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

- Older
- Female
- Have a disability
- Come from minority background
- Non-native English speaker
- Have dependent children as single parent
- Less likely to have parental support
- Family pressure to return home often
- May receive mixed messages about their changing identities
What the Demographic Data Tells Us
National Center for Education Statistics’ Beginning Postsecondary Study

- More likely than their most advantaged peers to:
  - Delay entry into postsecondary education
  - Attend college closer to home
  - Live off-campus
  - Attend part-time and
  - Work full-time while enrolled
What the Demographic Data Tells Us
National Center for Education Statistics’ Beginning Postsecondary Study

- 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.

- 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

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

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

Common Issues for Students and Parents

- Don’t know how to search or what to look for
- Some are overwhelmed
- Some only think about schools they know
- Don’t understand “fit” as a criterion
Strategies to Help

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

- **Student Action:**
  - Tour local colleges.
  - Talk to college students and adults.
Understanding “Fit”

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

- Lack help in completing college forms
- Applications
- Essays
Strategies to Help

Assistance with Search and Completing Applications

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

- Essay Help:
  - English teachers with training
  - *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

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

- Commit to professional collaboration across sectors
  - Bring financial aid professionals into your school – early and often!

- Engage student and parents earlier
  - Classroom presentations on financial aid starting freshman year
  - Financial Aid nights starting in freshman year with increasing information each year (translators if needed)

- Provide information about retention success across sectors
Strategies for Achieving Success by Reducing Financial Barriers During High School

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

- 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

- Provide opportunities for students to interact with financial aid counselors early
- Meet financial need through gift aid – focus resources on need-based aid
- Offer priority for Federal Work Study arrange opportunities with faculty, if possible
- Provide education about appropriate use of educational loans
Strategies for Achieving Success by Reducing Financial Barriers in College

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

- Give students the big picture of the college environment and introduce them up front to the people they need to know to succeed academically.
- Increase students’ understanding of the knowledge and skills (taught in college) that are essential to jobs and careers in the 21st century—and how their interests relate to the marketplace.
- 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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>HOW</th>
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<td>Help the student start building a network of support relationships as soon as they arrive on campus.</td>
<td><strong>First Year Student Orientation</strong>&lt;br&gt;Include:&lt;br&gt;• Administrators&lt;br&gt;• Faculty/Instructors, etc.&lt;br&gt;• Academic Advisors&lt;br&gt;• Academic support professionals&lt;br&gt;• Peer advisors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Map the big college picture.</td>
<td>Describe structure, roles, relationships and functions of the above.</td>
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<td>Give students some basic tools for making sense of their initial college experiences.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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Increasing Student Awareness of 21st 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 “20th 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.”

20th Century Skills

- “Know How”
  - Procedural
  - Vocational
  - Concrete

- “Know What”
  - Abstract
  - Accumulate Information
  - Use information to address problems with known solutions
  - Stability: Typically associated with a single lifetime career
“Knowing what” is still important but not an end in itself

- Locate, assess and represent new information quickly
- Communicate this information to others
- Work productively and collaboratively with others
- Be adaptable, creative and innovative
“Knowing what” is still important but not an end in itself

- Use knowledge to reason through a problem you haven’t seen before
- Understand things at the “big picture level”
- 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”*

- Any interaction with a student has the potential to be a mentoring moment
- Quality, not necessarily quantity matters
- Communication across support units is essential
- 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 21st Century Focus

Teach students academic self-management/critical thinking skills:

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

Time for Discussion!