

# FIRST-GEN STUDENTS

## CREATING AN ENGAGING & INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT



### WHAT IS IT?



A first-generation student is identified as a US student whose parents/guardians have not received a four-year, US bachelor's degree (Toutkoushian et al., 2016)<sup>1</sup>.

First-generation students tend to experience a variety of educational, financial, and social barriers that make successful completion of a bachelor's degree more difficult than for their continuing-generation peers (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015).

### RESEARCH...



*Pascarella et al. (2004) emphasize the importance of academic and classroom engagement for first-generation students. They contend that first-gen students may benefit from their academic experiences comparatively more than their continuing-gen peers because these experiences build cultural capital they might otherwise not have access to.*

*Research also validates the importance of providing students with resources for accessing academic support, both in and out of the classroom (Brazil-Cruz & Martinez, 2016).*

### DATA ...



**42%** of UC Davis students self-identify as first-generation students

**1<sup>st</sup> Gen** students are **more likely** than other students to report that family and/or job responsibilities are obstacles to their school work or academic success (UCUES, 2018)

<sup>1</sup>List of all references in the complete JITT Guide.

### TEACHING STRATEGIES...



- **Communicate high expectations** for all students, in a supportive way. For first-gen students, communicate that **they belong** in the university and are capable of achieving at the highest levels.
- **Model what you expect** students to do so that they can perform in ways that meet your high expectations.
- **Be transparent** and emphasize the **learning outcomes** of your course and explain how specific tasks/projects are designed to help students achieve these outcomes.
- Provide **structured** and/or **scaffolded learning** experiences to help students move to more independent problem solving and learning.
- Tap into **students' prior experiences and prior knowledge** and help them explore how they can apply it to the new content.

### STUDENTS SAY...



"I appreciate when instructors discuss or identify student support resources on the syllabus. When I know where to turn, I don't have to ask for help if I feel uncomfortable."

"Sometimes I enjoy working with peers in class who are not already my friends. Interacting with others in class helps me meet those who I may not have met within my own circle."

"I really enjoyed the professor I had who shared that she, too, was a first-generation college graduate. I was inspired by her success and openness to support my own journey."

### REFLECTION...



- How can you be more explicit in your expectations of students (i.e., incorporate study guides, student work exemplars, or rubrics)?
- How can you systematically consider whether assignments or exams assume prior cultural knowledge that may not have been covered in class?
- How do you develop students' critical analysis skills, demonstrating the processes of evaluating and critiquing ideas, that may be unfamiliar to first-gen students?



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