First Generation College Students: The Invisible Minority

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First Generation College Students

Framework for today’s conversation

• Facts about First Generation College Students
• Institutional Actions Impacting Success
• Next Steps
  • Focus on the transition into college
  • Focus on out-of-class engagement
  • Focus on academic engagement
Questions to Help Frame the Conversation

1. What is the climate on your campus for first-generation students?
   • How are FGS identified?
   • How are FGS defined?

2. Compared to non-first generation, are first-generation students on your campus successful?
   • Are FGS learning, being retained, and graduating?
   • Who is responsible for addressing the needs of FGS?
   • What is the motivation to assist FGS?

3. What is your campus doing to assist first-generation students?
   • What might be getting in the way of assisting these students?
   • What are the risks/costs of doing nothing?
Facts about First Generation Students

Difficult to identify
- Definitions of first generation student
- About one-third of all college students are FGS
- They are an “Invisible Minority” on many campuses

Compared to Non-First Generation Students, generally, First Generation Students are:
- Lacking in cultural capital and parental support
- Inadequately prepared for college
- Less engaged in out-of-class experiences
- More affected by college costs and debt

As a result...
First Generation Students tend to:
- Be at-risk as learners
- Have lower aspirations and lower self-efficacy
- Feel marginalized and like an impostor
- Drop out and stop out of college at higher levels
- Receive less attention and resources they deserve
Institutional Actions that Impact Success

INSTITUTIONS MUST:
• Have a “desire to assist” prior to focusing on “how to assist”
• Recognize that First-Gens are:
  • Under-prepared and Under-represented
• Allocate appropriate resources
• Know their students
• Counteract benign neglect
• Be intentional about learning
• Practice continuous improvement
Next Steps:
The Transition into College

Focus on students’ transition into college:
• Examine/discover your institution’s first-generation entering student profile; document, disseminate, teach, and train
• Provide tailored information for students and parents/families during recruitment
• Create specific new student orientation programs
• Provide scholarship assistance
• Tailor initial advising processes and institutional policies to address needs
• Do not assume successful assimilation, and don’t leave serendipity to chance
Two Examples

Angelo State University (TX)  
First in the Family Program
  • **Connects** FGS students with mentors (upper class FGS) and role models who encourage and support
  • **Equips** students with valuable skill sets for success
  • **Nurtures** pipeline for West Texas-area high school students who are considering being first in their family to attend college
  • **Matches** FGS students with local host families *(Host Family Program)* who help students adjust to college life

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
“Carolina Firsts” *(Winner of 2012 CollegeKeys Compact Innovation Award from The College Board)*
  • **Re-imagines** campus and community support for students
  • **Student organization** that provides academic and social support to FGS (20% of population)
  • **Outreach** programs and activities highly visible, woven into institutional culture
  • **Central nerve** for information and campus resources for FGS
Next Steps:
Out-of-Class Engagement

Create Intentional Engagement Opportunities:

• **Make** others aware of the **connection** between **engagement** and **learning**
• **Understand** how **engagement** is **compensatory** for FGS
• **Make** on-campus living **desirable**, **available** and **supportive**
• **Harvest** the **power** of **networks**
  • **Formal and informal**
    • Faculty and staff
    • Learning **communities**
    • Student **organizations**
    • **Mentoring** systems
Two Examples

Northern Kentucky University
University Connect and Persist
(UCAP)
• Re-imagines campus and community support for students
• Connects faculty, staff, and students in new ways
• Fosters proactive collaborations
• Facilitates intentional networks
• Provides tools and strategies that help NKU engage and support students.

Student benefit:
Intentional student networks within a campus community that delivers unparalleled student service before students know they need them

First Scholars Program
(Suder Foundation)
• Comprehensive Student Support
  • Academic
  • Social integration
  • Personal development
  • Financial needs
• Program Evaluation
  • Academic performance
  • Retention
  • Persistence
  • Student engagement
• Current Affiliates
  • University of Kentucky
  • University of Alabama
  • SIU Carbondale
  • University of Memphis
  • Washington State University
Next Steps: Academic Engagement

Focus on Academic Success:

• **Faculty** development
• **First year experience**
• **Advising** and support for choice of major
• Teach **help-seeking** skills
• Promote **experiential learning:**
  • Service-learning
  • Study abroad
  • Research
  • Internships
Two Examples

Academic Learning Communities

- University of Kentucky
  - Residential
  - **Cohorts** in UK101 and freshmen writing and communications classes
- University of Cincinnati
  - Residential
  - Academic **mentoring and monitoring**
  - Study skills class
  - Time management contract

Faculty Development

- Chapman University
  - Promising Futures Program
  - **Web resources** for faculty
- James Madison Univ.
  - First Generation Mentors – connecting faculty and student affairs staff who were once **first generation students** with current first gen students
- Grand Valley State University
  - Video and print resources for **academic advisors** of first generation students
How to Create Effective Learning Environments for First Generation Students

• First, **identify** your first generation students and understand what they **need** to succeed at **your** institution.

• Second, be clear and specific about what you want these students to **learn** and **accomplish** or how you want them to **change**.

• Third, create specific **learning opportunities**, in and out-of-class, designed to produce those stated learning outcomes.

• Fourth, **measure student learning** and change to determine the impact of your efforts and identify areas for institutional improvement.
Final Thought...

If a first generation student on your campus feels that there is only one person who cares about his or her success, let that person be you.
Thank You

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