

22 TIPS FOR TEACHING FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS AT CSUF

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- 52% of CSUF graduates are first-generation university graduates (Oct. 2013).
- This group is growing nationally.
- Nationally, first-generation college students are more likely to quit college after their first-year than their non-first-gen counterparts.
- Recommended teaching strategies for first-generation college students typically benefit all types of students.

WHY DO FACULTY NEED TO HELP?

- First-generation college students typically apply to universities and undertake university study without guidance and acculturation from parents and siblings who already attended or graduated from college.
- Lack of familiarity with university culture—such as the differences in roles of various types of university personnel and accepted modes of communication—has several consequences:
 - It makes college seem like a foreign country and a confusing system to navigate.
 - First-gen students often don't understand what they need to do to succeed.
 - First-gen students may feel intimidation, stress, self-doubt, and low confidence.
- First-generation college students benefit from help in social and academic integration, gaining cultural capital, and academic preparation.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

CLARIFY YOUR EXPECTATIONS

1. Use rubrics.
2. Provide examples of strong and weak work.
3. 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.
4. Communicate high expectations, supportively.
5. Offer constructive criticism that acknowledges students' strengths.

FOSTER SOCIAL INTEGRATION

6. Incorporate collaborative learning activities so they can become acculturated to their peers.
7. Have students discuss things like extracurricular activities, volunteering, and service-learning, as well as discipline-specific organizations and activities.
8. Show interest in their activities and professional networking efforts.
9. Engage with students outside of class meetings – through poster days, presentation opportunities, competitions, professional organizations, and independent study.

PROMOTE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY

10. Use engagement strategies with all students. See the FDC page on [student engagement](#).
11. Have students create concept maps of their learning process.
12. Incorporate self-assessment and peer-review.
13. Encourage students to set their own goals for their learning.
14. 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, undergraduate research, and internships. See the FDC resources on [high-impact practices](#).

ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO SEEK APPROPRIATE HELP

15. Make help-seeking an integral part of important class activities.
16. Reward help-seeking through praise or extra credit.
17. Include information on various university support services in your [syllabus](#). These may include the Writing Center, Disability Support Services, Veterans Resource Center, and Counseling services. Otherwise, students may rely primarily on advice from other students.

RECOGNIZE AND ADDRESS THESE COMMON OCCURRENCES

18. First-gen 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.
19. First-gen 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 done outside of class or off-campus.
20. Recognize and validate first-gen students' common strengths, such as resilience, teamwork, and a strong commitment to earning a degree.
21. Recognize and address first-gen 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.
22. First-gen 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.

First-generation college students are not a homogeneous group. Learn more about this important and diverse group and what you can do to help them succeed by using these sources:

Ward, Lee, Michael J. Siegel, and Zebulun Davenport. *First-Generation College Students: Understanding and Improving the Experience from Recruitment to Commencement*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012. Read [ch 1](#) or access the entire [ebook](#).

"Teaching & Learning with First Generation College Students." University of Wisconsin Platteville Teaching and Learning Center. Review the slides and notes [here](#).

Ortega-Villalobos, L. "Understanding and Supporting the Learning Process for First Generation College Students at CSUN," 2009. Read it [here](#).

Collier, Peter J. and David L. Morgan. "Is That Paper Really Due Today?": Differences in First-Generation and Traditional College Students Understandings of Faculty Expectations." *Higher Education: The International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning* (April 2008). Read it [here](#).