

# First-Generation College Students: What is Success?

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# What the Demographic Data Tells Us

National Center for Education Statistics' Beginning Postsecondary Study

- o Older
- o Female
- o Have a disability
- o Come from minority background
- o Non-native English speaker
- o Have dependent children as single parent
- o Less likely to have parental support
- o Family pressure to return home often
- o May receive mixed messages about their changing identities

# What the Demographic Data Tells Us

National Center for Education Statistics' Beginning Postsecondary Study

- o More likely than their most advantaged peers to:
  - o Delay entry into postsecondary education
  - o Attend college closer to home
  - o Live off-campus
  - o Attend part-time and
  - o Work full-time while enrolled

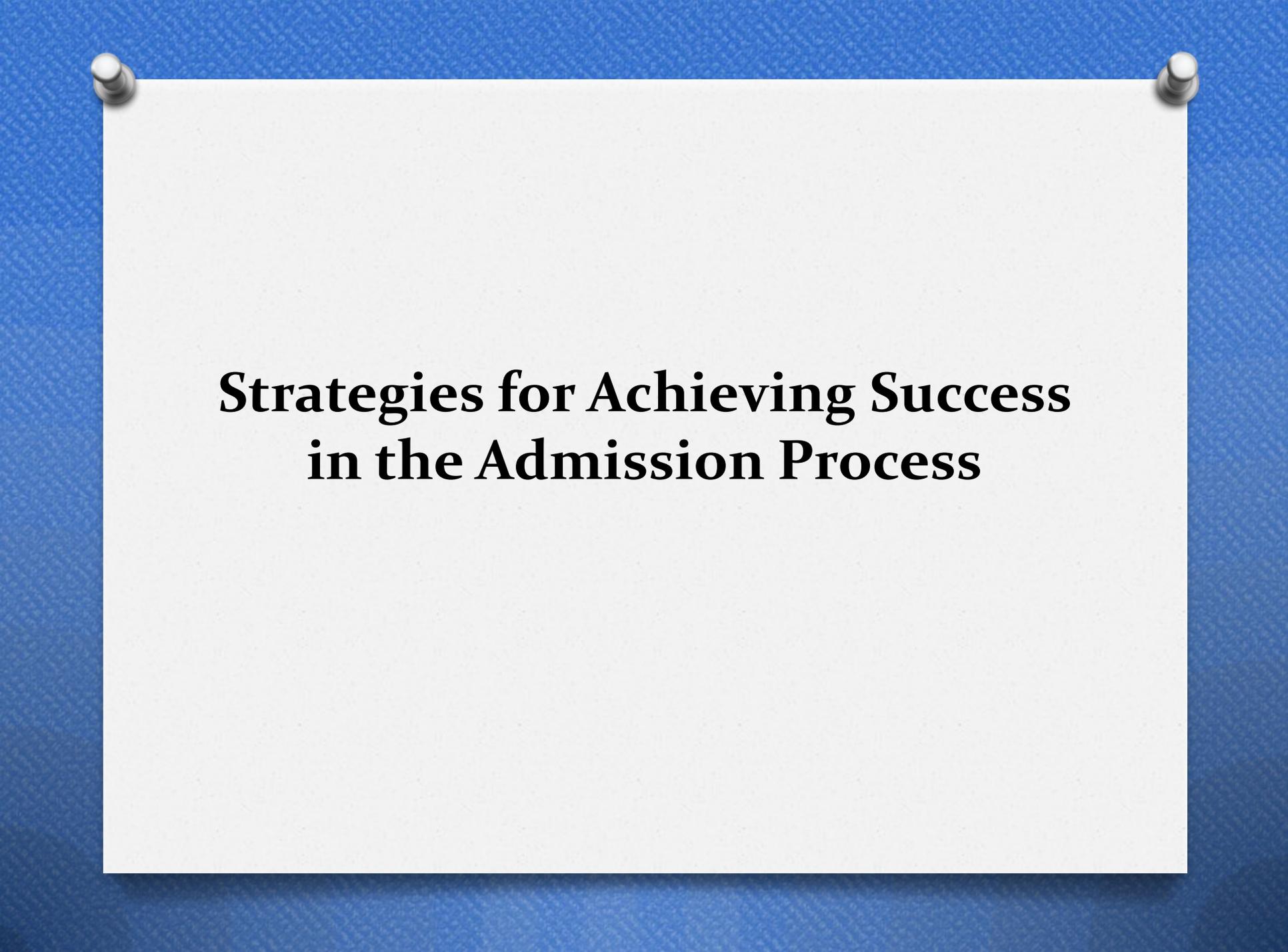
# What the Demographic Data Tells Us

National Center for Education Statistics' Beginning Postsecondary Study

- o Low-income, first-generation students were nearly four times more likely – 26 to 7 percent – to leave higher education after the first year than students who had neither of these risk factors
- o Low-income, first-generation students were seven times more likely to earn bachelor's degrees if they started in four-year institutions, but only 25% did so

# **Resource Information**

Handout of resource  
information will be available at  
Presenters Table after the  
session



**Strategies for Achieving Success  
in the Admission Process**

# College Success Definition

- o Admission to top choice
- o Learning and succeeding
- o Enjoying college
- o Stable/good job
- o Getting into graduate school

# Limitations

- o Not all support programs attend to the unique challenges faced by many First Generation students
- o Opportunities and information do not always reach these students early enough, if at all

Cunningham, A., M. A. Cooper, et al. (2012). Supporting First-Generation College Students through Classroom Based Practices. Washington D.C., Institute for Higher Education.

# Common Issues for Students and Parents

- o Don't know how to search or what to look for
- o Some are overwhelmed
- o Some only think about schools they know
- o Don't understand "fit" as a criterion

# Strategies to Help

## o Resources:

- o AVID Program
- o Presentations in classrooms or computer lab
- o After-school help with admissions process
- o [www.mymajors.com](http://www.mymajors.com)
- o [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)
- o [www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org](http://www.bigfuture.collegeboard.org)

## Student Action:

- o Tour local colleges.
- o Talk to college students and adults.

# Understanding “Fit”

- o Use grades and test scores
- o [www.parchment.com](http://www.parchment.com)
- o School’s profile of past graduates

# Common Issues for Students

- o Lack help in completing college forms
  - o Applications
  - o Essays

# Strategies to Help

## Assistance with Search and Completing Applications

- o Need more college and career counselors (Gibbons and Shoffner 2004)
- o Make it simple: post an application
- o Student mentors (NHS seniors, others)
- o Knowledgeable volunteers

# Strategies to Help

- o **Essay Help:**

- o English teachers with training

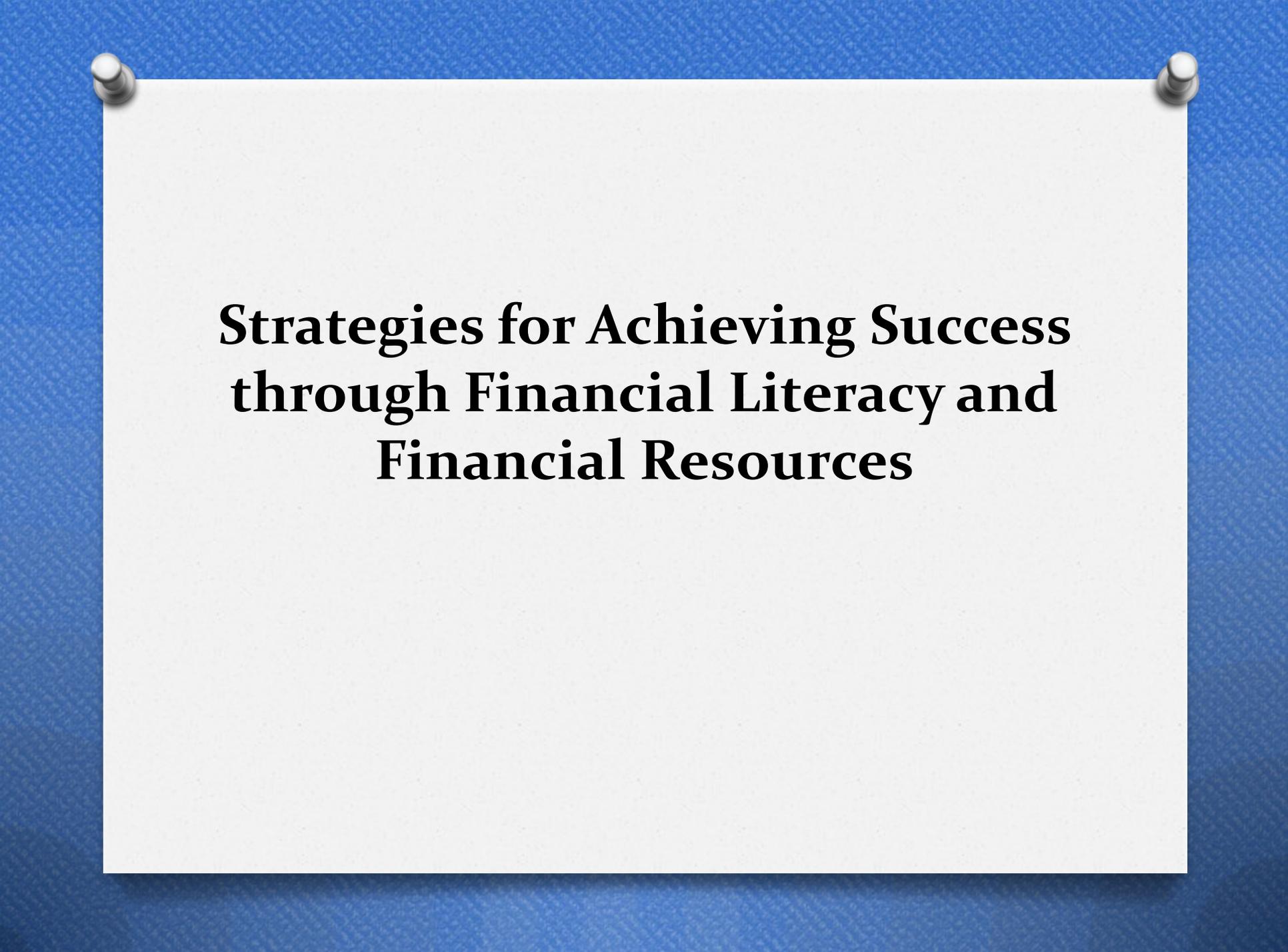
- o *Conquering the College Admissions Essay in 10 Steps* -- Alan Gelb

# Common Issues

- First-generation students are more likely to want to go to a school close to home (Inman and Mayes 1999)

# Strategies to Help

- o Information sessions to help parents understand potential financial and academic benefits
- o Individual meetings with students and parents
- o Assist with great nearby “fits”



**Strategies for Achieving Success  
through Financial Literacy and  
Financial Resources**

# Common Issues for Students and Parents

- o Do not believe they can afford college – often do not consider viable options
- o Assume they have to “pay as they go” – may only attend part-time
- o Are intimidated by the process – may not apply for aid or apply late
- o Do not realize private scholarships are available or how to apply
- o Do not know what questions to ask when they receive award notification – assume nothing can change
- o Have a fear or resistance to borrowing

# Strategies for Achieving Success by Reducing Financial Barriers During High School

- o Commit to professional collaboration across sectors
  - o Bring financial aid professionals into your school  
- early and often!
- o Engage student and parents earlier
  - o Classroom presentations on financial aid starting freshman year
  - o Financial Aid nights starting in freshman year with increasing information each year (translators if needed)
- o Provide information about retention success across sectors

# Strategies for Achieving Success by Reducing Financial Barriers During High School

- o Provide information to build confidence in ability to pay for college
  - o Net Price Calculators
  - o FAFSA4caster
  - o Bring graduates back to talk about their experience
- o Conduct workshops about application process, including FAFSA completion
  - o College Goal Sunday

# Common Characteristics

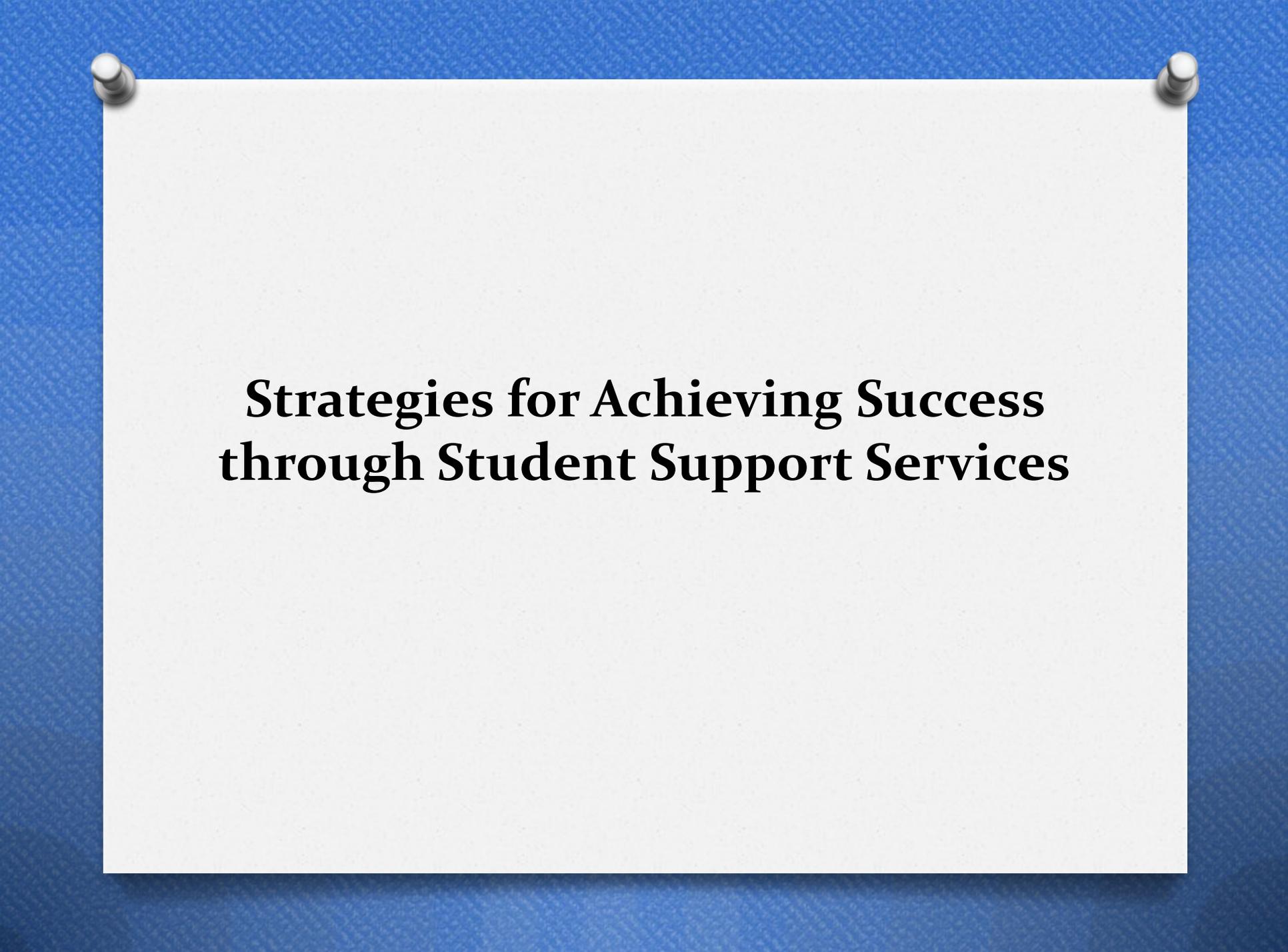
- o First- generation students' often lack understanding of on-campus resources available to support them, such as student services and financial aid offices.

## **Strategies for Achieving Success by Reducing Financial Barriers in College**

- o Provide opportunities for students to interact with financial aid counselors early
- o Meet financial need through gift aid – focus resources on need-based aid
- o Offer priority for Federal Work Study arrange opportunities with faculty, if possible
- o Provide education about appropriate use of educational loans

## **Strategies for Achieving Success by Reducing Financial Barriers in College**

- o If possible, provide financial resources to allow students to engage in campus activities (e.g., sports, theatre, dances, etc.)
- o Secure community resource handbook (local nonprofits who provide no-fee or low fee services)
- o Offer financial literacy counseling sessions
  - o Tips on frugal ways to live – low income assistance
  - o Key websites (e.g., [fueleconomy.gov](http://fueleconomy.gov))
  - o Earned income tax credit
- o Fund-raising for emergency funds
  - o Use to pay utility bills, transportation costs, car repairs
  - o Repay once aid is disbursed



**Strategies for Achieving Success  
through Student Support Services**

# Strategies for Academic Success and College Retention

- o Give students the big picture of the college environment and introduce them up front to the people they need to know to succeed academically
- o Increase students' understanding of the knowledge and skills (taught in college) that are essential to jobs and careers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century—and how their interests relate to the marketplace
- o Provide on-going advising and academic support—especially concrete tools to navigate and manage oneself in the college environment

## Front Load: Give students the big picture of the college environment and their support network

STRATEGY	HOW
<p>Help the student start building a network of support relationships as soon as they arrive on campus.</p> <p>Map the big college picture.</p> <p>Give students some basic tools for making sense of their initial college experiences.</p>	<p><b><i>First Year Student Orientation</i></b> Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Administrators</li><li>• Faculty/Instructors, etc.</li><li>• Academic Advisors</li><li>• Academic support professionals</li><li>• Peer advisors</li></ul> <p>Describe structure, roles, relationships and functions of the above.</p> <p>Lead a discussion on what to expect in college and/or differences between your colleges learning expectations and their high school experiences. Assure students that there are no dumb questions.</p>

# Increasing Student Awareness of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Knowledge and Skills

- First-generation students appear to perceive the college experience differently, primarily as a way to get a good job—often as a hoop to jump through.
- Expect that students will bring a “20<sup>th</sup> century” mindset to understanding how and what they need to learn to earn a college degree and get a good job after college—”just tell me what I need to know.”

*Gibbons, M., and M. Shoffner. 2004. “Prospective First- Generation College Students: Meeting their Needs Through Social Cognitive Career Theory.” Professional School Counseling 8, no. 1: 91–97.*

# 20th Century Skills

- o “Know How”

- o Procedural
- o Vocational
- o Concrete

- o “Know What”

- o Abstract
- o Accumulate Information
- o Use information to address problems with known solutions
- o ***Stability: Typically associated with a single lifetime career***



21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills



Good jobs require  
increasingly higher  
level skills

***“Knowing what” is still important but not an end in itself***

- o Locate, assess and represent new information quickly
- o Communicate this information to others
- o Work productively and collaboratively with others
- o Be adaptable, creative and innovative



21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills



Good jobs require  
higher skills

**“Knowing what” is still important but not an end in itself**

- o Use knowledge to reason through a problem you haven't seen before
- o Understand things at the “big picture level”
- o Think and learn independently, sometimes with help from external authorities and or systems and rules, but more often without this help

**Change, not stability, is a given**

## Leveraging the “Village” to Help Students Connect

*Encourage and train college support professionals, faculty and peer supporters to adopt “a mentoring perspective”*

- o Any interaction with a student has the potential to be a mentoring moment
- o Quality, not necessarily quantity matters
- o Communication across support units is essential
- o Provide special opportunities for first generation students to get together informally in small groups with a supportive faculty member or administrator

# Academic Support Services with 21<sup>st</sup> Century Focus

Teach students academic self-  
management/critical thinking skills:

- o As a course
- o As a series of workshops
- o In individualized support sessions
- o In an on-going way

*Myron Dembo and Helena Seli, (2008). Motivation and Learning Strategies for College Success: A Self-Management Approach. Mahwah, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.*



**Time for Discussion!**