 includes a review of the findings of the data collection and analysis. The emerging themes from the analysis were provided using direct quotes from the participants' experiences. Following the findings of the study, an evaluation of the outcomes is presented. Additionally, implications and recommendations for practice are provided, along with recommendations for future research. Finally, the conclusions of this descriptive qualitative study are discussed.

Findings

The participants for this study included 10 adjunct faculty with remote teaching assignments at an HEI located in the United States. Each participant had at least 2 calendar years of teaching experience. All the participants were currently teaching online at the time of the interview. The intention of ensuring that the adjunct faculty member had taught within the six months preceding the interview was that their experiences were recent. This descriptive

qualitative study explored belonging centered on two research questions through a self-developed interview protocol and a questionnaire. For clarity, the questions for the interview and questionnaire were field-tested. To maintain confidentiality, each participant was assigned a unique data storage code for their interview and questionnaire, and a pseudonym was assigned for the purposes of the narration in Section 3.

In the Zoom interviews, participants provided demographic information, including the number of years teaching remotely, the current type of HEI where adjunct faculty are teaching, and the number of HEIs they are currently affiliated with. Each participant was actively teaching as an adjunct faculty member at the time of the interview. Every participant taught for at least four years or more, with some participants teaching at several HEIs. Several types of HEIs were represented in the sample of this study. Table 1 shows the participant demographic information from this study.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Years of teaching remote	Types of HEIs identified by participant	Currently teaching at # of HEIs
Liam	5	Private nonprofit, public research university	3
Tom	7	Public university, private religious college	3
Charlie	4	Religious liberal arts university	2
Beth	7	Private nonprofit	1
Ruby	12	Private nonprofit	1
Noah	5	Private religious university	4
Leo	5	Private religious university, private nonprofit, private research university	3
Mila	7	Public community college	2
Sofia	4	Public community college	1
Ethan	12	Private nonprofit	1
Total participants: 10	Total years of remote teaching: 68 years	Total distinct HEI types identified: 7	Total HEIs currently taught at: 21

Note. Demographic information from the participants.

Criterion and snowball sampling yielded 10 participants in this study. Eight participants were recruited through the LinkedIn and Facebook recruitment form (see Appendix B). At the end of the interview, participants were informed that they could provide the researcher's recruitment form (see Appendix B) to other potential people who may have wanted to participate in the study. This snowball sampling method yielded two participants who met the criteria and agreed to participate in the study. All ten participants completed the Zoom interview, Qualtrics questionnaire, and member checking of the interview transcript.

To establish trustworthiness, I addressed four components to ensure that a rigorous study had been conducted as outlined by Bloomberg (2023): credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. The trustworthiness of a study can provide a consistent reference point to address the limitations of a study (Bloomberg, 2023). I employed several strategies throughout the research process to demonstrate trustworthiness. As recommended by Bloomberg (2023), the strategies I used included conducting member checks, journaling, keeping track of my hunches, reading additional literature to make comparisons to the data collected, maintaining meticulous documentation, and triangulating data sources to enhance the reliability of findings.

The credibility of a study refers to the researcher's ability to accurately reflect the participants' perceptions (Bloomberg, 2023). Ensuring accurate representation of the participants' perceptions is essential to demonstrate the credibility of a study (Bloomberg, 2023). As Bloomberg (2023) recommends, member checks are a way to ensure the accuracy of each participant's experience. Therefore, I chose to have the participants engage in member checking of the interview transcripts, assisting with the credibility of this study. To further strengthen the credibility of this study, I engaged in self-reflection of my biases through journaling and reported my biases in this study, which allowed me to monitor my subjective perspectives throughout the

research process. Thick descriptions were used to support the themes from the interview and questionnaire. Lastly, to assist with credibility I used multiple data sets and rigorously compared the data from the questionnaire with the data from the interviews to find similarities and differences. Triangulation was demonstrated by using one set of data from the questionnaire and one set of data from the interview to triangulate. Additionally, triangulation was also achieved by interviewing multiple participants.

Confirmability is established in a study by demonstrating that the findings and interpretations have been derived from the data (Bloomberg, 2023). To address confirmability, I journaled and memoed throughout data collection and analysis. Journaling allowed me to engage in reflexive practices, keeping track of my biases and hunches throughout the research process. When I was completing the analysis process, I memoed what steps I was taking to aid with the confirmability of the study. One of my acknowledged biases is the belief that adjunct faculty generally care about belonging. However, during the analysis, the findings revealed a more nuanced perspective. I ensured that the participants' experiences were fully and transparently reflected in the findings. The codes and themes were derived directly from the participants' exact words. The findings were further validated through detailed descriptions and the consistency of similar experiences reported by the majority of participants. As recommended by Bloomberg (2023), I ensured that the data could be traced back to original quotes in the interview and questionnaire transcripts.

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of this study can be applied or generalized to other settings beyond this specific study (Bloomberg, 2023). Although transferability cannot be guaranteed, providing explicit details about the research context and the participants allows future researchers to determine whether the findings are applicable to their

own contexts (Bloomberg, 2023). Purposeful sampling was a strategy used to ensure participants had remote teaching experience within a defined timeframe so their experiences with belonging as a remote adjunct faculty would be relevant and recent. Thick descriptions of the participant's experiences have provided detailed accounts, which contributed to the richness and depth of the findings (Bloomberg, 2023). Remote work is an integral aspect of the twenty-first century (Crespín-Trujillo & Hora, 2021; Garret et al., 2023) in all professional environments across various fields, making this study relevant beyond the context of higher education. However, belonging is subjective, and a person's experiences shape their perceptions of belonging, which are multifaceted (Allen et al., 2021). Replicating this study in other remote professions could provide valuable comparative insights and deepen understanding and nuances of belonging across various professional environments.

Dependability is achieved by clearly documenting the research process in a logical, traceable manner (Bloomberg, 2023). Prior to conducting the study, I field tested my interview protocol with experts in the field. I implemented the feedback from the field testers to ensure my interview protocol was clear and logical. Upon approval of the IRB, I followed the interview protocol with 10 participants. To further promote dependability, I provided a step-by-step process outlined in Section 2 that could be replicated by another researcher. Lastly, the coding schemes and emerging themes for each research question are detailed in the findings section, providing a clear audit trail from the raw data collected to the interpretations, evaluation, and recommendations of this study.

As a part of data collection, I reviewed the initial transcripts from the Zoom interview immediately following a participant's interview to clean the transcript for potential filler words such as "uh" and "um." To ensure the transcript was an accurate reflection of the participants'

words, I listened to the recorded Zoom interview to make comparisons and made adjustments if necessary to the transcript in preparation for the member checking. After this was completed, I sent the cleaned transcript to the participant and asked them to review it within 48 hours of receiving the transcript via email. Throughout the process, I engaged in reflexive practices by taking notes and journaling about my ideas, perceptions, and hunches.

Following the completion for data collection and member checking, I began Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process for thematic analysis that guided the data analysis process. To analyze the data, I began by familiarizing myself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the first phase, I read and re-read the transcripts from the interview and the questionnaire data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interview transcripts totaled 41 single-spaced pages of raw data, and 10 questionnaires were completed by the participants. I read each interview transcript and questionnaire data two times before putting the data into NVivo. After I read and re-read the data twice, I put the interview and questionnaire data into NVivo. I kept track of my hunches and ideas by journaling throughout the data analysis process.

After the first phase was completed, I began the second phase of generating initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I employed in vivo coding in the initial analysis of the interview and questionnaire data to ensure I was using direct words from the participant adding to the trustworthiness of the study (Bloomberg, 2023; Elliott & Timulak, 2005; Saldaña, 2013). The initial coding resulted in 140 unique codes, including the demographic information reflected in Table 1. From the initial coding process, I began phase three of thematic analysis and started to search for themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase I began to collate codes into potential themes creating categories with in vivo codes that were similar or closely related. Codes that did not align with existing categories were reviewed to determine whether they

should be merged, renamed, or removed from the coding scheme. Some categories collapsed because of similar coding patterns. Collapsing similar codes into categories reduced the initial set of codes to 40 unique codes, 12 potential categories, and six potential themes. During this phase I began to get a sense of preliminary themes for each research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the fourth phase of thematic analysis, I reviewed the themes by organizing the categories and codes according to the research questions. During this phase it became clearer if a code needed to collapse even more or if a category and the corresponding codes more appropriately aligned to one of the two research questions this descriptive study aimed to explore. In the fifth phase of thematic analysis, defining and naming themes, I used words directly from the participants that captured the essence of the codes and categories within the theme. Through this process, it became clear one of the potential themes should merge with another, ultimately leaving five emerging themes. Additionally, in the fifth phase, descriptive theme labels were created for the emerging themes to define the codes and categories within the theme.

Due to an extensive thematic analysis process, the final data set answering the two research questions resulted in the emergence of 21 unique codes, 10 categories, and five themes. Each step was carried out with a focus on saturation and ensuring that no code was based on a single quote or participant. This systematic approach allowed me to refine and verify themes and ensured that the findings were grounded in the data. The sixth phase of thematic analysis, creating a report, is detailed below and includes the final codes, categories, and themes shown in Tables 2 and 3, organized by research question. The report includes the findings, evaluation of the outcomes, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research.

Two research questions guided this descriptive qualitative study. The first research question had three themes that emerged: (1) adjuncting is isolating, online adjuncting is even more isolating; (2) being included; and (3) relationships can only be built when two entities want to connect. The second research question had two themes that emerged: (1) recognition is the biggest motivation; and (2) feeling like you are valued. These emerging themes represent overarching ideas using direct quotes from the participants about their experiences of belonging and how adjunct faculty teaching remotely believe their sense of belonging could be cultivated by their HEIs.

Research Question 1

How do adjunct faculty who teach remotely experience belonging at their higher education institution?

Participants were asked questions relating to their experiences of belonging. The participants were asked to describe a time when both a diminished and a strong sense of belonging was experienced. Additionally, participants were asked if there are skills, abilities or mindsets that could help foster a sense of belonging at their HEI, as well as any additional thoughts about belonging. Through thematic analysis I developed 12 codes that tied to the first research question. Further analysis led to the creation of six categories. Three themes emerged from the codes and categories: (1) adjuncting is isolating, online adjuncting is even more isolating; (2) being included; and (3) relationships can only be built when two entities want to connect. Table 2 shows the codes, categories, and themes addressing the first research question.

Table 2*Coding Scheme for RQ1*

Theme	Categories	Codes
Adjuncting is isolating, online adjuncting is even more isolating	Isolation	1. Felt like being devalued and isolated 2. No communication
	Not really a part of the community	1. Not connected
Being included	Collaborating with others	1. Opportunities 2. Invited
	Feel that sense of comradery	1. Feeling like
Relationships can only be built when two entities want to connect	Skills and communication	1. Minimal supervision 2. Skills with technology 3. Communication skills
	Mindset	1. Proactive in seeking belonging 2. Open and growth mindsets 3. Side gig

Note. Participants discuss experiences of isolation, being included, and competencies to belong.

Theme 1: Adjuncting is Isolating, Online Adjuncting is Even More Isolating. The first theme identified from the data included two categories. The first category, isolation, reflected experiences from adjunct faculty of feeling isolated, a lack of communication, and not having enough or any remote options for meetings at their HEI. The second category, not really a part of the community, captured the experiences of adjunct faculty's feelings of not being connected to the HEI. Participants shared experiences of feeling isolated, devalued, and a lack of communication that contributed to a negative sense of belonging.

When discussing perceptions of belonging, all 10 participants shared experiences about feeling devalued and isolated. These experiences encapsulated the participants' emotions of isolation and their perceptions of a lack of inclusion. Ten participants shared feelings of isolation or devaluation through experiences referencing feelings of a lack of inclusion, like a cog in a wheel, siloed, and lacking remote options. Three participants emphasized a lack of inclusion. For instance, Tom noted how a lack of inclusion in departmental decisions affected their motivation and engagement:

There was a period when my sense of belonging was challenged due to a lack of inclusion in departmental decisions. As a part-time adjunct faculty member, I was not included in meetings where significant curriculum changes were discussed. This exclusion made me feel disconnected from my department and less valued as part of the academic team. The lack of input left me feeling as though my contributions were overlooked, affecting my motivation and engagement.

In a similar manner, Leo stated, "Suggestions are never really heard," reflecting a perceived lack of inclusion. Similarly, Mila described how exclusion impacted motivation, "You're not including me, you're not engaging me. I think that is something that absolutely kills motivation."

Mila stated, "The belonging, it's just, it's not there," further contributing to the narrative of feeling isolated. Together, these reflections highlighted how the absence of inclusion and recognition not only diminishes motivation but also deepened the sense of disconnection.

Within the felt like being devalued and isolated code, two participants discussed feeling like a cog in the wheel. Sofia stated, "If I'm just another, you know, cog in this great thing, and they don't care about me, well, why should I put all this time and effort in?" Noah echoed the sentiment about feeling like a cog in the wheel, stating, "But I've never had a feeling of feeling like [HEI's] going above and beyond to make sure... online adjuncts are part of the rest of the faculty." These accounts suggested that a lack of inclusion contributed to feeling devalued and affects motivation.

Additionally, participants shared perceptions of isolation when discussing not having remote options. Three participants shared that since the COVID-19 pandemic has ended, virtual meetings are not offered anymore, and now the meetings are in-person only or offered at inconvenient times. Noah shared about feeling isolated with a lack of remote meeting options, "Another was when an institution sent an email about a meeting to discuss AI in the classroom only to find out it was an in-person meeting with no remote option." Mila similarly expressed frustration with the discontinuation of virtual meetings, which were replaced with in-person meetings scheduled at inconvenient times, saying, "After offering virtual meetings during the pandemic, they stopped and now only offer in-person meetings—on a Saturday!" Sofia mentioned, "When meetings or opportunities are only in-person or are only at a limited time - I hate it when they schedule things at times I can't attend." These accounts further the narrative by illustrating how not having remote options contributes to feeling isolated.

Five participants also discussed how feeling siloed and feeling like an add-on contributed to feeling devalued and isolated. Ethan shared experiences of feeling siloed, "Because it seems I feel siloed." Ethan went on to describe general feelings about teaching adjunct at their HEI:

I'm at the bottom, like I mean, I teach a bunch of classes, but I'm at the bottom organizationally, and so I only see it from, you know, from the bottom up. So, I feel like I'm just receiving things instead of like, you know... I just kind of feel alone at the bottom, and like I'm in a silo.

Ethan shared how their experience of belonging also affects their relationship with students, "And so, because I don't feel belonging, it's hard for me to convey belonging to my students below me." Additionally, Ethan said, "You feel like you're in or you're out, and for me, it feels like I'm out." Likewise, Ruby described how part-time faculty feel like an "add-on:"

I think that sometimes when people come to an adjunct position, at least, this has been my experience in talking with people, that when they come to an adjunct position, they automatically feel like they're out there. You know, they're not part of this full-time faculty, and they're just kind of like an add-on.

Similarly, Beth shared an experience of feeling isolated and a great deal of sadness due to organizational changes, "During this time of transition, we lost a number of our senior leaders, who were advocates of part-time faculty, and it caused a great deal of sadness." Beth shared that "during this time, it felt like going through the stages of grief" and that "All the committees that I served on were disbanded, and it was probably the loneliest time working remotely that I experienced." Beth shared that the experience made them feel "devalued, unconnected, and isolated." Mila shared her emotions and stated, "I feel ill to know that there are people who feel on the fringe and want to be a part of something." Sofia contributed to the narrative by stating,

"Adjuncting is isolating, online adjuncting is even more isolating." Similarly, Tom agreed that "remote work can create feelings of isolation." The experiences shared by the participants showed their perception that adjunct faculty who teach remotely experience feelings of isolation.

A diverging view from these participants is Charlie's perceptions of belonging and not really being a part of the community but being okay with that because of Charlie's full-time role. Charlie did not specifically express a diminished sense of belonging for themselves but did mention that the adjunct faculty they work with at a different institution often "feel removed or not always as familiar with the policies." Charlie also stated they do not seek to belong because they have a full-time teaching position at another institution:

I can't really say that I've ever felt like a diminished feeling or that I was a second-class citizen, because, you know, I am a full-time professor at another university, and I do spend a lot of time as a program director talking to adjunct faculty members. And so, I do know... they often sometimes feel removed or not always as familiar with the policies.

Charlie recounted not feeling alienated personally, "I cannot recall a time when I felt alienated as an adjunct." Charlie also discussed how adjunct faculty who want full-time roles are "always trying to get more integrated":

Some adjuncts are positioning, possibly to get into a full-time position. So, they're always trying to get more integrated into the university. But I don't really have that goal cause I already have a teaching position. So, I don't really feel that way, and I've always taught full-time at several universities.

Charlie's personal position is that they don't personally try to belong, at the same time, Charlie also acknowledged, "There's always going to be a sense of alienation amongst contingent faculty in higher ed. I think overall, in higher education, there needs to be a push to reduce the number

of contingent faculty." While Charlie had a diverging view of not personally feeling like they are alienated or experiencing isolation, Charlie did point out they do not need to feel that way because of their full-time position.

Seven of the 10 participants recounted experiences related to a lack of communication. Ethan described this challenge: "I'll send a message up and have a real question, and then it just won't get responded to." Ethan continued to explain how this lack of communication affects the student experience. Ethan stated, "I translated that into, that's how we respond to students... y'all barely respond to my messages, so I guess that is what we're doing now." Similarly, Ruby also highlighted how a lack of communication left her feeling disconnected; "There's no communication, and you feel kind of by yourself out there, and you have to really think about how you can connect with other people because there, there aren't opportunities being given to you to connect." Beth echoed these sentiments and emphasized that no communication occurred during a time of transition, "communication ground to a halt." During that experience, Beth stated, "It was the loneliest time working remotely." Mila and Sofia shared comparable experiences. Mila expressed frustration with sudden changes and a lack of communication, stating, "No one, no one knows why the change happened, no one has communicated anything." While Sofia shared, "I'll go months without an email until I get a course offer." Collectively, these experiences suggested that inconsistent or absent communication leaves adjunct faculty who teach remotely feeling overlooked and unsupported.

Conversely, one participant did express that too much communication is not helpful. Noah described how mass emails are "annoying." Noah stated, "I basically wake up every morning, delete like three or four emails, and then move on about my day." While mass emails were "annoying" to Noah, Liam described a diminished sense of belonging due to generic

communications. Liam stated, "It feels more diminished when things are just very generically sent out. Just a kind of boilerplate of pretty much useless information. You know, things that aren't helpful to me at that time." Liam also described feeling threatened by the institution through email communication about AI detection:

I had a particular situation where adjunct faculty were all threatened if they dared to use any type of AI detection software... it made me feel that the institution would get rid of faculty for the sake of convenience and to punish anyone who spoke out. That type of behavior does not create a sense of community or belonging.

Seven participants suggested that a lack of communication, not responding, and impersonal or threatening messaging contributed to feeling isolated.

Seven out of 10 participants recounted feeling not connected. This code captured the participant's experiences of not being part of the community, not having a connection at the HEI, and feeling replaceable. Charlie mentioned their experience as an adjunct faculty member teaching remotely, "And I would say that that's probably a similar feeling that I have when teaching at [HEI]. It's just, you know, I'm not really part of the community." Leo expressed wishing there was more connection, "I wish there was more interaction between adjunct faculty. It's like everyone is in their own little box separate from each other." Similarly, Noah discussed not having a point of contact to ask questions and, as a result, feeling more disconnected:

The department chair was a person I knew from professional connection, from conferences I've been to, he had since left the university, and so I don't have any strong connection to a single person there... I feel more disconnected that way.

Ruby echoed, feeling unconnected, "You feel kind of by yourself out there, and you really have to think about how you can connect with other people because there aren't opportunities being

given to you to connect." Similarly, Mila shared, "I don't really know any of the other faculty, I have never seen my dean or associate dean...there aren't any 'academic' opportunities, that I am aware of, to connect with other faculty." The participants' experiences reflect the overarching theme of isolation.

Ten participants described feeling devalued and isolated due to exclusion from decision-making, limited engagement, and a lack of institutional support. Seven participants described the no communication code, further emphasizing how abrupt halts in correspondence and minimal responsiveness contributed to their isolation. Additionally, seven participants expressed feelings of not being part of the community, as they were excluded from meetings and had limited interactions with colleagues. While isolation was a reoccurring theme within the data, participants did share experiences of how being included supported a sense of belonging.

Theme 2: Being Included. The second theme identified from the data included two categories. The first category, collaborating with others, captured the experiences of being invited to engage and having opportunities to connect. The second category, feel that sense of comradery, encompassed nuanced ways adjunct faculty experienced feeling included that supported feeling a sense of belonging. Ten participants expressed experiencing a strong sense of belonging when they had opportunities of being included, invited, allowed to collaborate, be a part of committee work, and feel like they were a part of the greater academic community.

Five participants shared how being included with opportunities to connect or collaborate supported their sense of belonging. Tom had the opportunity to work on a course revision and was regularly included in weekly conversation with the course revision group. Tom stated:

So, it was a combination of being compensated, a stipend, and being able to do something that helped my course as well as the students. And then just really being involved in

having those weekly conversations... So, it was really cool to work with people from different areas of the institution.

Furthering the narrative, Ruby emphasized the significance of opportunities to develop courses, Ruby shared “one of the opportunities that I got was that I have been able to develop courses...So that brings me into the mix.” Additionally, Ruby shared those opportunities to “collaborate with others in course revisions or committees” which supported a sense of belonging. Beth and Noah explained the importance of having the opportunity to collaborate, "Collaborating on projects with my faculty colleagues is rewarding and motivating." Noah added, “opportunities to collaborate on research projects also deepen my connection to the institution, making the remote nature of the role more fulfilling.” Additionally, Beth shared, “Connecting with people and not making them feel isolated are important for motivation, engagement, productivity, and retention.” Similarly, Leo discussed how opportunities with regular interactions with a team leader reinforced a sense of belonging and connection. Leo described, "We actually have a team leader every time we teach a course, we have a team leader which is kind of neat because you stay in touch with somebody at all times.”

Four participants discussed being invited to engage in different events or responsibilities as a remote adjunct faculty. Tom underscored the significance of being invited, deepening their connection with the institution and boosting motivation:

Being invited to participate in faculty development workshops, receiving positive feedback from both students and department heads, and being included in discussions around pedagogical approaches—are incredibly motivating. When my contributions to course content or departmental initiatives are recognized, it reinforces my commitment to teaching remotely.

Similarly, Beth highlighted being invited, asked, appointed, selected, and serving on committees or initiatives as incredibly motivating:

I was asked to serve on a university-wide task force to identify and help resolve some of the challenges that part-time faculty have in their day-to-day work and to improve opportunities for inclusion... I was appointed by my dean to serve on a committee to represent part-time faculty... I was selected to represent my school... I was invited to serve on a team... I was asked to be part of the team to draft the self-study for our program's initial accreditation... I was asked to be part of a team to create guidelines.

Similarly, Sofia described the significance of being invited, even if you cannot attend, "I think it's still being invited to things full college meetings... So being invited to organizations like that, I think, helps because you are, you feel like you're part of it now." Being invited to participate in various collaborations, committees, and projects remained a significant aspect of the "being included" theme.

Five participants discussed feeling like they belong through various experiences. Liam discussed sessions where faculty gathered together to kick off the term and feel a sense of camaraderie:

Bring all the faculty to teach the same course, which are quite a number in this area...Bringing them all together for a webinar to kick off every 5 week term...you just feel that sense of camaraderie and people that are sharing ideas and thank everybody for their work, and even share some student kudos and things like that really helps create that sense that we're all kind of in this together, working towards the same goal.

Additionally, Liam shared when they are brought together, "You feel a sense of purpose and a sense of togetherness." When an individual feels a sense of belonging, Tom noted, "An

individual who feels like they belong is more likely to uphold whatever core values the institution has,” which further suggests that feeling a sense of camaraderie or togetherness is a benefit to the institution. Similarly, Mila noted how being asked for input makes you feel like you belong: “And so, it feels like it's a culture where you feel like you belong, you know, because people are asking for your input, or they include you in decision-making process.” In summary, participants highlighted how being included encompassed opportunities to collaborate and being invited to participate on committees, course revisions, or conversations on pedagogical approaches. Additionally, feeling a sense of comradery through informal or formal faculty gatherings.

Theme 3: Relationships Can Only Be Built When Two Entities Want to Connect.

The third theme identified from the data included two categories. The first category, skills and communication, reflected the perceptions of specific skills that adjunct faculty members feel support one's ability to belong. The second category, mindset, captured the types of mindsets adjunct faculty have that may support or diminish their ability to belong. Ten participants explained a combination of essential skills and mindsets that contribute to one's ability to belong in an online academic environment.

Five participants described the ability to work with minimal supervision as a key competency that supports belonging. Beth and Liam described how working with minimal supervision would help an adjunct faculty to belong at an HEI. Beth noted the importance of being able to "work autonomously, work without supervision, work with minimal supervision." At the same time, Liam added that "working independently is an important skill" and emphasized the need to be comfortable with "minimal supervision and being okay with it." Adding to this narrative of being able to work with minimal supervision, Charlie mentioned, "I'm

pretty good at fixing my own problems...so I always say self-sufficiency." Similarly, Tom echoed this idea: "Being organized and self-motivated also helps me stay connected, even when working remotely."

Four out of 10 participants discussed how skills with technology support a sense of belonging. Tom and Charlie both discussed how they use their skills with technology to assist with belonging. Charlie mentioned how using "educational technology skills" assists with connection. Similarly, Tom noted, "I remain open to evolving technologies to ensure seamless integration into the institution's academic environment." Noah discussed using technology skills to leverage feeling included, "I leverage the ability to communicate with email and teleconference to make sure I'm involved." Similarly, Mila said:

If you know how to leverage your technology, you're not going to feel like you're on an island, no matter what, because you're going to make videos to send to students or to show a faculty member some cool thing that you're doing.

Mila added, "Being well versed in technology" is an important skill to engage.

Three participants discussed the importance of communication as a necessary skill to initiate and maintain connections, underscoring the theme that relationships and belonging require mutual effort. Tom, Ruby, and Noah highlighted how communication skills aid in the ability to belong. Noah stated, "As a remote faculty, sometimes it is on me, that communication, I have to be intentional about reaching out, I have to be intentional if I want to belong." Noah added:

I think, back to communication, the people who will communicate helps with belonging...if faculty don't reach out or don't communicate with you, you assume things are going well and that they feel like they're a part of it...I have to initiate that

communication to get into their circle, to make sure they know I'm having trouble, or I need this help, or I need this belonging.

Similarly, Ruby echoed the sentiment of the significance of one's communication skills. Ruby said, "Communication skills are really important." Ruby detailed what communication skills would be needed to support belonging, noting, "Communication skills such as written communication, feedback, matching body language, and tone." Tom also agreed that "Communications and collaboration skills are essential." The skills and communication category captured participants' perceptions of the competencies that support their ability to belong as adjunct faculty in online environments. The ability to work with minimal supervision, proficiency with technology, and effective communication skills were noted by eight of the participants.

Within the second category, mindset, adjunct faculty recounted perceptions and experiences about proactively seeking to belong, open and growth mindsets, and the side gig mentality. Seven participants emphasized the importance of proactively seeking belonging. Beth added, "I seek opportunities to be a contributing member of groups and committees working towards the mission, visions, and goals of my program, school, and the university." Similar to Beth, Ruby stated, "I am proactive in seeking out others and engaging them. I am also proactive in volunteering to work on course revision, serving on committees, etc."

Sofia echoed this sentiment, stating, "You have to be willing to either seek out that belonging, seek out opportunities, or be willing to accept them when they are offered." Sofia added, "You have to be willing to say yes, I want to participate...you have to take advantage of those opportunities that are offered because belonging doesn't happen easily when you are

online." Ruby described how proactively seeking to belong means "I really want to do this."

Ruby further explained:

To me, there's a difference between someone who wants to do it to pick up some extra money and a person who wants to do it because they really care about what the position is, and that may affect belongingness.

Sofia further explained how using the desire to "be aware of what is going on" to stay connected at the HEI:

I use my desire to be aware of what is going on, so I am careful about reading my email and seeing which opportunities I have the time and space and engage in. I attend in-person events when I can and also participate online if offered.

Similarly, Leo and Mila described how they would proactively find ways to collaborate and engage. Leo stated, "I engage with administration, ask questions, introduce myself to those in charge." In a similar manner, Mila said, "I would find a way to collaborate with other faculty in similar content areas." In addition to proactive behaviors, participants described how adopting open and growth-oriented mindsets might support a sense of belonging.

Four participants highlighted how open, or growth mindsets foster belonging. Liam and Tom discussed how an open and growth mindset contributes to a sense of belonging. Liam stated, "I think when you go in with that open mindset, you feel that kind of sense of belongingness. So, you have to have that open mindset." Similarly, Tom emphasized "a growth mindset," stating:

I think at the most fundamental level, I think a growth mindset because as you're teaching online, there's going to be a lot of things as higher education is changing online, just the

entire world of artificial intelligence. A lot of things are changing, and so if you stay traditional or stay fixed... I think you'll be uncomfortable.

Similarly, Liam explained, "I think having that growth mindset helps embrace the changes of higher education." Furthering this narrative, Beth added, "It would be good to have an analytical solution-oriented mindset, to be willing to engage, take on new tasks and challenges."

Additionally, Ethan described "interpersonal flexibility" as a key growth mindset, reflecting the ability to navigate between open and growth-oriented behaviors.

Finally, four participants pointed to adjuncts' motivations, particularly whether they viewed the role as a career or a side gig. Mila described their opinion of an adjunct faculty's goals affecting their motivation to belong:

I think it's that people who are like, hmm, I'd like to work here full time, they're gonna find a way to get involved...I also think new faculty... have a different interest and a different goal in mind. And I don't think everybody has the same goal in mind. You know, some people are just like, I just need a check.

Similarly, Noah described how some adjuncts don't care or want to belong. Noah said, "I think some of it's on the adjuncts because they're not wanting to, as part of their contract or whatever, I don't want to deal with all these other things." Noah explained the "side gig" mentality vs. when "faculty really care":

You have some online adjuncts that their whole mentality is, this is my side gig; I'm just doing it for the paycheck, and this is going to sound bad, but they don't necessarily care about the education of the student...whereas if the faculty really care about the student, they care about making that connection, they're connecting to the student who is part of the institution.

Additionally, Noah stated:

I think it's a lot of it is their mentality: I'm here to make a difference and help, and those they're typically going to want to belong, and they're going to want more communication of how to get connected and how to make sure they're impacting those students as much as they can. Whereas the faculty, the adjuncts who are just trying to check the box to earn the paycheck, they want to know what's the bare minimum I can do and get by.

Similarly, Mila stated, "You know, some people are just like, I just need a check." Liam echoed that some adjunct faculty see the role as a side gig, stating, "Adjuncts have a full-time job somewhere else and don't necessarily want to be part of the community, like, I just want to do my job." Noah shared an opinion stating:

I think that much of belonging comes also from the adjunct faculty member's mindset of wanting to belong or wanting to get a paycheck. A relationship can only be built when two entities want to connect; otherwise, it won't work.

Participants recounted that how adjunct faculty view their role may influence one's engagement and sense of belonging.

The mindset, skills, and communication categories' codes suggest that internal orientations may shape an adjunct faculty's experiences of belonging. Participants consistently emphasized that a sense of belonging in online higher education settings requires intentional efforts in action and attitude. Participants also recognized that not all adjunct faculty may not all experience a desire to belong in the same way. As noted by the participants who discussed adjunct faculty who view the role as just a side gig, the adjunct faculty with this mindset may not want to put in extra time to connect. Collectively, thematic analysis led to the overarching theme suggesting that belonging requires a mutual effort.

Research Question 2

In what ways do adjunct faculty who teach remotely believe their sense of belonging could be cultivated by their higher education institution?

Participants were asked what actions leadership can take to cultivate a sense of belonging for remote adjunct faculty. Additionally, participants were asked what kind of experiences with belonging increase their motivation to teach remotely. Lastly, participants were asked what opportunities are available that boost their sense of belonging, as well as anything else they wanted to share about belonging. Through thematic analysis, I developed nine codes related to the second research question. Further analysis led to the creation of four categories. These codes and categories led to two themes that emerged: (1) recognition is the biggest motivation; and (2) feeling like you are valued. Table 3 shows the coding scheme for the second research question.

Table 3

Coding Scheme for RQ2

Theme	Categories	Codes
Recognition is the biggest motivation	Recognizing contributions	1. Recognition is the biggest motivation
	Leadership	1. Communication 2. Leadership be visible and accessible
Feeling like you are valued	Valued	1. Professional development 2. Pay 3. Feel a part of something 4. Full autonomy
	Opportunities to connect	1. Offering a space to connect 2. Mentor

Note. Participants discuss experiences of recognition and feeling valued.

Theme 1: Recognition is the Biggest Motivation. The first theme emerged from three codes, which were organized into two categories. The first category, recognizing contributions, reflected perceptions that highlighted being recognized as a major motivator and factor that supports a sense of belonging. Recognizing contributions spanned from verbal and written acknowledgments to intangible actions like feeling trusted. The second category, leadership, captured the idea of how accessible and visible leadership supports a sense of belonging among adjunct faculty. The data suggested the significance of leadership visibility, and effective communication in fostering motivation, engagement, and a sense of belonging for remote adjunct faculty. External validation, such as acknowledgment, leadership presence, and feedback were noted throughout the interviews and questionnaires as significant factors that drive engagement and motivation. Recognition that extends beyond symbolic gestures was noted as well; verbal recognition came up several times in the interview and questionnaire findings.

Eight participants discussed how various aspects of recognizing contributions impact adjunct faculty members' sense of belonging. Recognition could come from leadership, colleagues, or students. Leo noted, "Recognition is the biggest motivation. I enjoy positive letters from students." Similarly, Tom also discussed the importance of being recognized by students and leadership, being included in conversations, and when their contributions are recognized, it is "incredibly motivating." Tom stated:

Experiences that enhance my sense of belonging, such as being invited to participate in faculty development workshops, receiving positive feedback from both students and department heads, and being included in discussions around pedagogical approaches—

are incredibly motivating. When my contributions to course content or departmental initiatives are recognized, it reinforces my commitment to teaching remotely.

Similarly, Charlie emphasized the significance of even a simple gesture of gratitude, stating, "Really just a thank you from the university or any feedback that will help me improve." Ruby furthered this narrative noting that "connecting with other faculty and recognizing others" supports a sense of belonging. Beth also agreed upon recognition being motivating, stating, "Recognizing work well done and recognizing great contributions is motivating." Beth reiterated "Belonging means part-time faculty feels connected, appreciated, valued, and recognized while working in a safe and nurturing environment." This perspective was also shared by Liam, who noted how "Taking some time to recognize people individually" could help support feeling recognized at an HEI.

Similarly, Leo shared an opinion about whether or not leadership recognizes the capabilities and contributions of adjunct faculty at an HEI by giving more responsibilities and trusting adjunct faculty. Leo said:

I wish leadership would give the adjuncts more responsibility. They're micromanaged as if they're children and you know something if you have a Ph.D., you're not a child.

You've done something with your life that not many people have done, so, instead of micromanaging us, give us more responsibility to create better online experiences for the students.

Leo went on to express how being recognized included being trusted by leadership, which encourages belonging. Leo stated:

If you give me more responsibility because you trust me, I'm going to do even more to show you that you can trust me... I was named outstanding teacher of 2024 at [HEI], that doesn't hinder me to belong; that encourages me to belong.

Along with trust, Beth discussed how “a sense of belonging is boosted by recognizing and appreciating our perspectives, hearing our concerns, and working together on remedies for all part-time faculty.” Noah shared a similar perception of being recognized as a unique contributor stating:

You have this population in which often they're at the bottom rung of our priority list, right... making sure that they get a fair share in their priorities. I think, a way to do that, not just oh, we'll just include them with all the other faculty, because they're not all the other faculty and so separating them out to say, hey, we know you're in a different boat, but we still want you to make sure you know you're important.

Noah brought up the uniqueness of the adjunct faculty, and that this kind of recognition could support a sense of belonging. Collectively, these responses suggest that meaningful, individualized recognition whether through feedback or acknowledgment could contribute to cultivating motivation, connection, and a sustained sense of belonging among remote adjunct faculty.

Seven participants discussed the significance of how communication can be a big motivation and support belonging. Communication encompassed many experiences and suggestions including email correspondence, conversations in virtual or in-person sessions with leadership, and receiving feedback from students or leadership. Noah discussed the importance of receiving emails from administrators or staff boosted belonging. Noah noted, “When I receive some emails from administrators/staff about particular students in my course and how I am

handling them helps increase my belonging and motivation to be adjunct.” Similarly, Liam also discussed how “Personalized outreach is helpful along with resources that help me be more efficient with my job,” which boosts the motivation to belong. Likewise, Beth highlighted the value of receiving communication from leadership, noting, "Receiving feedback from supervisors and being appreciated for contributions to academe is a motivator." Tom agreed that “receiving positive feedback from students and department heads...are incredibly motivating.” This perspective was also shared by Leo, who was individually recognized by the President at their HEI with a letter. Leo stated:

I got a letter from the President of [HEI] because he found my research, and he goes, I read your research that was an amazing thing that you did... and I'm like Oh, my God! He read my work. So those things foster belonging because he went out of his way to write me a letter. How could I not feel closer?

Overall, seven participants emphasized that consistent and personalized communication from leadership and students fostered motivation and a sense of belonging.

Consistent with previous accounts, Sofia shared how receiving communication from leadership made them feel valued and encouraged to belong. Sofia stated, “Every email that the President sends out I get...we're treated like full-time faculty members, and you don't realize how nice that is until you're at a place where you're not.” Noah echoed the significance of communication, stating, “Receiving some emails from administrators/staff about a particular student in my course and how I am handling them helps increase by belonging and motivation to be adjunct.” Noah expanded, saying, “Emails about milestones and main events on campus that help me know what is going on and feel included.”

Conversely, Charlie shared an opinion about how adjunct faculty should not communicate with their leadership. Charlie stated:

If you want to remain an adjunct, this is my advice, try to be as quiet as possible. Because you're paid not to bother the administrators. They don't want to hear from you. If they don't hear from you and then the class goes smoothly, and you solve all of your problems, you're more likely to continue to teach there. I'm just telling you: my little nugget of wisdom is just if you like to teach adjunct, you know, basically get your shit together and just do it.

Charlie shared their opinion of how adjunct faculty should not communicate with leadership, while the other seven participants had different opinions. Noting this diverging viewpoint is important, because it highlights the varying perceptions, which explores the similarities and differences of experiences.

Eight participants discussed how leadership being visible and accessible contributed to being recognized at their HEI. Within this code, participants' experiences underscored how they perceived direction from leadership, articulated a desire for increased interaction with leadership, and emphasized that consistent leadership efforts may contribute to cultivating a strong institutional culture and a sense of belonging. Sofia recounted appreciating having an opportunity to interact with leadership at their HEI:

I was invited to a lunch with the President with a number, with about five or six other adjuncts, just to talk with him because he was new, and trying to meet as many faculty members as possible, and he made a point of including adjuncts...so I think, for leadership to be visible and accessible to them, and know that as an adjunct, I am just as important to them as somebody who is full time and so conveying that message.

Sofia's experience suggested that interactions with leadership contribute to feeling just as important as a full-time employee.

There were other experiences shared where connections with different levels of leadership contributed to their perceptions of belonging. For example, Leo discussed how support within the course room boosts their sense of belonging, "They give us a wonderful team of support. We actually have a team leader every time we teach a course... which is kind of neat because you stay in touch with somebody at all times." Similarly, Tom shared their opinion about how the role of remote work can make it challenging to experience belonging, but leadership can play a key role in fostering a sense of belonging. Tom suggested, "Consistent efforts from leadership to engage adjuncts can create a more cohesive academic environment." Tom discussed how opportunities to engage with leaders would give those who want to belong the opportunity to do so, stating:

I think more engagement opportunities for leaders to talk about what's happening within the department, what's happening in the university... I think if leadership is more communicative...Let's have an open session, here's what's happening, feel free to join. I think that'll give the individuals who are seeking to become more integrated within the institution the opportunity to do so.

Similarly, Beth echoed the engagement opportunities with leadership and stated, "I believe that regular check-ins are necessary for part-time faculty to really feel connected and to cultivate their sense of belonging." Additionally, Beth discussed how the President at their HEI does want to hear from the part-time faculty, "Our President wants to hear about their ideas and values the contributions of part-time faculty. Having these connections is probably the most important thing." Lastly, Beth discussed the responsibility of a leader to create safe, welcoming

environments for adjunct faculty. Beth stated, “The leadership in the institution needs to assure that there is collegiality, that there's no horizontal violence going on...so having a safe environment is very important for a sense of belonging.”

Conversely, to having accessible and visible leadership having a positive effect on feeling recognized Mila and Noah shared experiences about a lack of leadership affecting belonging.

Mila stated:

It seems like you take direction from the leadership and what they're providing and what kind of culture they create. And so, if it feels like it's a culture where you feel like you belong, you know, because people are asking for your input, or they include you in the decision-making process that you go to a meeting... those are the things that make a difference.

As a result, Mila expressed not even trying to belong at the HEI because of the lack of connection and direction from leadership:

I have no idea what people are doing in their programs. I don't know what new programs. What new opportunities I don't know. I don't know what is going on. I don't know anything, I'm not asked for any input on curriculum. I'm not asked for my expertise on anything.

Mila also shared about their lack of connection with leadership where they teach remotely stating, “I've never spoken to the dean or the associate dean.” Finally, Mila discussed how the lack of connection has potential compounded results:

So, it's easy to feel really lost when people don't reach out and don't connect. And then when they don't connect, you stop checking email and you feel even more and more distant. And I think it has a negative impact on some people.

Finally, Ethan shared how leadership's role in fostering or hindering a sense of belonging extends to faculty-student interactions. Ethan noted at one point feeling a strong sense of belonging, but suddenly it changed, and this affected how Ethan translated that into responding to students. Ethan explained how their superior sets the tone for interactions with students. Ethan stated, "I felt really connected to the department and to the people above me because I received that connection from them. I translated that into that's how we respond to students." However, when the change occurred, and Ethan did not feel a sense of connection and belonging, this negatively impacted Ethan's motivation to connect with students. Ethan recounted, "Because I don't feel belonging, it's hard for me to convey belonging to my students below me." Ethan expanded on how the lack of connection with leadership has affected the student experience and shared, "This is bad, like this is really bad, but I actively navigate away from phone calls, from students. I don't want to talk to them." Ethan ended the interview with stating, "My superior sets the tone for how I'm going to respond to students." In contrast to Ethan's experience with leadership playing a role in being recognized at an HEI, Tom stated, "One key observation is that a strong institutional culture of inclusion can significantly impact an adjunct's sense of belonging." The data emphasized that visible leadership, engagement, and opportunities to connect with leadership boosted an adjunct faculty's sense of belonging.

Theme 2: Feeling Like You Are Valued. The second theme identified from the data included two categories. The first category, valued, captured the experiences and perceptions of how adjunct faculty feel valued and how that supports a sense of belonging. The second category, opportunities to connect, highlighted that adjunct faculty who teach remotely believe that spaces to connect and opportunities to participate in mentorship support their sense of belonging.

Five participants discussed how professional development opportunities support their sense of value at an HEI. Liam, Noah, and Ethan discussed the importance of feeling valued with opportunities for professional development and growth. Liam stated:

You could take classes for free...work on another master's degree, or even a doctorate... that's definitely something that would help...offering micro-credentials in different areas like, say DEI [Diversity Equity and Inclusion]...to really enhance your craft. Because, you know, most adjuncts are teaching other places, too, so if I get training that helps me become a better instructor, it's probably going to impact students that I teach at other schools as well, those really add value.

Additionally, Liam discussed how useful training makes them feel valued:

The most useful trainings are usually the ones that are aimed at making faculty lives easier. I've noticed faculty are really drawn into those things... How can I be better at my job but also save time at the same exact time? Those are always a hit.

Similarly, Noah also agreed that when HEIs “offer professional development or training for remote employees” that is motivating and supports their sense of belonging. Tom and Noah described opportunities for professional development that boosted value and a sense of belonging. Tom stated, “The institution also offers tailored professional development resources, including webinars and workshops, specifically designed for adjunct faculty.” In a similar vein, Ethan discussed feeling valued by some kind of promotion, stating, “For me, that's belonging, so some kind of promotion is a way to feel like I belong.” Conversely to the benefits of having access to professional development options, Mila shared an experience where there was a missed opportunity to provide professional development for adjunct faculty at their HEI. Mila referenced the lack of professional development opportunities, stating, “Instead they focus solely

on policy compliance and enforcement, neglecting support and professional development...their lack of concern for faculty was truly egregious.”

Within professional development experiences two participants discussed how the onboarding experience plays a crucial role in a sense of belonging, suggesting that a sense of belonging starts from the beginning. Beth discussed feeling like you are valued from the very start of employment. Beth stated:

I believe a sense of belonging actually should start before faculty are hired... Providing a sense of belonging starts with that first initial contact and continues throughout the recruitment, application, interview, hiring, and onboarding process, and it continues with the development of that new hire and how the communication works between them.

Similarly, Noah agreed, stating, “The other part for me through the different institutions is the onboarding process. I’ve had good onboarding processes, and I’ve had bad onboarding processes.” Professional development can entail compliance, training, role clarity, skill building within an HEI, the opportunity for a promotion, and could even start with the onboarding process at an institution.

One tangible reoccurring aspect mentioned by three participants was pay, the financial component of being an adjunct faculty. Participants Liam and Beth discussed how fair and equitable compensation assists with a sense of belonging and value. Liam stated:

Pay is a big issue in an era of inflation, where costs have risen 20%, and my adjunct pay has not budged at both institutions I work for. The lack of investment in loyal faculty to at least attempt to keep pace with inflation decreases a sense of belonging.

Beth agreed, stating, “Another action to cultivate a sense of belonging is to make sure that the benefit package and compensation is fair and equitable.” Liam said that the communication and training offered are a null point if compensation is not fair. Liam stated:

It doesn't exactly engender belonging; despite some of the communication you might get from the institution, the training offered doesn't make up for the financial piece. And I think that's a really important piece...And it's just kinda, you always kinda know, you're just expendable. So that's the message that is sent is that you're expendable. We'll find somebody else who will be very eager to teach this class for that, what you're making right now. So, if you don't like it, there's the door.

While three participants shared fair and equitable compensation to feel valued, one participant shared that it is not about the paycheck to feel valued. Leo stated:

So, for me, it's being told that what I do is worthwhile; it's not even the paycheck. I don't care about that. It's being told that what you're doing is changing the world, and when you educate a mind, you open that mind, and you change the world, and I honestly believe that.

Three participants discussed financial compensation, which could suggest that pay is a significant factor that directly impacts one's sense of being valued. One participant shared that the intrinsic recognition of their work and its impact is what makes them feel truly appreciated, regardless of the paycheck.

When discussing ways participants think an adjunct faculty's sense of belonging could be cultivated, feeling a part of something emerged repeatedly. Six participants shared how they think feeling a part of something supports belonging. Ruby shared that when a person feels they belong, they will try harder, while the opposite is true, stating:

I think that when people feel that they're not part of something, they will meet the minimum standards of what needs to be done, but if they feel they're part of something, they will put a lot more into it, and I think they'll get more out of it as well because of what they did.

Ethan shared an experience where they were going to be “away from the office” on an amazing trip. Ethan shared how the leadership was responsive and helped to cover Ehtan’s course. Ethan recounted feeling: “They covered for me... and it made me feel great. It made me feel really included.” Conversely, Mila and Sofia highlighted the consequences of when people feel valued vs not feeling valued. Mila stated:

If people don't feel valued and feel like they're not in the right place, that there's space for them, that they don't have to contort themselves to be accepted and to be valued, then you run the risk of not getting the best people, you'll have a reputation for being an institution that doesn't support part-time faculty, and people won't want to work there. Or if they do, they're not going to give you their best.

Mila goes on to say, “I think investing in people is so important, and it doesn't take a lot to make people feel valued, something as simple as sending out a newsletter or just making sure that you communicate on a consistent basis.” Sofia echoed the idea of feeling like you are valued part of an HEI:

I think, feeling like you are a valued part of an institution, that they care about you, that they want you to succeed, that they are willing to invest time and money in you, to improve you...it makes me want to be a better teacher, because I know I have value to them. If I'm just another, you know, cog in this great thing, and they don't care about me, well, why should I put all this time and effort in, you know?

Similarly, Liam added to the narrative of feeling like you are valued by stating, “So part of belonging is feeling like you are valued.” Noad added one way that might assist with feeling like you are valued is using communication effectively. Noah stated they appreciated receiving “Emails about milestones and main events on campus that help me know what is going on and feel included.” Similarly, Tom stated, “Transparency in communication and recognizing the contributions of adjunct faculty go a long way in fostering a positive experience.” Feeling like you are a valued part of something reoccurred several times throughout the analysis process.

Four participants discussed how autonomy contributed to feeling like a valued part of an HEI. Liam shared “I have full autonomy to do all the things that a full-time faculty member can do...I just participated with a committee that worked with open educational resources.” Liam added, “There is a clear emphasis on ensuring adjunct faculty have a voice in departmental decisions and discussions.” Similarly, Leo shared at one HEI they teach at as adjunct, “I have full reign of the courses. I love that they do not tell me you have to do this.” While Liam and Leo shared the experiences of autonomy, Beth reiterated how having a voice in decision making is a significant aspect of fostering a sense of belonging. Beth stated the importance of “Having a voice in decision making” contributes to feeling a valued part of an organization. The data suggested that tangible and intangible actions are potential steps HEIs can take to help adjunct faculty feel valued. Specifically, through professional development, pay, feeling a part of something, and autonomy as an adjunct faculty.

Seven out of 10 participants expressed the importance of offering a space to connect. Liam stated there should be attempts to actively engage adjunct faculty, “By giving people chances to interact... and really more than just a superficial like, we have this space, but nobody posts in there. You know, really actively trying to engage.” Liam pointed out that meaningful

spaces to interact assist with feeling valued and fostering a sense of belonging. While actively engaging in spaces to connect was mentioned by Liam, Tom suggested structured opportunities to connect. Tom stated, “There are structured opportunities to connect, such as regular virtual faculty meetings and department-wide discussions that adjuncts are encouraged to join.”

Conversely, Leo said, “I do wish there was more interaction between adjunct faculty. It's like everyone is in their own little box separate from each other.” While some participants, like Liam and Tom, emphasized the significance of structured and actively engaged spaces for connection, others, like Leo, expressed the desire for more opportunities to interact with fellow adjunct faculty to break down the isolation often felt in their roles.

Furthering the narrative of offering a space to connect, it was suggested these events could be formal or informal and that there could be more opportunities to connect. Mila shared longing to have a space where faculty can connect with other faculty. Mila mentioned:

Connecting with faculty to share ideas for teaching innovation would motivate me, I don't really know any of the other faculty, and I have never seen my dean or associate dean...simply offering a space to connect would make a big difference!

Mila also expressed wanting to simply be invited to things: “Have meetings where you invite them... I have not been invited to anything at a departmental level.” Ethan echoed how there is more opportunity to offer connection at their HEI, “Just because people are quietly working doesn't mean that they don't need attention. There is quite a bit of opportunity to check-in on people and see what they need!” Sofia mentioned the flexibility of modalities to connect in the virtual space, stating, “As long as they have a Zoom link, I can participate.” Beth observed, “Connecting with people and not making them feel isolated are important for motivation,

engagement, productivity and retention.” This statement highlighted Beth’s opinion of the multifaceted outcomes that may occur concerning connection or the lack thereof.

Similarly, Beth and Ruby discussed how having a space to connect provided opportunities to collaborate, which was motivating. Beth stated, “Collaborating on projects with my faculty colleagues is rewarding and motivating.” Ruby expressed being happy being ‘brought into the mix,’ saying: “One of the opportunities that I got was that I have been able to develop courses and work on courses. So that brings me into the mix. You know I’m not just somebody sitting out there.” Similarly, Liam mentioned, “By giving people chances to interact and maybe a community or something like that can enhance that sense of belonging.” Ruby stated that she felt a strong sense of belonging when there were spaces to connect:

I felt a strong sense of belonging when we previously had the monthly faculty meetings, and we discussed what was going on and what was coming up. That was a time when you got to know other faculty and the administrators because you were interacting with them on a monthly basis. And it was more, I would say it was quite personalized.

Additionally, Ruby shared, “Connecting with other faculty, recognizing others who shared in a collegial experience with me, collaborating with others in course revision or on committees, creating an inclusive environment for students, mentoring, committee work, and webinars” were all opportunities to connect and foster a sense of belonging.

Three participants mentioned how connecting with faculty in professional capacities, such as mentoring opportunities, deepened their connections and made their role more fulfilling. Tom stated, “Opportunities for mentorship or collaborating on research projects also deepen my connection to the institution, making the remote nature of the role more fulfilling.” Furthermore, Tom discussed, “Peer mentoring and inclusion in curriculum discussions further foster a sense of

belonging and engagement.” These experiences suggested the significance of connection and collaboration with colleagues potentially enhancing a sense of belonging. Beth shared how an HEI could be affected if connections among adjunct faculty and different types of leadership are lacking. Beth stated:

I had a good mentor who helped me...but I could see where some people who didn't feel valued or appreciated and or connected to the university, would be demotivated.

Connecting with people and not making them feel isolated are important for motivation, engagement, productivity, and retention.

While Beth shared how a connection with a mentor contributed to feeling valued, Ruby shared that mentoring could support “creating an inclusive environment for students.” Beth, Tom, and Ruby pointed out that the connection between feeling a part of something, being included in the culture, and having a mentor who supported them contributed to their ability to create a more inclusive environment for students and made them feel more motivated. Reoccurring aspects in the data included fair compensation, meaningful connections, tailored professional development, autonomy, and mentorship, which contributed to adjunct faculty feeling valued.

Evaluation of the Outcomes

This descriptive qualitative study sought to understand how adjunct faculty who teach remotely experience a sense of belonging and how they believe belonging could be cultivated at their HEIs. The study was grounded in the belonging framework of Allen et al. (2021): perceptions, opportunities, motivations, and competencies. Research questions organize the subsequent subheadings, and the findings associated with each question are outlined. In this section, I explain how the findings address the purpose and problem the study aimed to explore. Additionally, I describe how the findings contribute to the current literature related to belonging

for adjunct faculty who teach remotely. Lastly, I discuss how the results are consistent with current literature and explain divergent results.

Research Question 1

The first theme revealed that adjunct faculty who teach remotely are experiencing isolation, feeling disconnected, devalued, and excluded from their institutions due to limited communication, inclusion, and remote participation opportunities. This aligns with prior research documenting the alienation and expendability felt by remote adjuncts (Buch et al., 2023; Gelman et al., 2022; Sam, 2021). While most participants shared these experiences, one noted a lack of desire for institutional belonging due to satisfaction with a full-time role elsewhere but recognized isolation among adjuncts. This isolation negatively impacts student learning, often resulting in task-oriented teaching and diminished instructional engagement (Batiste et al., 2023; Rahmat, 2024). Participants linked poor institutional communication to their disengagement, sometimes affecting their communication with students. These findings support Hofman et al. (2024) by confirming that adjunct isolation is a significant barrier to student success and institutional effectiveness, emphasizing the importance of addressing this issue within higher education.

The second theme highlights the importance of intentional inclusion in fostering adjunct faculty's sense of belonging. When faculty feel invited to collaborate, their motivation and connection to the institution increases. The finding of belonging from this theme aligns with current literature, which suggests that feelings of inclusion directly affect perceptions of belonging (Sam, 2021; Walton & Brady, 2017). Current literature indicates that faculty engagement enhances student success (Ren, 2023; Toner et al., 2021). Therefore, if faculty members feel included, they are more likely to be engaged, thus impacting student success (Sam,

2021). Conversely, negative experiences with leadership, as shared by Mila and Ethan, decreased their motivation and communication. This theme deepens understanding of how both visible and subtle aspects of inclusion impact an adjunct faculty's sense of belonging.

The third theme revealed that competencies, skills, and motivations influence adjunct faculty members' sense of belonging. The literature notes that a growth mindset is the belief that intelligence and abilities can be developed (Dweck & Yeager, 2021). Four participants described how attributes such as a growth mindset and emotional intelligence contributed to feeling more connected to their institution, supporting existing research that links motivation and willingness to engage with a sense of belonging (Sam, 2021; Vo et al., 2022). All ten participants identified essential skills for cultivating belonging in remote teaching contexts, including working independently, technological fluency, and effective communication. These findings reflect prior literature emphasizing key competencies for remote adjunct faculty, such as empathy, adaptability, proficiency in Learning Management Systems (LMS), and administrative awareness (Chaharbashloo et al., 2024; González et al., 2023; Martin et al., 2021). Participants consistently agreed that communication and technological skills facilitate engagement and enhance their sense of belonging. This theme addresses the study's purpose and problem by revealing the nuanced ways adjunct faculty perceive belonging and offering insights to improve their experience.

Overall, three themes emerged addressing RQ1, which point to the experiences of adjunct faculty with isolation, how being included enhances a sense of belonging, and that a mutual effort is required to foster belonging. This study affirms existing research showing that limited communication and inclusion contribute to remote adjuncts' isolation (Hofman et al., 2024; Brower et al., 2024; Farakish et al., 2022; Gelman et al., 2022; Speights et al., 2024). Participants

confirmed these patterns and emphasized that intentional inclusion improved their sense of connection and motivation. All participants reported isolation, but intentional inclusion was noted to have boosted connection and motivation. A growth mindset, strong communication, and technological fluency were described as key factors supporting a sense of belonging.

Research Question 2

The first theme suggested that a stronger sense of belonging can be experienced when adjunct faculty receive recognition. Participants shared several positive experiences about being recognized, informally or formally, and the intrinsic and extrinsic effects. The findings indicate that recognition plays a significant role in motivation. Additionally, participants feel a stronger sense of value when contributions are acknowledged. Lastly, the findings suggest that adjunct faculty value clear communication and appreciate visible, accessible leadership.

The findings of this study align with existing literature, underscoring the link between recognition and a sense of belonging among adjunct faculty. Prior research has emphasized that recognition from colleagues, students, or institutional leaders fosters motivation and belonging (Byrd, 2022; Dolan, 2011; Sam, 2021). Hoffman et al. (2024) found that recognition significantly shaped online adjuncts' perceptions of institutional climate. Similarly, eight participants in this study described how recognition through student communication, leadership feedback, being invited, and inclusion in conversations positively influenced their sense of connection.

These findings also underscore the critical role of leadership in fostering recognition and belonging. Current literature suggests that the behavior of leadership and colleagues toward adjunct faculty at an HEI contributes to the culture and climate experienced by adjunct faculty (Batiste et al., 2023; Culver et al., 2020). Leadership support or lack thereof could affect

retention and turnover costs, which can significantly impact an organization (Sadagheyani et al., 2022). Batiste et al. (2023) posited that administrators should encourage teamwork in the virtual space to help faculty feel valued and connected. Participants emphasized the importance of a strong institutional culture of inclusion led by effective communication and meaningful interaction opportunities from leadership.

Conversely, negative leadership interactions contributed to faculty disengagement and weakened institutional and student connections. Mila and Ethan noted how leadership treats faculty influences their motivation and student relationships. Beth stated: "Connecting with people and not making them feel isolated are important for motivation, engagement, productivity, and retention." Ruby echoed this idea, observing the effects that if someone feels disconnected, they will not try as hard. In contrast, the opposite is true. The findings suggest that recognizing contributions and meaningful interactions with leadership and inclusion with leadership interactions were key factors in fostering adjunct faculty's sense of belonging.

The findings from the second theme indicated that adjunct faculty felt valued through professional development, fair compensation, inclusion, mentorship, and autonomy. Additionally, the findings suggest that opportunities to connect further supported feeling valued and an increased sense of belonging. These findings align with existing literature, which links belonging to feeling valued, accepted, and included (Crawford et al., 2024). Social interaction, bonding, and networking opportunities may help increase feelings of belonging at a HEI (Hoffman et al., 2024; Batiste et al., 2023; Perrotta & Bohan, 2020). Several participants in this study underscored these observations.

Seven participants expressed how opportunities to connect or collaborate created a sense of value and belonging. Consistent with prior research, the findings from this study indicated that

mentorship and professional development opportunities benefit not only adjunct faculty members but also the institution and the student experience (Brouwer et al., 2024; Hoffman et al., 2024; Gelman et al., 2022; Perrotta & Bohan, 2020). Participants recommended providing spaces and opportunities to connect and collaborate to increase their sense of value and belonging. The findings further revealed meaningful interactions, feeling valued from the beginning of their contact with an HEI, and providing fair compensation were also significant contributing factors to feeling valued. Current literature highlights the pay disparity between full-time and part-time faculty and the connection to how an increase in pay or rank contributes to feeling respected and valued (Hoffman et al., 2024). Additionally, unfair compensation may affect the quality of instruction and an individual's overall well-being, which has been noted by several researchers and academic institutions (American Federation of Teachers, 2020; Batiste et al., 2023; Christopher et al., 2022). Participants emphasized that equitable pay or promotions contribute to feeling valued and increase their sense of belonging.

Brower et al. (2024) identified onboarding as critical in fostering adjunct faculty's sense of belonging, emphasizing the need for structured support in contracts, orientation, mentoring, and communication. Findings from this study support these conclusions, as participants described belonging as beginning with initial institutional contact and shaped by the onboarding experience. This study confirms the findings by highlighting the significance of onboarding in feeling a sense of belonging. Two participants noted that effective onboarding significantly influences how adjunct faculty perceive their relationship with the institution.

The findings suggest that cultivating a sense of belonging for remote adjunct faculty requires intentional recognition of their contributions. Participants reported that recognition from leadership through communication, meaningful interactions, and visible accessibility increased

motivation and connection. Conversely, a lack of connection often leads to disengagement and reduced effort. Providing fair compensation, professional development, mentorship, and ongoing opportunities for inclusion further supports belonging. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of onboarding, as early intentional interactions can shape adjunct faculty's sense of affiliation and belonging.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The findings from this descriptive qualitative study informed implications and recommendations for practice. The problem this study addressed is the lack of belonging adjunct faculty teaching remotely at higher education institutions experience, leading to job dissatisfaction, high attrition, (Batiste et al., 2023; Buch et al., 2023; Olson, 2021), a decrease of effectiveness in the classroom, (Blankinship, 2022; Wojcik, 2017), and feelings of isolation (Batiste et al., 2023; Blankinship, 2022; Rahmat, 2024). The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how adjunct faculty who teach remotely in higher education institutions experience belonging. By hearing the experiences of adjunct faculty, strategies for cultivating adjunct faculty belonging have been formulated. The significance of this study adds to the body of literature focused on belonging. Adjunct faculty play a crucial role at HEIs (American Federation of Teachers, 2020), and their experiences of belonging are connected to motivation, engagement, retention, and quality teaching (Blankinship, 2022; Wojcik, 2017).

The Allen et al. (2021) belonging framework was used to ground the interview and questionnaire questions focusing on perceptions, competencies, opportunities, and perceptions to belong to explore the subjective nature of belonging. The thick descriptions from the 10 participants have provided insight and a deeper understanding of the experiences of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely. Two research questions were used to determine how

adjunct faculty who teach remotely experience belonging and in what ways they believe belonging could be cultivated. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase thematic analysis process, three themes emerged addressing the first research question: (1) adjuncting is isolating, online adjuncting is even more isolating; (2) being included; and (3) relationships can only be built when two entities want to connect. The second research question had two themes that emerged: (1) recognition is the biggest motivation, and (2) feeling like you are valued. The implications and recommendations for practice are organized by research questions and the five related themes.

RQ1: How do adjunct faculty who teach remotely experience belonging at their higher education institution?

The findings from theme one indicates that adjunct faculty who teach remotely are experiencing feelings of isolation. All ten participants expressed concerns about the effects of being isolated, echoing current research that highlights how isolation and disconnection for adjunct faculty can adversely affect their well-being, the student experience, and institutional culture (Batiste et al., 2023; Blankenship, 2022; Buch et al., 2023; Rahmat, 2024; Speights et al., 2024). Participants described the negative intrinsic feelings experienced when they felt isolated and described scenarios where a lack of connection or exclusion occurred. One participant, Charlie, expressed a different stance, stating that Charlie does not personally seek a sense of belonging in their adjunct role. However, Charlie acknowledged that many adjunct colleagues at their full-time institution often "feel removed." This contrast is significant because it underscores that while the need for belonging may not be universal among adjunct faculty, the widespread sense of disconnection still affects the community.

Beth recounted feeling “a great deal of sadness” when they described an experience of feeling isolated. Participants described feeling like an “add-on” or “siloed” as adjunct faculty teaching remotely. Institutions that fail to address the emotional and professional needs of remote adjuncts risk diminished instructional quality, higher faculty turnover, and weakened institutional culture. Speights et al. (2024) noted that adjunct faculty would feel more integrated if they had a seat at the table. Based on current literature and the findings of this study, HEIs need to focus on how to intentionally integrate remote adjunct faculty (Speights et al., 2024), viewing belonging not as an optional benefit but as essential to institutional effectiveness and student outcomes. The findings of theme one, in support of the current literature, suggest that prioritizing the inclusion of adjunct faculty may help to foster a more connected and engaged faculty, which could in turn positively impact the workplace culture for the adjunct faculty member (Christopher et al., 2022), student success (Ren, 2023; Toner et al., 2021), and the success of an academic institution (Rahmat, 2024).

Based on the findings of this study and related literature, several recommendations for practice are proposed to support the belonging of adjunct faculty who teach remotely and reduce isolation. First, HEIs should enhance communication channels to reduce adjunct faculty isolation. The desire for clear communication was noted by several participants. This could involve regular check-ins or newsletters where adjunct faculty can feel informed and connected. Clear and consistent targeted communication could mitigate feelings of isolation. This is confirmed by current literature, Brouwer et al. (2024) noted that clear and consistent communication nurtures a sense of belonging and overall wellbeing of adjunct faculty. The participants of this study echoed the significance of effective communication, supporting their sense of belonging.

The second recommendation for practice is to create more opportunities for community building. HEIs and leadership could support this by actively including adjunct faculty who teach remotely to department meetings, on-campus events if geographical proximity allows, or course revisions. These recommended practices could help address the isolation experienced by adjunct faculty assisting with employee retention (Cordaro et al., 2023), health risks associated with isolation (Allen et al. 2021), and student connections with adjunct faculty (Cordaro et al., 2023). The findings from theme one highlighted that isolation is not an individual problem. Instead, isolation is a systemic issue that has possible cascading negative effects spanning from the adjunct faculty member to the student experience, and the institutional culture. Addressing the isolation experienced by adjunct faculty who teach remotely could enhance a supportive and thriving academic environment.

The findings from the second theme suggest that intentional inclusion supports a sense of belonging for an adjunct faculty who teaches remotely. Participants reported feeling a strong sense of belonging when they were actively included whether through invited, allowed to collaborate, connect, or asked to be a part of committee work. Nine participants shared the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of being included through experiences of being invited or opportunities to connect. Additionally, six participants shared feeling like they belong through department-wide kick-off meetings or being asked for input in decision-making processes.

These findings are supported by prior research showing that a person's experiences of inclusion directly affect a person's perceptions of belonging (Walton & Brady, 2017). Moreover, current research from the American Federation of Teachers (2020) underscored the inequitable treatment adjunct faculty often face, with 69.7% of respondents reporting they do not have a say in decisions that impact them, and 41% feeling unrecognized as part of the faculty body at their

institution (American Federation of Teachers, 2020). Based on current literature and the findings of this study, an implication for practice is that HEIs should create formal and informal opportunities that intentionally include adjunct faculty who teach remotely.

Recommended strategies could include intentionally inviting adjunct faculty who teach remotely to meetings. HEIs could create virtual spaces for informal or formal connection or professional collaboration. These recommendations are supported by current literature, which suggests that belonging can be achieved by inviting adjunct faculty to meetings and social events to ensure they feel they are a part of the wider academic community (Brouwer et al., 2024; Negar et al., 2022). Hofman et al. (2024) noted that purposefully inviting adjunct faculty can help boost feelings of respect and support. These recommendations should be offered through multiple formats to promote equitable access. Intentional inclusion could be provided through in-person, synchronous virtual, or asynchronous recorded sessions to honor adjunct faculty with geographic constraints or scheduling complications. One potential recommendation to decrease feelings of isolation and promote inclusion could be offering virtual networking spaces. Formal and informal virtual networking spaces could foster a sense of belonging by providing opportunities to interact and connect at HEIs. These findings impact leadership, department chairs, or those responsible for faculty development. A lack of inclusion is not just an oversight; it directly affects the adjunct faculty's sense of belonging. Therefore, deliberate inclusion could assist with fostering connection, which benefits the faculty members and the HEI.

Additionally, HEIs should consider how to incorporate adjunct faculty who teach remotely in the decision-making process that affects them by offering spaces to collaborate or participating in governance. These practices could address gaps of inclusion noted by Dolan (2011) and Toner et al. (2022). Finally, these recommendations could mitigate the lack of

inclusion experienced by adjunct faculty by creating opportunities to network (Negar et al., 2022), collaborate (Hofman et al., 2024), or learn skills from each other, which may increase the adjunct faculty's feeling that they are a part of the academic community or strengthen a sense of belonging (Buch et al., 2023). Overall, intentional inclusion is an actionable step HEIs can take to foster a sense of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely.

The findings from the third theme demonstrate that adjunct faculty members' competencies and motivations to belong are significant factors for the ability to belong. Participants expressed that certain mindsets and competencies, such as growth or open mindsets, can foster a sense of belonging. Two participants mentioned that some adjuncts just want to "be left alone," while half of the participants emphasized the importance of having a personal "drive" to belong. Skills such as communication, technology, emotional intelligence, and the ability to work with minimal supervision were noted as key skills that may assist with the ability to belong. These findings align with the belonging framework by Allen et al. (2021), which indicated that one's competencies to belong may affect one's abilities or skills to belong. Similarly echoed in current literature, Chaharbashloo et al. (2024) identified key competencies for online faculty, including the ability to empathize, create a friendly learning environment, teach with compassion, knowledge of the LMS, administration requirements, and the ability to adjust. Based on this study and current literature, these findings imply that adjunct faculty competencies may also contribute to their ability to belong.

One recommendation that could contribute to awakening or supporting competencies could be faculty development programs. Faculty development programs emphasizing connection, collaboration, support, and enhancing knowledge and professional skills are pivotal in promoting faculty growth and enriching the educational environment (Guraya & Chen, 2019).

Therefore, workshops on emotional intelligence may assist with competencies and belonging. According to CASEL (2024) and Mallillin and Mallillin (2019), competencies such as communication, self-awareness, self-management, cultural competency, planning, teamwork, and teaching and learning abilities are important competencies. Opportunities for adjunct faculty to engage in professional development focused on empathy, self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness could enhance or reignite competencies supporting belonging components.

The findings indicate that belonging is a shared responsibility. Therefore, it is essential to address both institutional and individual contributions. Higher education leaders should ensure meaningful opportunities for adjunct faculty development, while adjunct faculty should be supported in developing the skills and mindsets that foster belonging. Improving an adjunct faculty's sense of belonging affects retention engagement and enhances student success (Brouwer et al., 2024; Hofman et al., 2024; Toner et al., 2022). Therefore, it would behoove researchers to explore what competencies best support the ability to belong in the remote work environment.

Although participants discussed certain competencies that may support belonging, some participants mentioned in generalities that adjunct faculty may only view the role as a side gig and be less interested in engagement. Four participants shared, through observations of other adjunct faculty, not themselves, that some adjunct faculty view adjuncting as a secondary role and prefer to be left alone. One participant, Charlie, shared not having an interest in belonging because of their full-time role, yet acknowledged that, in general, the other adjunct faculty they work within their full-time role often feel removed. There appears to be a gap in the literature confirming that adjunct faculty who view the role with a side gig mentality are less interested in being engaged. A possible recommendation from the findings of this study is to explore the

perceptions of adjunct faculty who are not interested in being involved and view the role as a side gig.

RQ2: In what ways do adjunct faculty who teach remotely believe their sense of belonging could be cultivated by their higher education institution?

The findings from theme one suggested that when adjunct faculty receive recognition for their contributions, their motivation and sense of value increase, fostering a stronger sense of belonging. Eight participants confirmed that being recognized boosted motivation and a sense of value. Additionally, the majority of participants shared how effective communication and visible, accessible leadership enhanced their sense of belonging. As previously mentioned, adjunct faculty appreciated formal and informal recognition methods. Participants shared that recognition spanned from emails from students to sitting at the dinner table with leadership. Current literature supports the findings of this study, noting that recognition is a significant motivator contributing to a sense of belonging. Batiste et al. (2023) highlighted that adjunct faculty frequently feel unrecognized, while Byrd (2022) emphasized that acknowledgment from students, higher education administrators, or colleagues can significantly enhance their sense of belonging. Similarly to this study, Hofman et al. (2024) noted that adjunct faculty want their work recognized by supervisors.

While receiving recognition was confirmed by the participants and current literature, it remains important to consider the role of leadership at an HEI. Batiste et al. (2023) and Perrotta & Bohan (2020) discussed how reduced face-to-face time with leaders impedes an adjunct faculty's sense of belonging. This recent research was confirmed in the findings of this study. Additionally, Culver et al. (2020) and Batiste et al. (2023) highlighted how leadership behaviors toward adjunct faculty shape the culture and climate of an HEI. Confirming the literature, the

findings of this study indicated that when adjunct faculty do not feel valued or recognized by their leadership, motivation to connect with stakeholders across the HEI, including students, may be diminished. Participants shared that they value visible and consistent leadership efforts, open communication, and informal and formal opportunities to be recognized as contributing factors to their sense of belonging.

The implication of these findings implies that recognition can be a key strategic driver of motivation, a sense of value, and, ultimately, a sense of belonging. Leadership, faculty developers, or administration at an HEI should implement structured recognition programs that highlight adjunct faculty achievements through awards and public acknowledgments in both informal and formal ways. When HEIs prioritize recognizing adjunct faculty who teach remotely, this could increase morale, contributing positively to engaged faculty, overall well-being, and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is linked to a higher quality instructor (Hofman et al., 2024), contributing to higher student retention. Therefore, taking steps to recognize adjunct faculty and ensuring visible, accessible leadership should be a top priority of HEIs.

The findings from theme two indicate that adjunct faculty feel valued through professional development, fair compensation, meaningful interactions, autonomy, and having space to connect or engage in mentorship. The implications of these findings are that feeling valued is multi-dimensional, much like the complexities of belonging. Participants shared the impact of successful onboarding and professional development experiences that contributed to their sense of belonging and connectedness. These findings are similar to the current literature, which emphasizes that professional development that offers growth within the adjunct faculty members' field and successful onboarding experiences support connectedness, belonging, and overall well-being (Brouwer et al., 2024; Speights et al., 2024).

Fair compensation emerged as an important factor in feeling a sense of value. At the same time, one participant, Leo, stated the paycheck did not matter, instead emphasizing the importance of intrinsic recognition over pay. Leo's perception diverged from that of the other three participants, who discussed fair compensation. Current literature corroborates the concerns about low pay (American Federation of Teachers, 2020; Brouwer et al., 2024; Gelman et al., 2022) and points to how higher pay contributes to feeling valued (Hofman et al., 2024; Toner et al., 2022). The findings also suggested that feeling a part of something and having autonomy contributes to feeling valued.

Adjunct faculty stated that when they felt like they were a part of something, it contributed to their sense of belonging and value. Participants indicated that small actions, such as a simple newsletter or having their leadership cover for them while on vacation, supported a sense of belonging. Organizational strategies, such as a regular newsletter or designated time to hear from leadership, can help adjunct faculty feel supported and enhance their connection to the institution (Brouwer et al., 2024; Speights et al., 2024). These nuanced perspectives highlight how pay, professional development, and feeling a part of something contribute to feeling valued.

Lastly, the findings indicate that offering a space to connect and mentorship opportunities can bolster a sense of belonging. Participants resoundingly mentioned the desire to have opportunities to connect, whether it is through informal or formal channels. Current literature recommends focusing on issues such as lack of acknowledgment, a deficit of value, exclusion from institutional decisions, insufficient interaction with colleagues, and absence of belonging (Batiste et al., 2023; Butters & Gann, 2022; Danaei, 2019; Dolan 2011). Batiste et al. (2023) pointed out that adjunct faculty who teach remotely do not have a designated office space, which furthers the divide between faculty and employers. The absence of such spaces exacerbates

feelings of isolation and disconnection, possibly contributing to the divide between adjunct faculty and the HEI (Batiste et al., 2023). Based on current literature and the findings of this study, recommendations for practice may include creating structured opportunities and designated virtual or in-person spaces where adjunct faculty can connect, collaborate, and feel valued.

The implication of these findings is that feeling valued is multi-dimensional for remote adjunct faculty and directly influences their sense of belonging, well-being, and engagement. HEIs need to recognize that value is not conveyed solely through pay but through intentional onboarding, access to meaningful professional development, mentorship opportunities, and inclusion. When these elements are missing or inconsistent, it may result in disengagement, reduced instructional quality, and a weakened institutional commitment. As Speights et al. (2024) stated, "Higher education needs to continue improving working conditions for adjunct faculty, not only in fair pay, benefits, and job security, but also in working toward inclusion and increased respect" (p. 222). These insights point to the need for actionable strategies that strengthen connection and belonging among remote adjunct faculty.

A recommendation for practice is for HEIs to create designated spaces for adjunct faculty to connect, collaborate, and feel like a valued member of an institution. These spaces might include regular virtual meetups through Zoom, Teams, or other AI tools that support virtual meetings, faculty communities, or, where applicable, designated physical offices or meeting areas for adjuncts to foster collaboration and engagement. Another recommendation noted by Leo in the findings could be offering connections through a "team lead" relationship at an HEI. A "team lead" program could provide connection, support, and assist with integrating the adjunct faculty into the HEI, alleviating feelings of isolation. By providing these opportunities, HEIs

could help reduce isolation and improve the sense of belonging for adjunct faculty, enhancing their contributions, contributing to a sense of value to the institution, and improving retention rates.

The recommendations for practice from this study provide actionable steps to address isolation, enhance inclusion, and strengthen adjunct faculty competencies to belong (Allen et al., 2021; Buch et al., 2023; CASEL, 2024; Cordaro et al., 2023; Mallillin & Mallillin, 2019). Additionally, developing programs that recognize adjunct faculty's contributions, enhance leadership's role to cultivate a sense of belonging, and creating spaces where adjunct faculty feel valued will support and improve faculty well-being, institutional success, and the student experience (Batiste et al., 2023; Byrd, 2022; Culver et al., 2020; Speights; 2024). Overall, addressing how adjunct faculty experience a sense of belonging should lead to more inclusive, supportive, and collaborative environments that enhance faculty satisfaction and positively impact student engagement and academic outcomes.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore how adjunct faculty who teach remotely in higher education institutions experience belonging. By listening to the perceptions of adjunct faculty, strategies for cultivating adjunct faculty belonging can be formulated. The findings of the study yielded five main themes and implications. Current reports estimate that over 50% of the faculty body at HEIs are adjunct faculty (AAUP, 2018; Christopher et al., 2022; Speights et al., 2024). Considering the growing number of adjunct faculty and limited research on how adjunct faculty who teach remotely experience belonging, expanding our understanding of the experience of belonging through broader or focused studies remains crucial.

This study explored the problem, purpose, and research questions using a qualitative descriptive approach. One implication from this study is that adjunct faculty who teach remotely experience belonging in complex, nuanced ways. Seven different types of HEIs were captured in this qualitative descriptive study including private nonprofit universities, public universities, private religious colleges, community colleges, and other institutional types. A recommendation for future research could be to explore the perceptions of belonging through a bounded system using a single case study design. Using a bounded system at one type of HEI, specifically a single institution, could provide an in-depth exploration of the experiences of belonging for adjunct faculty. A single case study could also incorporate the perspectives of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely at one HEI but could also include how other stakeholders such as the leadership, staff, or full-time faculty perceive adjunct faculty belonging at the HEI. Including multiple roles within a single institution may provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely by other employees who work remotely at HEIs. Lastly, a single case study could lead to recommendations that improve the culture of belonging within the single institution being studied.

One of the findings from this study was that the adjunct faculty experienced a sense of value through professional development, which contributed to their feelings of connection at an HEI. Another recommendation for future research could be to design a quasi-experimental study to examine the impact of participating in a targeted intervention, such as a mentoring program, on adjunct faculty's sense of belonging. The study could compare the experience of belonging at the HEI for adjunct faculty who receive the intervention with those who do not. This approach could offer insight into the effectiveness of cultivating adjunct faculty's sense of belonging

through targeted professional development programs. Furthermore, it could provide quantifiable evidence of why some programs may be more effective than others.

This study explored the experiences of belonging using the four components outlined by Allen et al. (2021): opportunities, perceptions, motivations, and competencies to belong. A third recommendation for future research would be to conduct a phenomenological study that explores the essence of one component of belonging from the Allen et al. (2021) framework at a deeper level. It would be interesting to understand the essence of one of the components of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely. By recommending a phenomenological study to explore the essence of one component of the Allen et al. (2021) framework, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how belonging is experienced. A phenomenological study could also offer valuable insights that inform strategies to support belonging in the remote environment.

These recommendations aim to provide actionable insights for HEIs, helping them create more inclusive environments and implement evidence-based strategies that enhance adjunct faculty engagement, reduce isolation, and improve overall faculty satisfaction. The recommendations for future research could directly influence HEI practices and policies, making them highly relevant and valuable for fostering a sense of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely. Moreover, the proposed recommendations for future research would expand the literature on belonging, offering pathways for HEIs to adopt informed approaches that support an adjunct faculty's sense of belonging, improving the working conditions of the adjunct faculty members and the institutions they serve.

Conclusions

This descriptive qualitative study addressed the issue of a lack of belonging for adjunct faculty teaching remotely at higher education institutions (Batiste et al., 2023; Blankinship,

2022; Buch et al., 2023; Olson, 2021; Rahmat, 2024). The purpose of the study was addressed by exploring how adjunct faculty who teach remotely in higher education institutions experience belonging (Batiste et al., 2023; Blankinship, 2022; Cottom et al., 2018; Trespalacios et al., 2021). Through understanding the perceptions of adjunct faculty, the study also aimed to propose strategies for cultivating a greater sense of belonging. A qualitative methodology provided a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Bloomberg, 2023; Creswell, 2015). Several strategies were used to ensure a rigorous qualitative study was performed, including open-ended research questions, purposeful sampling, thick descriptions from the participants, proving trustworthiness throughout the research process, engaging in a multilayered data analysis process, and engaging in a reflexive process as a researcher (Bloomberg, 2023).

I served as the primary instrument in this study, data collection, data analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings (Bloomberg, 2023). A self-developed interview protocol was used, grounded in Allen et al.'s (2021) belonging framework, which explores perceptions, motivations, opportunities, and competencies to belong. Field testers reviewed the interview and questionnaire items to ensure clarity. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted using Zoom; all participants completed a questionnaire and verified their transcripts for accuracy. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process guided the data analysis. Additionally, reflexive practices, including journaling and memoing, helped address biases, track insights, and evaluate the steps taken throughout data collection and analysis.

The findings of this study contribute to educational practice by making recommendations to improve the working environment for adjunct faculty who teach remotely. The results of the analysis process provided five themes that address the two research questions this study aimed to answer. The research questions were: How do adjunct faculty who teach remotely experience

belonging at their higher education institution? And, in what ways do adjunct faculty who teach remotely believe their sense of belonging could be cultivated by their higher education institution? Three themes emerged for RQ1: (1) adjuncting is isolating, online adjuncting is even more isolating; (2) being included; and (3) relationships can only be built when two entities want to connect. These findings indicate that adjunct faculty who teach remotely may experience a heightened sense of isolation, and intentional efforts to include them in the institutional community and foster meaningful relationships are significant factors in feeling a sense of belonging. Additionally, belonging requires mutual participation.

Two themes emerged for RQ2: (1) recognition is the biggest motivation; and (2) feeling like you are valued. These results indicate that for adjunct faculty to feel a stronger sense of belonging, their institutions need to prioritize recognition and ensure adjunct faculty feel valued. The findings underscore the need for institutions to actively engage with adjunct faculty and create opportunities for connection and inclusion. The implications of the study point to a few key recommendations for RQ1, which include addressing isolation by providing intentional spaces to connect, offering formal and informal opportunities for adjunct faculty to be included, and offering faculty development opportunities that contribute to awakening or supporting competencies to belong. For RQ2, the key recommendations include implementing structured recognition programs to ensure adjunct faculty feel acknowledged, increasing leadership visibility to help adjunct faculty feel connected to the institution, and creating opportunities to feel valued. These recommendations aim to strengthen adjunct faculty's sense of belonging and contribute to a more inclusive and supportive institutional culture.

The significance of this study expands beyond adjunct faculty and the higher education landscape. Allen et al. (2021) argued that assessing belonging will enhance the understanding of

belonging and contribute to how belonging may be cultivated, ultimately improving human health and resilience. In a time with ever-changing and evolving technologies, one thing remains deeply rooted in the existence of being human: the significance of community, connection, and belonging. This dissertation offers a deeper understanding of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely and contributes to the body of knowledge on belonging within the human experience.

References

- Ahn, M. Y., & Davis, H. H. (2023). Students' sense of belonging and their socio-economic status in higher education: A quantitative approach. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 28(1), 136–149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2020.1778664>
- Allen, K. A., Kern, M. L., Rozek, C. S., McInerney, D. M., & Slavich, G. M. (2021). Belonging: A review of conceptual issues, an integrative framework, and directions for future research. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 73(1), 87–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2021.1883409>
- Allen, K. A., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 30(1), 1–34. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9389-8>
- Amiti, F. (2020). Synchronous and asynchronous e-learning. *European Journal of Open Education and E-Learning Studies*, 5(2).
- Anthony, W., Brown, P. L., Fynn, N., & Gadzekpo, P. (2020). The plight of adjuncts in higher education. *Practitioner to Practitioner*, 10(4), 3–10.
- Baran, E., Correia, A-P., & Thompson, A. (2011) Transforming online teaching practice: Critical analysis of the literature on the roles and competencies of online teachers. *Distance Education*, 32(3), 421-439, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2011.610293>
- Batiste, H., Benson, W. L., & Garcia, C. (2023). I am not worthy: How interpersonal experiences influence perceived value and worth of full- and part-time faculty. *Management in Education (Sage Publications, Ltd.)*, 37(4), 169–177. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08920206211027633>

- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, *117*(3), 497–529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>
- Baumeister, R. F., & Robson, D. A. (2021). Belongingness and the modern schoolchild: On loneliness, socioemotional health, self-esteem, evolutionary mismatch, online sociality, and the numbness of rejection. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, *73*(1), 103–111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049530.2021.1877573>
- Blankinship, A. C. (2022). *Toward fostering a sense of community among online adjunct faculty: Strategies of selected higher education Administrators* (Order No. 28866721) [Doctoral dissertation, William & Mary University]. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2627129802). <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/nu.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/toward-fostering-sense-community-among-online/docview/2627129802/se-2>
- Bloomberg, L. (2023). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end* (5th ed.). Sage.
- Blum, L., A. (1996). Community. In J. J. Chambliss (Ed.), *Philosophy of education: An encyclopedia* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGljbGU6MjE5MTAzMA==?aid=102577>
- Bourke & Bourke, (2009). Community. In R. Hutchinson (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of urban studies* (1st ed.). Sage Publications. <https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGljbGU6MTIwNDI3MQ==?aid=102577>

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE.
- Brouwer, H. J., Griffiths, S., Jacob, A., Ricks, T. A., Schulz, P., Lavell, S., Jacob, E. (2024). What are the facilitators and barriers experienced by sessional academics during the process of onboarding: a scoping review. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 46(6), 585–602. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2024.2340987>
- Buch, K., McCullough, H., & Kapota, J. (2023). Virtual faculty learning communities: An innovative approach to supporting adjunct faculty. *The Journal of Faculty Development*, 37(1) <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/virtual-faculty-learning-communities-innovative/docview/2760887042/se-2?accountid=253200>
- Bull, D., Johansen, A., Kaiser, D., Merritt-Myrick, S., Nybro, P., Santangelo, D., & Tarr, J. (2024). The effect of a belongingness strategy on online higher education student performance measures. *Cogent Education*, 11(1), 2311612
- Burns, M., Bally, J., Burles, M., Holtslander, L., & Peacock, S. (2022). Constructivist grounded theory or interpretive phenomenology? methodological choices within specific study contexts. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221077758>
- Byrd, M. Y. (2022). Creating a culture of inclusion and belongingness in remote work environments that sustains meaningful work. *Human Resource Development International*, 25(2), 145–162.

- Canlas, A. L., & Williams, M. R. (2022). Meeting belongingness needs: An inclusive leadership practitioner's approach. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 24(4), 225–241. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15234223221118953>
- Chaharbashloo, H., Talebzadeh, H., Largani, M. H., & Amirian, S. (2024). A systematic review of online teaching competencies in higher education context: A multilevel model for professional development. *Research & Practice in Technology Enhanced Learning*, 19, 1–43. <https://doi.org/10.58459/rptel.2024.19014>
- Chankseliani, M., Qoraboyev, I., & Gimranova, D. (2021). Higher education contributing to local, national, and global development: new empirical and conceptual insights. *Higher Education*, 81, 109–127.
- Chitra, A. & Raj, M. (2018). E-Learning. *Journal of Applied and Advanced Research*. 3. 11. <https://doi.org/10.21839/jaar.2018.v3iS1.158>
- Christopher, T., Kumar, A., & Todd Benson, R. (2022). Fine wine at discount prices? A review of the research on the part-time faculty workforce. Research & Occasional Paper Series: CSHE. 7.2022. Center for Studies in Higher Education.
- Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). (2024). *Fundamentals of SEL*. <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/>
- Colby, G. (2023). Data snapshot: Tenure and contingency in US higher education. AAUP (American Association of University Professors, March 16, 2023).
- Cottom et al., C., Atwell, A., Martino, L., & Ombres, S. (2018). Virtual community of practice: Connecting online adjunct faculty. *Learning Communities Journal*, 10(1), 27.

- Cordaro, M., Howard, K., Schmiedehaus, E., & Dailey, S. Faculty mental health and compassion fatigue: A call to the profession, a call to the institution. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*, 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15555240.2023.2292120>
- Crawford, J., Allen, K. A., Sanders, T., Baumeister, R., Parker, P., Saunders, C., & Tice, D. (2024). Sense of belonging in higher education students: An Australian longitudinal study from 2013 to 2019. *Studies in Higher Education*, 49(3), 395–409.
- Crespín-Trujillo, V., & Hora, M. T. (2021). Teaching during a pandemic: Insights into faculty teaching practices and implications for future improvement. *New directions for Community Colleges*, 2021(195), 13–22. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20463>
- Creswell, J. (Academic). (2015). Types of qualitative research [Video]. Sage Research Methods. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506363431>
- Cudjoe, E. (2023). Making sense of husserlian phenomenological philosophy in empirical research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22, 16094069231171099. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231171099>
- Culver, K.C., Young, R.L. & Barnhardt, C.L. (2020). Communicating support: examining perceived organizational support among faculty members with differing appointment types. *Innov High Educ* 45, 299–315. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-020-09503-z>
- Cummins, P. A., Arbogast, A., McGrew, K., & Bahr, P. R. (2022). Barriers and facilitators for mid- and later-life community college students: The role of faculty. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 46(6), 431–434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2021.1876783>
- Danaei, K. J. (2019). Literature review of adjunct faculty. *Educational research: theory and practice*, 30(2), 17–33.

DeDominicis, B., E. (2016). Remote faculty. In S. L. Danver (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Online Education* (1st ed.). Sage Publications.

<https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGljbGU6NDMyMzIxMw==?aid=102577>

Dennis M. J. (2021). Did COVID-19 make any positive contributions to higher education?. *Dean and Provost*, 23(2), 6–7. <https://doi.org/10.1002/dap.30937>

Diehl, W., Calvin. (2020). Online education. In M. J. Amey; M. E. David (Eds.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Higher Education* (1st ed.). Sage UK.

<https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGljbGU6NTE0OTc=?aid=102577>

Doyle, L., McCabe, C., Keogh, B., Brady, A., & McCann, M. (2020). An overview of the qualitative descriptive design within nursing research. *Journal of research in nursing: JRN*, 25(5), 443–455. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987119880234>

Dweck, C. S., & Yeager, D. S. (2021). A growth mindset about intelligence. In *Handbook of wise interventions: How social psychology can help people change*. (pp. 9–35).

Edmonds, W. A., & Kennedy, T. D. (2017). *An applied guide to research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods* (Second ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071802779>

Elliott, R., & Timulak, L. (2005). Descriptive and interpretive approaches to qualitative research. *A handbook of research methods for clinical and health psychology*, 1(7), 147–159.

Farakish, N., Cherches, T. & Zou, S. (2022). Faculty success initiative: an innovative approach to professional faculty onboarding and development. *J Form Des Learn* 6, 113–126.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s41686-022-00069-x>

- Ferencz, T. L. (2017). Shared perceptions of online adjunct faculty in the united states who have a high sense of community. *Journal of Educators Online*, 14(2), n2.
- Fernández-Batanero, J. M., Montenegro-Rueda, M., Fernández-Cerero, J., & Tadeu, P. (2022). Online education in higher education: Emerging solutions in crisis times. *Heliyon*, 8(8), e10139. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e10139>
- Garrett, R., Simunich, B., Legon, R., & Fredericksen, E. E. (2023). CHLOE 8: student demand moves higher ed toward a multi-modal future, the changing landscape of online education, 2023. Quality Matters and Encoura Eduventures Research.
- Garza Mitchell, R., L. (2020). Distance education, history of. In M. J. Amey; M. E. David (Eds.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Higher Education* (1st ed.). Sage UK.
<https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGljbGU6NTEyNDM=?aid=102577>
- Getz, D. (Ed.). (2021). Belonging(Ness). In *events management theory and methods: Dictionary of event studies, event management and event tourism* (1st ed.). Goodfellow Publishers.
<https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGljbGU6NDg5OTE2OA==?aid=102577>
- Gelman, C., Gandel, J., & Bausman, M. (2022). A multi-faceted, adjunct-centered initiative to support part-time faculty. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 42(1), 82–99.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2021.2013000>
- Given, L. M. (2008). Phenomenology. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (Vol. 0, pp. 615-619). SAGE Publications, Inc.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909>

- González, C., Ponce, D., & Fernández, V. (2023). Teachers' experiences of teaching online during COVID-19: implications for post pandemic professional development. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 71(1), 55–78.
- Gravett, K., & Ajjawi, R. (2022). Belonging as situated practice. *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(7), 1386–1396. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2021.1894118>
- Gründahl, M., Weiß, M., Maier, L., Hewig, J., Deckert, J., & Hein, G. (2022). Construction and validation of a scale to measure loneliness and isolation during social distancing and its effect on mental health. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 13.
- Haffar, M., Al-Karaghoul, W., Djebarni, R., Al-Hyari, K., Gbadamosi, G., Oster, F., & Ahmed, A. (2023). Organizational culture and affective commitment to e-learning changes during COVID-19 pandemic: The underlying effects of readiness for change. *Journal of Business Research*, 155, 113396.
- Hagerty, B. M., & Patusky, K. (1995). Developing a measure of sense of belonging. *Nursing research*, 44(1), 9–13.
- Hagerty, B. M., Lynch-Sauer, J., Patusky, K. L., Bouwsema, M., & Collier, P. (1992). Sense of belonging: a vital mental health concept. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 6(3), 172–177. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0883-9417\(92\)90028-h](https://doi.org/10.1016/0883-9417(92)90028-h)
- Hennink, M., & Kaiser, B. N. (2022). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests. *Social Science & Medicine*, 292, 114523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114523>
- Hofman, L., Nummela-Hanel, B., Lippert, K., & Rodrigues, C. (2024). Perceptions of university culture and community among online adjuncts. *Christian Higher Education*, 23(5), 464–483. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15363759.2024.2358400>
- Holt-Lunstad, J. (2018). Why social

relationships are important for physical health: A systems approach to understanding and modifying risk and protection. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *69*, 437–458.

<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-122216-011902>

Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing Interview Protocols and Conducting Interviews: tips for students new to the field of qualitative research in *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 17.

Jo, L., & Ardoin, S. (2020). Contingent faculty. In M. J. Amey & M. E. David (Eds.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Higher Education* (1st ed.). Sage UK.

<https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGljbGU6NTEyMTI=?aid=102577>

Johnson, N., Veletsianos, G., & Seaman, J. (2020). US faculty and administrators' experiences and approaches in the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Online Learning*, *24*(2), 6–21.

Jung, H.S.; Song, M.K.; Yoon, H.H. (2021). The effects of workplace loneliness on work engagement and organizational commitment: moderating roles of leader-member exchange and coworker exchange. *Sustainability*, *13*, 948.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/su13020948>

Karakose, T. (2021). The impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on higher education: Opportunities and implications for policy and practice. *Educational Process: International Journal (EDUPIJ)*, *10*(1), 7-12.

Klusmann, U., Richter, D., & Lüdtke, O. (2016). Teachers' emotional exhaustion is negatively related to students' achievement: Evidence from a large-scale assessment study. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *108*(8), 1193.

- Kim, H., Sefcik, J. S., & Bradway, C. (2017). Characteristics of Qualitative Descriptive Studies: A Systematic Review. *Research in nursing & health*, 40(1), 23–42.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.21768>
- Korotchenko, S. & Dobbs, R. (2023). The effect of COVID-19 pandemic on college enrollment: How has enrollment in criminal justice programs been affected by the pandemic in comparison to other college programs.
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2023.1136040/full#ref22>
- Larsen, H.G. (2023). *Eight Domains of Phenomenology and Research Methods* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003270058>
- Leary, R., & Kelly, M. (2009). Belonging motivation. *Handbook of individual differences in social behavior*, 400409.
- Liljegren, D. G. (2016). Faculty, adjunct. In S. Danver (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Online Education*. Sage Publications. Retrieved January 23, 2024, from <https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGljbGU6NDMyMzA5NA==?aid=102577>.
- Loukas, A., & Ripperger-Suhler, K. (2018). School connectedness. In R. J. R. Levesque, *Encyclopedia of Adolescence* (2nd ed.). Springer Science + Business Media.
<https://search.credoreference.com/articles/Qm9va0FydGljbGU6NDc4MTE3NQ==?aid=102577>
- Mahar, A. L., Cobigo, V., & Stuart, H. (2013). Conceptualizing belonging. *Disability and rehabilitation*, 35(12), 1026–1032

- Mallillin, L. L. D., & Mallillin, J. B. (2019). Competency skills and performance level of faculties in the higher education institution (HEI). *European Journal of Education Studies*.
- Marasi, S., Jones, B., & Parker, J. M. (2022). Faculty satisfaction with online teaching: A comprehensive study with American faculty. *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(3), 513-525. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1767050>
- Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370–396. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>
- Martin, F., Kumar, S., & She, L. (2021). Examining higher education instructor perceptions of roles and competencies in online teaching. *Online Learning*, 25(4), 267–295.
- Martin, F., Wang, C., & Sadaf, A. (2018). Student perception of helpfulness of facilitation strategies that enhance instructor presence, connectedness, engagement and learning in online courses. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 37, 52–65.
- Mertler, C. A. (2019). *Introduction to educational research* (2nd ed.). SAGE.
- Moretz, P. (2022). *Understanding administrative support in online education: Voices of online adjunct faculty* (Order No. 29394212). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2714507133). <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/nu.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/understanding-administrative-support-online/docview/2714507133/se-2>
- Nduagbo, K. C. (2020). Online education past, current, and future. In L. Kyei-Blankson, E. Ntuli & J. Blankson (Eds.), *Handbook of research on creating meaningful experiences in online courses* (pp. 85–100). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-0115-3.ch007>

National Center for Education Statistics (2023). Characteristics of postsecondary faculty. COE - Characteristics of Postsecondary Faculty (ed.gov).

<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/csc/postsecondary-faculty>

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2025). Current term enrollment estimates:

Spring 2025. <https://nscresearchcenter.org/current-term-enrollment-estimates/>

National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. (1979). The belmont report: Ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/read-the-belmont-report/index.html>

Negar, F., Cherches, T., & Zou, S. (2022). Faculty success initiative: An innovative approach to professional faculty onboarding and development. *Journal of Formative Design in Learning*, 6 (2), 113–126. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41686-022-00069-x>

Nelson, G., Monson, M. J., & Adibifar, K. (2020). The gig economy comes to academia: Job satisfaction among adjunct faculty. *Cogent Education*, 7(1), 1786338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2020.1786338>

Nikolopoulou, K. (2022). Face-to-face, online and hybrid education: University students' opinions and preferences. *Journal of Digital Educational Technology*, 2(2), ep2206.

O'Grady, K. (2021). Prioritizing the part-time professor: How cultivating community impacts adjunct faculty motivation, participation and performance. A Quality Improvement Plan for Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business.

- Olo, D., Correia, L., & Rego, C. (2021). Higher education institutions and development: Missions, models, and challenges. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 12(2), 1–25.
- Olson, M. I. (2021). A sense of community, job satisfaction, and job retention among online adjunct faculty: A qualitative multiple case study (Ph.D.). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2642873044). <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/sense-community-job-satisfaction-retention-among/docview/2642873044/se-2?accountid=253200>
- Pardede, S., & Kovač, V. B. (2023). Distinguishing the need to belong and sense of belongingness: the relation between need to belong and personal appraisals under two different belongingness-conditions. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, 13(2), 331–344. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe13020025>
- Parker, M. L. (2014). Role & constructivist competencies of an online instructor: Elements of an online course. https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1911&context=oa_dissertations
- Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Sage publications.
- Peacock, S., Cowan, J., Irvine, L., & Williams, J. (2020). An exploration into the importance of a sense of belonging for online learners. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 21(2), 18–35.

- Pedler, M. L., Willis, R., & Nieuwoudt, J. E. (2022). A sense of belonging at university: Student retention, motivation and enjoyment. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *46*(3), 397-408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.19558444>
- Percy, W. H., Kostere, K., & Kostere, S. (2015). Generic qualitative research in psychology. *The Qualitative Report*, *20*(2), 76–85. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2097>
- Perrotta, K. A., & Bohan, C. H. (2020). A reflective study of online faculty teaching experiences in higher education. *Journal of Effective Teaching in Higher Education*, *3*(1), 50–66.
- Piotrowski, C., & King, C. (2020). COVID-19 pandemic: Challenges and implications for higher education. *Education*, *141*(2), 61-66.
- Prodgers, L., Travis, E. & Pownall, M. (2023). It's hard to feel a part of something when you've never met people: defining "learning community" in an online era. *High Educ* *85*, 1219–1234. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00886-w>
- Raes, A., Detienne, L., Windey, I., & Depaepe, F. (2020). A systematic literature review on synchronous hybrid learning: gaps identified. *Learning Environments Research*, *23*, 269–290.
- Rahmat, M. R. (2024). Compassion-based training for cultivating well-being and building resilience in online adjunct faculty. In *adjunct faculty in online higher education: Best practices for teaching adult learners* (pp. 20–48). IGI Global.
- Reed, R. (2021). Higher education administrator turnover: An examination of situational leadership styles. *College & University*, *96*(1), 2–15.
- Ren, X. (2023). Investigating the experiences of online instructors while engaging and empowering non-traditional learners in eCampus. *Educ Inf Technol* *28*, 237–253 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-11153-x>

- Resch, K., Alnahdi, G., & Schwab, S. (2023). Exploring the effects of the COVID-19 emergency remote education on students' social and academic integration in higher education in Austria. *Higher Education Research & Development, 42*(1), 215–229.
- Reyes, M. E., Cruz, R., & Meza, I. (2023). University membership through immersive virtual environments and a sense of belongingness. *Interactive Learning Environments, 1–13*
- Rhoades, G. (2020). Taking college teachers' working conditions seriously: Adjunct faculty and negotiating a labor-based conception of quality. *The Journal of Higher Education, 91*(3), 327-352. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2019.1664196>
- Russell, D. W. (1996). UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3): Reliability, validity, and factor structure. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 66*(1), 20-40.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2022). Self-determination theory. In *Encyclopedia of quality of life and well-being research* (pp. 1–7). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Sadagheyani, H. E., Ebrahimi, M., & Tatari, F. (2022). Investigating policies and factors affecting the faculty members' retention. *Journal of Advanced Pharmacy Education & Research, Jan–Mar, 12*(1), 75.
- Sam, C. H. (2021). How academic community and an ethic of care can shape adjunct work environments: A case study of a community college. *Journal of Academic Ethics, 19*(3), 323-341. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-021-09436-y>
- Sandelowski, M. (2000), Whatever happened to qualitative description?. *Res. Nurs. Health, 23*: 334-340. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240X\(200008\)23:4<334::AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-G](https://doi.org/10.1002/1098-240X(200008)23:4<334::AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-G)
- Schofer, E., Ramirez, F. O., & Meyer, J. W. (2021). The societal consequences of higher education. *Sociology of Education, 94*(1), 1-19.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040720942912>

- Sotardi, V. A. (2022). On institutional belongingness and academic performance: Mediating effects of social self-efficacy and metacognitive strategies. *Studies in Higher Education*, 47(12), 2444–2459. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2022.2081678>
- Speights, E., Harris, A., & Rogers, J. (2024). Pull up a Chair: Making Room at the Table for Adjunct Faculty. In *Adjunct Faculty in Online Higher Education: Best Practices for Teaching Adult Learners* (pp. 210-224). IGI Global.
- Terosky, A. L., & Heasley, C. (2015). Supporting online faculty through a sense of community and collegiality. *Online Learning*, 19(3), 147–161.
- The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (n.d.). About Carnegie Classification. Retrieved (Feb, 2024) from <https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/>.
- The American Federation of Teachers. *An Army of Temps: AFT 2020 Adjunct Faculty Quality of Work/Life Report*. Retrieved (Feb, 2024) from https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2020/adjuncts_qualityworklife2020.pdf
- The National Institutes of Health. *What are competencies?* Office of Human Resources. Retrieved (March, 2024) <https://hr.nih.gov/about/faq/working-nih/competencies/what-are-competencies>
- Thomas, G., & Myers, K. (2015). *The anatomy of the case study*. SAGE Publications Ltd, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473920156>
- Trespalacios, J., Snelson, C., Lowenthal, P. R., Uribe-Flórez, L., & Perkins, R. (2021). Community and connectedness in online higher education: A scoping review of the literature. *Distance Education*, 42(1), 5-21.

- Toner, J., Reyes, M., Schwartz, S. L., Parga, J., & Ryan, T. (2021). Emerging issues with remote faculty. *Journal of Social Work Education, 58*(4), 682–692.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10437797.2021.1957737>
- Townsend, K. C., & McWhirter, B. T. (2005). Connectedness: a review of the literature with implications for counseling, assessment, and research. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 83*(2), 191–201.
- US Department of Health and Human Services. (Retrieved December 10, 2023). Office for Human Resource Protections. The Belmont Report | HHS.gov
- Vo T, Tulliao K, Chen C. Work Motivation: The roles of individual needs and social conditions. *Behavioral Sciences. 2022; 12*(2):49. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs12020049>
- Walton, G. M., & Brady, S. T. (2017). The many questions of belonging. *Handbook of competence and motivation: Theory and application, 2*, 272–293.
- Weller, S. C., Vickers, B., Bernard, H. R., Blackburn, A. M., Borgatti, S., Gravlee, C. C., & Johnson, J. C. (2018). Open-ended interview questions and saturation. *PloS one, 13*(6), e0198606. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0198606>
- Wheele, T.; Weber, C.; Windlinger, L.; Haugen, T.; Lindkvist, C. (2023). A narrative literature review using placemaking theories to unravel student social connectedness in hybrid university learning environments. *Buildings, 13*, 339.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings13020339>
- Wilton, M., Gonzalez-Niño, E., McPartlan, P., Turner, Z., Christoffersen, R. E., & Rothman, J. H. (2019). Improving academic performance, belonging, and retention through increasing structure of an introductory biology course. *CBE—Life Sciences Education, 18*(4), ar53.
<https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.18-08-0155>

Wojcik, J. (2017). The relationship between sense of belonging and instructor self-efficacy among online adjunct faculty in higher education. Florida Atlantic University.

Appendices

Appendix A

IRB Approval



9388 Lightwave Ave.

San Diego, CA 92123

irb@nu.edu

Notice of Exemption

September 11, 2024

To: Emily Spranger

Project Title: Belonging Research

NU IRB Number: IRB-FY23-24-1149

Determination: Exempt from further review 45 CFR 46.101 Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

Status: Active - Research activities may begin as of September 11, 2024

Dear Emily Spranger:

The study referenced above has been reviewed by the National University IRB. The IRB has determined your research is exempt from further review under 45 CFR 46.104, which means you will not need to renew your study and may begin your study effective immediately. However, if you find the need to change your study in any way, you will need to submit a modification to the IRB prior to implementing the changes. This will allow the IRB to determine whether or not the study still meets exemption criteria.


Please review your Post Approval Responsibilities here: [Approved Documents Guidelines](#)

For any questions regarding your protocol, please reach out to the IRB at irb@nu.edu.

Sincerely,



Dr. Joseph Marron, IRB Chair



Dr. Brianne Mongeon, Director, HRPP & IRB



Jenessa Eberhardt, Associate Director, HRPP & IRB

Appendix B

Social Media Post

My name is Emily Spranger, and I am a doctoral student at National University. I am conducting a research study on the experiences of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely for a higher education institution (HEI). I am recruiting individuals who meet all these criteria:

Eligibility: You may participate in this research if you meet all the following criteria:

1. You are currently employed as an adjunct faculty member at a Higher Education Institution (HEI) located in the United States.
2. You have taught online at an HEI for at least two calendar years.
3. You are currently teaching online OR you have taught online within the preceding six months.

I hope to include 10–12 people in this research. If you know someone who might fit the eligibility criteria, please send them the details and have them contact me if they are interested in participating.

Activities

What you will be asked to do: If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

1. Participate in a 1:1 60-minute interview via Zoom.
2. Complete an online questionnaire for 20 minutes.
3. Review your interview transcript for 10–15 minutes to ensure accurate representation of your comments. You will receive the transcript via email.

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

1. Your perceptions of belonging at your HEI.
2. How your sense of belonging might be cultivated by your institution.
3. Your reflections about belonging and how it might affect your broader employment experience.

After you complete the interview, questionnaire, and review of transcripts, you will receive a \$20 Amazon Gift Card via your email.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me to set up a time for the interview at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Emily Spranger

Doctoral Candidate, National University

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

My Name is Emily Spranger, and I am a doctoral student at National University (NU). I hold the role of a Graduate Learning Specialist at National University. I'm asking you to take part in a research study about your experiences and perceptions of belonging at a higher education institution as an adjunct faculty who teaches online. The name of this research is "Belonging: A Qualitative Descriptive Study Exploring the Experiences of Adjunct Faculty Who Teach Remotely at Higher Education Institutions."

Eligibility

You may participate in this research if you meet all the following criteria:

1. You are currently employed as an adjunct faculty member at a Higher Education Institution (HEI) located in the United States.
2. You have taught online at an HEI for at least two calendar years.
3. You are currently teaching online OR you have taught online within the preceding six months.

I hope to include 10-12 people in this research. If you know someone who might fit the eligibility criteria, please send them the details and have them contact me if they are interested in participating.

Activities

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study. What you will be asked to do: If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities:

1. Participate in a 1:1 60-minute interview via Zoom.
2. Complete an online questionnaire for 20 minutes.
3. Review your interview transcript for 10–15 minutes to ensure accurate representation of your comments. You will receive the transcript via email.

During these activities, you will be asked questions about:

1. Your perceptions of belonging at your HEI.
2. How your sense of belonging might be cultivated by your institution.
3. Your reflections about belonging and how it might affect your broader employment experience.

Risks: There are minimal foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this research. You can skip any question you do not wish to answer, skip any activity, or stop participation at any time.

Benefits: If you participate, there are no direct benefits to you. This research may increase the body of knowledge in the subject area of this research.

Recording: I would like to audio/video record your responses and/or actions with Zoom during the interview with a second back up voice recorder. You can disable the video function of the online meeting platform at any time.

Compensation: After you complete the interview, questionnaire, and review of transcripts, you will receive a \$20 Amazon Gift Card via your email.

Mandated Reporting: My professional role outside of NU requires me to report suspicion of child or elderly abuse, suspicion of possible harm to self or others, and committed crimes to the appropriate authorities.

Confidentiality: I will keep the records of this study private and take reasonable measures to protect the security of all your personal information. In any report I make public, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you.

Taking part is voluntary: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may quit at any time.

If you have questions: Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) via email at [REDACTED].

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. During today's session I will ask questions about your perceptions of belonging, how your sense of belonging might be cultivated by your institution, and what your reflections about belonging are and how it might affect your broader employment experience. As a reminder, I will record our session through Zoom, store the data from this session in a secure cloud account, and delete the sessions within two years of the dissertation's publication. I would like to ask a few questions before we begin recording. Did you receive the consent form I emailed? Did you have time to review the consent form? Do you have any questions about the research or the consent form? Do you consent to participate in this research? I would like to remind you that after the interview, I will request that you complete the questionnaire and later review the interview transcript via email to ensure the recorded session's accuracy. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Thinking about your position as an adjunct faculty teaching remotely in an institution of higher education, I'm going to ask you a few questions about your experiences with belonging at your institution.

Begin Recording

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching remotely as an adjunct faculty?
1. Where do you currently teach remotely as an adjunct faculty?
2. How many HEIs do you currently teach for?
3. Can you tell me about a time when you felt a strong sense of belonging as a remote adjunct faculty member?

4. Can you tell me about a time when you felt a diminished sense of belonging as a remote adjunct faculty member?
5. Are there any interpersonal skills, abilities, or mindsets do you think an adjunct faculty member teaching remotely might have (or need to develop) that could help them experience belonging at their HEI?
6. Are there any opportunities that your institution(s) has offered that have helped you feel a greater sense of belonging?
 - a. What actions can leadership take cultivate a sense of belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely?
7. In what ways do you think belonging helps or hinders the motivations of adjunct faculty teaching online?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as an adjunct faculty related to a sense of belonging?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your contribution is greatly appreciated and will enhance our understanding belonging for adjunct faculty who teach remotely. The next step will be to take approximately 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire with the link I have provided you in the chat of Zoom.

Appendix E

Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this questionnaire. Your insights are valuable in understanding the experiences and perceptions of adjunct faculty. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions, the goal is to gather additional examples and insights. Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. Your responses will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes.

1. What skills and abilities do you use to support your ability to belong as a remote adjunct faculty member?
2. Can you describe a time when your sense of belonging was negatively impacted as an adjunct employee teaching remotely at your HEI?
3. Can you explain what kind of experiences with belonging increase your motivation to teach remotely as an adjunct faculty?
4. What opportunities for boosting a sense of belonging are available to adjunct faculty teaching remotely at your HEI(s)?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with belonging as an adjunct faculty member who teaches remotely?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Your responses are greatly appreciated and will contribute to our understanding of the experiences and perceptions of adjunct faculty who teach remotely for HEIs.