



Science  
Societies

# Creating spaces where all members can thrive

By Geoffrey Koch and Liz Gillispie

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*Brandon Gregory Bell, Talent and Culture Lead at Syngenta North America, delivered the presentation, "Finding Your Place: Cultivating Professional Belonging," during the CANVAS 2025 meeting in Salt Lake City in November.*

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At CANVAS 2025, the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee (DEIC) hosted programming focused on a timely theme: how we create spaces where all members can thrive.

Brandon Gregory Bell, Talent and Culture Lead at Syngenta North America, delivered the keynote presentation "Finding Your Place: Cultivating Professional Belonging." Bell's central message resonated with attendees: belonging isn't something that happens by accident—it's cultivated through intentional, everyday actions.

Participants were walked through the relationship among culture, inclusion, and belonging. Culture, Bell noted, is the collection of behaviors, values, and norms we create together. It's neither inherently good nor bad, but there's always room for improvement. Inclusive culture emerges when individual differences don't prevent involvement and contribution. And belonging? That's the outcome—the feeling of being fully accepted, valued, and empowered to show up authentically.

**Consistent, intentional actions can make a difference**

What made this presentation particularly actionable were the concrete behaviors Bell offered. Some were foundational: introduce yourself with your name and pronouns, greet people with a smile, and say hello when sitting down for sessions. Others pushed participants further: seek out collaboration with colleagues from different backgrounds, invite newcomers to join you for meals, and actively engage people who may be attending alone. Collectively, these behaviors demonstrated that fostering inclusion is less about grand gestures and more about consistent, intentional actions.

Speaking of intentional actions, the DEIC also launched "Grounds for Connection," a coffee and networking hour held on three mornings during CANVAS. The goal of this program was to create space for new attendees of all backgrounds, from new students to CCAs, where they can learn more about the Societies, their members, and opportunities for them to fit in. The response exceeded expectations with strong attendance each day. We're bringing it back next year—stay tuned!



*"Grounds for Connection," a coffee and networking hour held on three mornings during CANVAS 2025 in Salt Lake City, had strong attendance.*

Looking ahead, we're excited to share that the Agronomic Science Foundation has committed funding for the next three years to support the Bridge Scholars program, ensuring continued investment in diversifying our scientific community.

### **We're seeking new members**

Our committee is actively seeking new members to help plan events, workshops, and programming. Whether you have ideas to share, time to contribute, or simply want to be part of the conversation, we'd welcome your involvement! Email [Liz Gillispie](mailto:Liz.Gillispie@unh.edu)

(Committee Chair) or [Geoffrey Koch](#) (Vice Chair).

If committee work isn't for you right now, that's okay too. Bell's presentation reminded us that belonging starts small: with a smile, an introduction, an invitation to lunch.

These are challenging times for many in our community, but they're also times when small gestures of kindness and inclusion matter most! BE the change!

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