Blackboard

ALLY

Fostering Inclusion and Belonging for First-Generation Learners

Instructional Strategies for Student Success

For first-generation college and university students, higher education offers a gateway to career advancement, social capital, and intergenerational mobility. But being the first of anything is never easy. First generation students face numerous challenges to successfully completing a degree. Understanding those challenges can help inform course design strategies that foster a greater sense of inclusion and belonging to help all students find academic success.

Challenges	Strategies
Limited Financial Resources Tuition costs aren't the only financial challenge faced by first-generation students. Text book costs, access to computers, and access to high-speed Internet can all impact a student's ability to effectively participate in your course.	**Use Open Educational Resources** Open Educational Resources (OERs) can help reduce text book costs for students by replacing paid content with free alternatives. For OERs with a Creative Commons license, create assignments that encourage students to remix course content to help them master the material as well as develop additional learning resources to support peer-to-peer learning. **Make it Mobile-Friendly and Low-Bandwidth** Students may have limited access to computers, especially when learning at home. Create web-based content using authoring tools in your Learning Management System instead of relying just on docs and PDFs to improve reading experiences on small screens. Remember that video conferences and watching recorded videos can be bandwidth intensive. Provide students alternative means for participation and engagement such as collaborative asynchronous activities, transcripts of videos and meeting recordings, and access to lecture slides and notes.
Struggles with Impostor Syndrome First-generation students are more likely to experience greater feelings of self-doubt, lack confidence, or feel they don't have the skills of their peers to be successful.	**Use Low-Stakes Formative Assessments** Students who lack self-confidence may struggle with the pressure of high-stakes exams. Help ease their anxiety with formative assessments that gauge their understanding, build confidence, and inform targeted instructional interventions. **Assign Rotating Roles for Group Work** Students may feel intimidated or insecure when interacting with peers during group work. Assign rotating roles to clearly define responsibilities and empower students to showcase their abilities to their peers.

Learn how Blackboard Ally can help your organization find solutions below the surface

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Course Design for First-Generation Learners

Challenges	Strategies
Lack of Belonging First-generation students are more likely to come from cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds that have been historically under-represented or marginalized in certain academic fields and disciplines.	**Forge Connections between Content and Experience** Lightweight "micro" activities that ask students to make a connection between their personal experiences or home culture and the course curriculum can help students feel that their identity and perspective are a valued part of the classroom discourse. Those connections can also reinforce learning by creating meaningful associations in the brain. **Diversify Representation in your Curriculum** Apply a critical eye to the voices or perspectives represented in your curriculum, and find opportunities to bring in experts in the field from diverse and non-dominant cultural backgrounds. A curriculum that includes under-represented voices can help students identify people like them and foster a sense of belonging.
Digital Literacy and Study Skills First-generation students may have more limited experience using digital tools for learning, speak a different language at home, or have undiagnosed learning disabilities.	**Encourage Text-to-Speech and Annotation Tools** For second language learners and students with processing challenges, free text-to-speech tools allow students to listen to text aloud while reading, which can benefit comprehension and retention. Free annotation tools help students take notes, while collaborative annotation tools help peers share notes and insights to improve review practices for exams. **Assign a Reflective Journal** Reflective practice can help students develop metacognitive awareness to improve their study habits. Encourage students to keep a journal that details their experiences in the course, their approaches or strategies to mastering difficult concepts, and their lingering questions. A journal can help students discover the ways they learn best, and help them be more successful both in your course and as lifelong learners.

Most Important: Practice Empathy!

Uncertain times present unpredictable challenges, and first-generation students are especially vulnerable during crises. Foster a classroom culture of trust by establishing open lines of communication and spaces for dialogue to help all your students feel that they belong to a supportive learning community that cares about their success.