

## Greg Walton

Greg Walton is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Stanford University. Much of his research investigates psychological processes that contribute to major social problems and how “wise” interventions that target these processes can address such problems and help people flourish, even over long periods of time.

- One intervention he developed with Geoff Cohen to bolster students’ feelings of social belonging in the transition to college raised the academic achievement of ethnic-minority students over 3 years, and cut by half the achievement gap with white students (for more, see below)
- Another developed with Jason Okonofua and Dave Paunesku helped middle school teachers adapt an empathic mindset toward misbehaving students, and cut by half student suspension rates over an academic year.
- Other interventions aim to reduce intergroup prejudice, to promote environmental behaviors, to increase voter turnout, and to improve marriages.

In all these cases, Dr. Walton focuses on fundamental ways in which people make sense of themselves, other people, and social situations, how meanings people draw can be counterproductive and self-reinforcing (e.g., “People like me don’t belong here”) and how they can be altered to cause lasting benefits to individuals and to society.

Dr. Walton’s research has been covered in major media outlets including the *New York Times*, *Harvard Business Review*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Huffington Post*, *NPR*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Washington Post*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Onion*.

He has received awards from numerous organizations including the American Education Research Association, American Psychological Association, Society for Experimental Social Psychology, and the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, and was identified as a “Rising Star” by the American Psychological Society in 2011.

He has presented at major universities and to educators and policymakers including at the White House.

His research has been supported by the Institute for Education Sciences, the National Institute of Health, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Jeff and Tricia Raikes Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Spencer Foundation, the Joyce Foundation, and Character Lab.

In addition to his scholarship, Dr. Walton is a committed teacher and mentor. At Stanford, he teaches courses on psychology and social problems, including one entitled “Wise Interventions.”

Dr. Walton earned his A.B. in Philosophy from Stanford in 2000 and a PhD in Psychology from Yale University in 2005. After graduate school, he worked for a year as a fellow in the Office of Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and then completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Waterloo before joining the Stanford faculty in 2008.

## **The social belonging intervention**

In basic research, Dr. Walton and his collaborators have shown that one of the most powerful sources of influence on students' motivation is their sense of belonging: their feeling of membership in the social community and belief that they are valued and respected. However, this sense of belonging is at risk for students from groups that are negatively stereotyped and/or underrepresented in an academic environment. They reasonably worry about whether they—or people “like me”—will belong.

This insight led Dr. Walton to develop the social-belonging intervention. This intervention uses information and stories from older students to help students entering a new school see that common challenges—like getting criticized, or feeling lonely—are normal experiences that improve with time, not necessarily evidence that “I don't belong.” This helps students see belonging *as a process*, not a fixed quality.

In multiple trials with thousands of students, this intervention has raised achievement for students facing disadvantage in school settings (e.g., Walton & Cohen, 2011; Walton, Logel, Peach, Spencer, & Zanna, 2015; Yeager, Walton, et al., 2016).