

## **Promoting Instructional Success for First-Generation Students**

### **UC DAVIS FIRST-GENERATION UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

- ▶ A first-generation student is identified as a US student whose parents/guardians have not received a four-year, US bachelor's degree.
- ▶ Approximately 42% of UC Davis students self-identify as first-generation students (UC Davis Undergraduate Admissions and UC Info Center, Fall 2015).
- ▶ Teaching strategies for first-generation college students typically benefit all types of students (i.e., domestic students, international students, transfer students, and English Learners; Mayhew et al., 2016).

### **RECOGNIZE SOME OF YOUR STUDENTS' CURRENT LIFE SITUATIONS**

- ▶ Think of first-generation students as pioneers in their families and their communities. Explore what it means to be a first-generation student for different students in your class. Recognize that first-generation students are also a diverse group in itself: some are low-income, some are minority/non-White, some are disabled, some are English Learners, some may be undocumented. However, not all students share all of these ethnic, socioeconomic, language, and cultural characteristics.
- ▶ First-generation students often commute, work many hours, and have unusual schedules. They may have part-time enrollment status, interruptions in their enrollment, and occasional impediments to their persistence from family and friends. Help them have time management options, such as assignments and timelines that allow for research or collaboration to be done outside of class or off-campus.
- ▶ As previous groups who gained access to higher education, first-generation students are developing a new set of language skills, academic skills, and beliefs as they learn to be college students. These may be different from those present in their families and communities. Be aware that some students may hold contradictory feelings as they may sometimes feel that they do not fully fit in neither academia nor back in their communities.
- ▶ Several first-generation students may be bilingual in English and another language. Support the students' learning of academic language in your class by clarifying terminology, using synonyms, and explaining the different linguistic demands of academic genres in your discipline.
- ▶ Be aware that first-generation students may face financial issues that are similar and different from other students. Unless students need to buy particular supplies or apps for your class, be cognizant of additional financial burdens.

### **EFFECTIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES**

#### **EXPLAIN YOUR EXPECTATIONS**

- ▶ Communicate high expectations for all of your students, in a supportive way. In particular, for first-generation students, communicate that they belong in university and that they are capable of achieving at the highest levels.
- ▶ Be intentional. Briefly explain your teaching approach and instructional strategies. This helps students understand what they are expected to do to succeed and how your teaching approach will help them learn. Clarify what different activities are carried out as part of your class and what is expected of students in them (e.g., lecture, sections, labs, office hours).
- ▶ Provide guidelines and rubrics that specify how students will be evaluated.

### **APPLY PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE ADULT LEARNING TO YOUR TEACHING**

- ▶ Teach from a learning outcomes framework: focus on what students will know, will be able to do, and the types of attitudes and social skills that they will develop by the end of your course. Communicate these outcomes explicitly in your syllabus, teaching materials, and assignments, as well as in class.
- ▶ Design your course around authentic, practical tasks and applications. Help students understand why they should learn something.
- ▶ Tap into students' prior experiences and prior knowledge and help them explore how they can apply it to the new content.
- ▶ Help students understand how your class fits into a major/minor and into students' academic and professional preparation.

### **MAKE YOUR ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS MORE TRANSPARENT AND CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE**

- ▶ Help students understand what it means to evaluate and critique ideas. Some first-generation students may come from socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds that punish vulnerabilities and see criticism as a personal attack to authority. Some first-generation students may not be familiar with the academic process of evaluating and critiquing ideas that is part of the US college culture.
- ▶ Check your assignments and exams for clarity. Have a colleague or teaching assistant read and/complete the exam and provide you with feedback.
- ▶ Review exam questions and define the learning outcome/performance to be assessed, specify the scope of content to be covered, and use non-ambiguous, simple language.

### **PROMOTE SOCIAL INTEGRATION**

- ▶ If you are a first-generation faculty member, publicly identify yourself as such and invite students to ask questions and learn more about your academic journey or visit you during office hours.
- ▶ Encourage all students to create networks of support (i.e., to “shrink” a larger campus into a more manageable community).
- ▶ Monitor the language that is used in class so that it does not create in-groups and out-groups in terms of prior academic experiences.

### **ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO SEEK HELP AND FEEDBACK**

- ▶ Make help- and feedback-seeking an integral part of your class activities. Help students see that it is normal to be vulnerable, seek support, and receive feedback
- ▶ Help students navigate the higher education system and identify resources where they can receive the help they may need. Include information on various university support services in your syllabus (e.g., the Writing Center, Student Disability Center, Center for Leadership Learning).
- ▶ Be aware that many students may lack knowledge about, and access to, academic resources such as the Library. Plan for an activity that introduces students to the Library, its services, and the type of help that they can receive from a librarian.

Adapted from Lohman, L. (2015). Twenty-two tips for teaching first-generation college students at CSUF. Retrieved from: [http://fdc.fullerton.edu/\\_resources/images/teaching/Teaching%20First-Generation%20College%20Students.pdf](http://fdc.fullerton.edu/_resources/images/teaching/Teaching%20First-Generation%20College%20Students.pdf)

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