Retention Services: Tutoring and Academic Support Center (TASC)

Teaching First Generation College Students Guidebook

Academic
Success
Coaching Program

Welcome

This guidebook is organized by deconstructing the narrative of the first generation identity, followed by identifying characteristics of a first generation college student. In addition, it includes culturally responsive and sustaining teaching practices for faculty to employ. These best practices facilitate the success of first generation college students in the classroom. Furthermore, we describe social capital in the community college context.

- Significant Characteristics of First Generation College Students

- Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Teaching of First Generation College Students

- Why Do Faculty Need To Help?

- Systemic Reflection For Faculty

Significant Characteristics of First Generation College Students:

Financial Concerns: Per Lohfink and Paulsen (2005), first generation college students are disproportionately low-income. They also drop out of college at a rate four times higher than their non-low-income, non-first generation college peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Motivations for Attending College: First generation college students often attend and persist in college for different reasons than their non—first generation peers (Saenz et al., 2007). These students are more likely to attend college in order to help their parents, bring honor to their family, and gain personal respect (Bui, 2002). Moreover, first generation college students more commonly internalize their educational attainment (Aspelmeier, 2012).

Stereotype Threat: Negative stereotypes about socially marginalized groups presumes that any lack of socioeconomic success may be attributed to internal deficits rather than social, historical, or situational injustice. A first generation student may feel anxious about confirming such negative stereotypes through their individual achievement. Insidiously, this experience commonly leads to academic underachievement through an unconscious self-handicapping (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Impostor Syndrome: First generation high-achieving students may feel that their success has nothing to do with their individual efforts or talents. Instead, they attribute their success to external factors such as luck, coincidence, or the ease of an endeavor. These feelings of "phoniness" negatively affect academic performance, social integration, and emotional health (Claude & Imes, 1978; Ewing et al., 1996).

Levels of Parental Engagement: Upon making the decision to attend college, first generation college students may feel disconnected or misunderstood by their families and communities (Davis, 2010). These students commonly report feeling that they are being disloyal to their parents and peers (Inman & Mayes, 1999). Differences between the goals and life paths of parents and first generation college students is "likely to cause dissonance," according to Somers et al. (2004). This dissonance has been called by researchers, "survivor guilt" (Somer et al., 2004) and "breakaway guilt" (London, 1989). Regardless of the terms used, feeling unsupported by family has consequences on the educational attainment of first generation college students. Parental involvement in education has been shown to

improve students' educational aspirations and reduce the shock of transitioning to college (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

Sources of Knowledge about College: The transition to college may be difficult for first generation college students because of limited understanding of college culture. Davis (2010) reports that first generation college students are likely to limit themselves to "one or two sources of information" about college culture. As a result, integrating into this new college culture is a much more challenging and potentially negative experience. First generation college students must learn not only the content of their classes but the social rules and roles of academia. The vocabulary of college—concepts like "registrar," "office hours," and "internship"—may be completely unfamiliar to these students.

Educational Differences: First generation college students are more likely than their continuing-education peers to attend lower

performing schools and take less challenging courses while in high school (Harrell & Forney, 2003; Martinez, et al., 2009; Pascarella et al., 2004). During the first year of college, first generation students report markedly lower GPAs than non—first generation students. (Warburton et al., 2001).

Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Teaching of First Generation College Students:

A type of equity pedagogy, in which faculty intentionally uses the cultural background and knowledge of their first generation students to inform curriculum and increase academic success of students that are limited to social and navigational capital in the higher education setting. (Gay, 2000; Ladson Billings 1995)

Ways to infuse this in your classroom:

1. Understand yourself as a cultural being and recognize how your beliefs shape your interactions and influences your teaching

    - What are your biases regarding "performing intelligence"? (i.e. independent learner)
    - What characteristics do you deem as appropriate for a "good student"? (i.e. listens quietly)
    - What are your feelings in regards to allowing students to "know" your thinking/reasoning processes?

2. Know your students' values and experiences and use them to inform your teaching

    - What do your students value? (i.e family, community, music)
    - How can you foster the notion that students are producers of knowledge? (i.e. taking the lead)
    - How can you use these values to augment your instruction?

3. Select curriculum content with your students in mind

    - How can you provide a 21st century learning experience in your course? (multicultural, multilingual, technology, team oriented)

- In what ways can you indicate that you value student backgrounds in your curriculum? (personal histories, community leaders that reflect student heritage)
- What texts/experiences can you include/support that reflect student culture, heritage, language etc. (i.e. use of case studies)

4. Use student centered teaching techniques

- What more can you do to engage students in the lesson? Can you include team teaching, jigsaw or collaborative problem-solving in your lessons?
- In what ways can you show that you value student leadership within your course? (i.e. choose a learning objective)

5. Creating a supportive classroom climate

- How can I ensure that my classroom fosters a safe and supportive climate? (ice breakers)
- How can I create a safe space for first generation college students when they make mistakes and learn from them? (i.e. multiple exposure to material)
- What can I do to build a learning community that feels safe to talk about individual and group differences in communities, campus, and our larger democracy?

6. Understand your role as an agent of change

- How can you ensure your students are empowered within your course? (i.e. voices are heard)

- Do you engage critiques of social inequities?

- How can you ensure your students are actively involved and produce knowledge in this endeavor?

7. Assess First Generation College students in meaningful and transparent ways

- How can I be transparent about what I'm assessing and why?

- Can I provide Rubrics? How can I allow students to connect their personal histories to new knowledge for assessment purposes? (i.e. direct questions)

- Use various methods of assessment techniques to allow students to demonstrate their knowledge. (i.e. verbal, visual)

8. Support students' efforts to gain/increase their cultural capital

- How can you include opportunities to gain cultural capital in your course? (i.e. modeling and feedback)

- Can you identify entities/endeavors that would open the door for students to increase their cultural capital? (i.e. walk select students to campus supports)

Why Do Faculty Need To Help?

First generation college students typically apply to college and undertake coursework without guidance. Lack of familiarity with community college culture—such as the differences in the roles of various types of campus personnel and accepted modes of communication—has several consequences:

1. It makes college seem like a confusing system to navigate.
2. First generation students often don't understand what they need to do to succeed.
3. First generation students may feel intimidation, stress, self-doubt, and low confidence.

Clarify Your Expectations

• Use rubrics.

• Provide examples of excellent and average work.

• Briefly explain your teaching approaches. This helps students understand what they are expected to do to succeed and how your approaches will help them learn.

• Communicate high expectations, supportively.

• Offer constructive criticism that acknowledges students' strengths.

Foster Social Integration

- Have students discuss things like extracurricular activities, volunteering, and service-learning, as well as discipline-specific organizations and activities.

- Incorporate collaborative learning activities so they can become acculturated to their peers.

- Show interest in their activities and professional networking efforts.

- Engage with students outside of class meetings – through college hour, club meetings, campus events, and community events.

Promote Student Engagement and Responsibility

- Use engagement strategies with all students.

- Have students create concept maps of their learning process.

- Incorporate self-assessment and peer review.

- Encourage students to set their own goals for their learning.

- Motivate students by helping them see how course material and course experiences relate to their lives and goals. Do this informally, or formally through high-impact practices like service learning, community engagement, and internships.

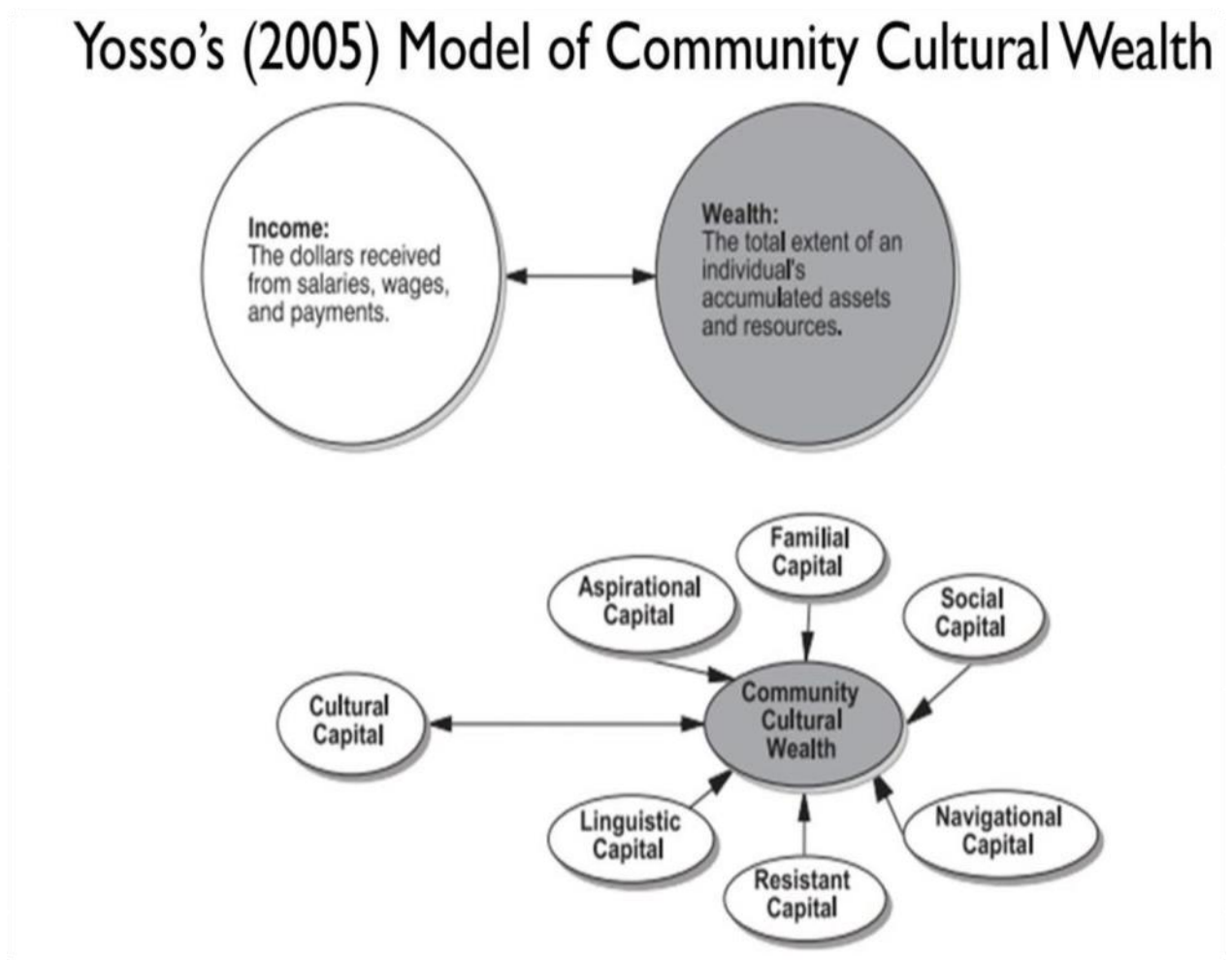# Encourage Students to Seek Appropriate Help

- Make help-seeking an integral part of important class activities.

- Reward help-seeking through praise or extra credit.

- Include information on various college support services in your syllabus. These may include Counseling Services, Disabled Students Program & Services (DSPS), Extended Opportunity Programs & Services (EOPS), Food Pantry, RAFFY, Tutoring Academic & Support Center (TASC), and Veterans Services.

Recognize and Address these Common Occurrences

- First generation students may have a strong sense of responsibility to their family. They may need help learning to balance their school needs with their family needs.

- First generation students often commute, work more, and have unusual schedules. Help them have various time management options, such as assignments and timelines that allow for research or collaboration to be performed outside of class and off-campus.

- Recognize and validate first generation students' common strengths, such as resilience, teamwork, and a strong commitment to earning a degree.

- Recognize and address first generation students' common struggles, such as feeling disconnected from home, feeling different, having to work harder than other students, and self-doubt. Help students build self-confidence.

- First generation students are more likely to have part-time enrollment status, interruptions in their enrollment, and impediments to their persistence from family and friends. Proactive advising can help these students.

Systemic Reflection for Faculty

Yosso's (2005) Model of Community Cultural Wealth

Income: The dollars received from salaries, wages, and payments.

Wealth: The total extent of an individual's accumulated assets and resources.

Aspirational Capital

Familial Capital

Social Capital

Cultural Capital

Community Cultural Wealth

Linguistic Capital

Resistant Capital

Navigational Capital

Social Capital in the Community College Setting

Social capital, the value of a relationship that provides support and assistance in a given social situation (Stanton-Salazar, 2001), is a useful theory for understanding the experiences of low-income students who are the first in their families to attend college. According to social capital theory, networks of relationships can help students manage an unfamiliar environment by providing them with relevant information, guidance, and emotional support. Existing research on social capital in postsecondary institutions has focused on low-income, ethnic minority students, finding that low socioeconomic status (low-SES) and first generation ethnic minority students struggle in accessing beneficial social capital on campus (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Saunders & Serna, 2004).

Cultural Wealth Model

Tara Yosso's Cultural Wealth Model consists of six types of capital that educators may use to frame their interactions with students. Yosso argues that all six forms of capital can be utilized to empower students and their educational journeys. Yosso created this model to acknowledge the talents, strengths and experiences that students of color bring forth with them to the college environment (Yosso, 2005). The Cultural Wealth Model is a framework representation on how to understand students of color that access and experience college from a strengths-based perspective (Yosso, 2005).

The Six Forms of Cultural Capital Are:

1. Aspirational

Yosso defines aspirational capital as the "hopes and dreams" students have. Yosso notes that African American and Latinx students and their families continue to pose high educational aspirations regardless of persistent educational inequities (Yosso, 2005). For example; exposure to a television program that highlights an affluent lifestyle, while the student is living in a poverty stricken neighborhood and working on homework with the hope to one day achieve an improved lifestyle.

Questions to consider:
- **How are we supporting the maintenance and growth of students' aspirations?**
- **What assumptions do we have about our students' aspirations?**

2. Linguistic

Linguistic capital consists of the various languages students speak and bring forth to their college environment, including the ability to code switch in a variety of settings. In order to code switch, critical thinking is foundational as students transition from their neighborhood speaking their casual native language, to later utilizing academic jargon in the classroom amongst non-peers of color. Yosso further elaborates on this form of capital by expanding on the role of storytelling, particularly for students of color. According to Yosso,

"storytelling is a part of students' lives, before they arrive on college campuses, they bring with them skills [that] may include memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and rhyme." When assessing these multifaceted communication skills, there are strengths that instructors and students services staff can utilize to foster related leadership competencies.

Questions to consider:

- **How are we supporting the language and communication strengths of our students?**

- **To what degree do courses utilize inclusive pedagogical practices?**

3.   Familial

Yosso defines familial capital as follows; "Familial capital refers to the social and personal human resources students have in their pre-college environment, drawn from their extended familial and community networks". Yosso explains that when family members offer emotional support and encouragement to persist it leads to positive student experiences in college as they aspire to make their family/familia proud.

Questions to consider:

- **How do we recognize and help students draw on wisdom, values, and stories from their home communities?**

- **How do we honor family history of students?**

4. Social

Social capital is a form of capital that Yosso defines "peers and other social contacts, that students utilize to gain access to college and navigate other social institutions" (2005). According to Harper, students access social capital through the form of emotional support amongst their older peers (2008). Furthermore, Harper shares that this notion was critical for black males, as they also sought the assistance of older peers to navigate the college setting.

Questions to consider:

- **How do we help students stay connected to the communities and individuals instrumental in their previous educational success?**

5. Navigational

Navigational capital refers to how students utilize their skills and gain assistance from resources, information, and people to help them succeed in their educational journey and navigate social institutions (Harper, 2008; Liou et al., 2009). Yosso further explains that "students' navigational capital empowers them to maneuver within unsupportive or hostile environments".

Questions to consider:

- **How do we help students navigate our institutions? Interactions with faculty? Interactions with student-support staff? Their peers?**

- **How willing are we to acknowledge that our institutions, both their structures and cultures, have a history of, and may still in many ways be unsupportive and/or hostile to our students and their communities?**

6.   Resistance

Resistance capital is based on the experiences of communities of color towards securing equal rights and collective freedom. Yosso states, "the sources of this form of capital come from parents, community members and a historical legacy of engaging in social justice" (2005). This historical legacy of resistance leaves students of color particularly well-positioned to leverage their higher education training to enter society prepared to solve challenging problems regarding equitable health, educational and other social outcomes.

Questions to consider:
- **How do we support students who are committed to engaging in and serving their home communities?**

- **What opportunities do we provide students in and outside of the classroom to prepare them for participation in a diverse democracy?**

Conclusion

Our guidebook has provided a context and offered best practices on how to engage and work with First Generation College students. We understand that this is not an end-all, but perhaps a starting point in gaining more awareness on the first generation college student experience. The First Generation College student identity is not

exclusive since it intersects with ethnicity, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, differently abled, and other dynamic and diverse characteristics of our student population. We hope that you will utilize this guide, engage with the research available, and listen to our students as we assist community members to academically excel and reach success.

Acknowledgements:

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