

Working with Diverse Student Population

A guide for faculty and staff

Veterans, first generation college students, minorities and nontraditional students often have a different college experience. Understanding, exploring and responding their unique needs and circumstances may assist these students in reaching their academic goals and personal aspirations.

Veterans

- Many veterans feel isolated on college campuses and will often go home immediately after classes.
 - Difficulties relating to other students (may be a significant age difference)
 - Boredom
 - Trouble adjusting to college culture
 - Miss camaraderie and action of military life
 - May feel loss of identity
- A number of veterans have a spouse and/or children
- Many veterans are still readjusting to civilian life.
 - Physically
 - Mentally
 - Without special attention and support both on and off campus, many will fail to graduate
- Helping veterans connect with each other
- Offering more counseling and financial aid (if possible)
- Veterans may encounter uncomfortable, insensitive questioning
 - “Did you kill anyone?”
- Female veterans may have additional personal struggles
 - May have been victim of sexual harassment or assault during time in service
- Veteran students may, due to anxiety, injury-related disorganization, etc.:
 - Arrive late to class or miss entirely
 - Arrive early
 - May feel more comfortable sitting in the back of the class to
 - Have difficulties sitting still or remaining focused
 - May need to leave room to regain composure
 - May not ask for help when it is needed
- These students do not mean disrespect; they value authority figures
 - Approach with respect and compassion
 - Make appropriate accommodations
- Give notice prior to activities with loud sounds or presentations with disturbing content and/or imagery
- Refer to crisis line: 1-800-273-TALK or www.Veteranscrisisline.net

Non-Traditional Students

- Often married and/or has children or dependents
- May work part- or full-time outside of college
- Considered financially independent
- Delays post-secondary education
- Typically 25 or older
- May need additional assistance with financial aid
- Advisors can assist student with acclimating with college environment
- Refer to Counseling Services if student becomes overwhelmed with life's demands and/or balancing personal and academic responsibilities
- Create an atmosphere of inclusion
 - Sponsor family-friendly events
 - If possible, create an on-campus support group for non-traditional students

Minority Students

- School environment may be very different from student's home environment and previous academic experiences
 - Home environment may not be conducive for academic success
- Many minority students may also be first-generation college students
 - Parents/family may be uninvolved with student's education
 - Parents/family may not be knowledgeable about the inner-workings of college life (scheduling classes, required credit hours, work study opportunities, etc.)
 - Parents/family may have placed additional responsibilities on student (working, babysitting younger siblings, caring for older relative, etc.) that affect the student's ability to adequately prepare for class or become involved in campus-life
- Some minority students may be accused of "acting white" by their peers
- Academic performance may be affected by anxiety
 - Fear that failure would confirm negative stereotypes
- Focus on building trust with these students
 - Authenticity
 - Avoid assumptions
 - Empathy
 - Mutual respect
 - Positive rapport → honest exploration of presenting problems
 - Be aware that some minority students are less willing to seek help because they believe that others will not understand their personal issues
- Faculty and staff need to be aware and respectful of cultural differences
 - Discuss problems and solutions with students
 - Ask open-ended questions to learn more valuable information
 - Do not devalue students' experiences or problems

- Have a supportive attitude
 - Remain nonjudgmental and open if the student chooses to share personal information
 - Provide coping skills to avoid internalizing negative messages
 - Support students as they begin integrating themselves amongst more diverse groups
- Be aware of challenges immigrant students may encounter as they become more familiar with the language and culture
- Be aware that socioeconomic status will also affect the issues and experiences that minority students encounter
 - Delay or failure to obtain books
 - May not possess a vehicle or may own an unreliable vehicle
 - May not be able to pay admission to events

- **First Generation College Students**

- Prior to admission, admissions counselors can be more present and communicate more frequently at high schools
 - Can ease transition from high school to college
- Provide additional support/guidance for identified first generation students during difficult or intimidating times during registration and semester (applying for financial aid, choosing a major, registering for classes, etc.)
 - Student may not disclose or show any signs of confusion about navigating through the college system
 - Give student opportunities to ask questions and be available if the student needs additional assistance
- Establish and support first generation student organizations (example: peer-mentorship program)
- Tend to lack the academic preparedness of their peers
 - May require remedial courses
 - May need assistance with study and time management skills
 - Tend to have less confidence in their academic abilities
- Less likely to participate in social and academic experiences
 - Study groups
 - Interacting with professors
 - Utilizing support services
 - Participating in extracurricular activities
- Pre-college programs can potentially ease the transition
 - Increasing aspirations
 - Helping navigate college admissions process
 - Begin building relationships with college staff
- These students, particularly racial and ethnic minorities, are often unprepared for the feelings of alienation from peers
 - May also experience negative changes in relationships with family and friends who did not go to college

- May feel that faculty is less concerned and less supportive towards them
- Likelihood of success can be increased by having adequate support at home and on campus