PASSHE Student Success Conference 2018  
First Generation College Students: Optimizing their Likelihood of Success  

Educational Opportunities and Challenges that must be Considered  

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First Generation College Students

Quick questions:

• How many people in the room were First Generation College Students (FG's)
  • What was your most intimidating experience?
  • What were your thoughts as you entered college?
  • Did you ever feel like you didn’t belong (imposter syndrome)?

• University Acronyms:
  • UC example
  • MTWRF
First Generation College Students

Framework for today’s conversation

• Facts about First Generation College Students (FG's)
• Institutional Actions Impacting Success
• Wrap up
  • Key concepts to consider
Facts about First Generation Students

**FACTS**

**Difficult to identify**
- **Definitions** of first generation students **vary**
- About **one-third of all** college students are FG's
- They are an **“Invisible Minority”** on many campuses

**Compared to Non-First Generation Students, (generally,)**

FG's 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...**

FG's tend to:
- 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** than they **deserve**
Questions to Help Frame the Conversation

Having the Discussion

1. What is the climate on your campus for first-generation students?
   • How are FG’s defined?
   • What are the implications of the definitions?
   • How do they know who they are?
   • How are FG’s identified?
   • What do FG’s say about your institution?

2. Compared to non-first generation, are non-supported first-generation students on your campus successful?
   • Are FG’s learning, being retained, and graduating?
   • What departments are responsible for addressing the needs of FG’s?
   • What are the incentives for assisting FG’s?

3. What is your campus doing to assist first-generation students?
   • What might be getting in the way of assisting these students?
   • Are there risks/costs of doing nothing?
   • What are the benefits of......
Institutional Actions that Impact Success

SOLUTIONS

INSTITUTIONS MUST:

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

SOLUTIONS

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
Next Steps: Out-of-Class Engagement

SOLUTIONS

Create **Intentional Engagement Opportunities**: 

- **Understand** how engagement is compensatory for FG's
  - How will the experience **benefit** the student?

- **Know the implications** of the programs that **emanate** from your areas

- **Articulate** the intentional learning **outcomes** of your programs

- **Make FG's aware of the connection** between engagement and learning
Creating 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 their success, let that person be YOU.