Supporting First-Generation University Students Series
PART 4: Fostering Social and Community Integration

Engle & Tinto (2008) highlight the challenges first-generation students face in becoming engaged socially in campus life, with barriers ranging from hours spent working off-campus for financial reasons, to difficulties adjusting to the emphasis on independence that is a hallmark of university culture. Yet, in their study, Soria & Stebleton (2012) found that first-generation students were more likely to be academically engaged if they felt like they belonged, arguing further that "the greater the sense of belonging to the academic and social community for students, the more likely it is that students will persist toward graduation" (p. 681). Here are a few suggestions on how to foster social and community integration for first-generation students:

Strategies	Teaching Suggestions
Design your class to fit a diverse range of student needs	Consider that students from college-educated families and those who are first-generation may understand and approach the classroom in vastly different ways, and may therefore have different needs.
Implement active and collaborative activities	Consider incorporating collaborative, active learning activities so that students can become acculturated to their peers and establish new friendships. Research has found that first-generation students may especially benefit from collaborative learning opportunities (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Soria & Stebleton, 2012, Loes et al., 2017). For examples of active learning activities, see our resource series titled "Activating Your Lecture" and "Strategies for Covering Content"
Encourage students to work with a variety of their peers in class	Implement active learning activities that ask students to collaborate with a variety of their peers, and not just their friends in class. 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
Create opportunities for personal relevance	Have students discuss personal interests and personally-relevant activities, like extracurricular activities, volunteering, service-learning, and discipline-specific organizations and activities.
Encourage networking and professional development	Show interest in your students' extracurricular activities and professional networking efforts. This could include building a service learning component into your course, or offering extra credit for attending networking events or meeting with professionals in the field. Also, engage with students with outside-of-class activities, such as poster days, presentation opportunities, competitions, professional organizations, and independent study.
Help students build networks of support	Encourage all students to create networks of support (i.e., to "shrink" a larger campus into a more manageable community). Make sure they are aware of various cultural, ethnic, religious, hobby, or interest clubs on campus that can offer social and academic support.
If first-generation, self-identify	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

Additionally, Stephens et al. (2012) found that the emphasis on independence in college can have adverse effects on first-generation students, who may come from community-based backgrounds where interdependence and collectivism is emphasized. To mitigate this:

Strategies	Teaching Suggestions
Help students balance school and home	First-generation students may have a strong sense of responsibility to their families (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Moreno, 2016). Show understanding as students learn how to best balance their school needs with their family needs.
Foster independence *and* community membership	Encourage students to explore how they can focus on their independent goals *and* still be part of the academic community and of their communities (Covarrubias, Herrmann, & Fryberg, 2016).
Recognize students strengths	Recognize and validate first-generation students' common strengths, such as a pioneering spirit, resilience, teamwork, and a strong commitment to earning a professional degree.

Adapted from: Lohman, 2015

Additional Resources
- *Q&A: Stanford's Hazel Markus*
- Grand Valley State University Resource on First Generation Students
- *First generation: Best practices for faculty. [UC Irvine]*
- *First year experience. [UCLA]*
- "I fit in neither place." Article from Zamudio-Suarez in *The Chronicle of Higher Education.*

References
Covarrubias, R., & Fryberg, S. A. (2015). Movin'on up (to college): First-generation college students' experiences with family achievement guilt. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 21*(3), 420-429.

Covarrubias, R., Herrmann, S. D., & Fryberg, S. A. (2016). Affirming the interdependent self: Implications for Latino student performance. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 38*(1), 47-57.

Engle, J., & Tinto, V. (2008). Moving beyond access: College success for low-income, first-generation students. *Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education*. Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED504448.pdf

Loes, C. N., An, B. P., Saichaie, K., & Pascarella, E. T. (2017). Does Collaborative Learning Influence Persistence to the Second Year of College?. The Journal of Higher Education, 88(1), 62-84.

Moreno, R. (2016). *The guilt of success: Looking at Latino first generation college students and the guilt they face from leaving their home and community to pursue college* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Proquest. (10118902).

Soria, K. M., & Stebleton, M. J. (2012). First-generation students' academic engagement and retention. *Teaching in Higher Education, 17*(6), 673-685.

Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A., Markus, H. R., Johnson, C. S., & Covarrubias, R. (2012). Unseen disadvantage: how American universities' focus on independence undermines the academic performance of first-generation college students. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 102*(6), 1178-1197.