

KEY TERMS RELEVANT TO THE FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

border living and double consciousness – *border living* describes the act of operating regularly within two (or more) cultures that promote distinct and sometimes opposing values, beliefs, behaviors, and practices. By learning the social codes connected with these cultures, an individual can develop a *double consciousness*, or a divided social identity.

cultural capital and social capital – *cultural capital* is a set of cultural credentials (e.g., language, clothing, and “tastes”) that certify eligibility for membership in status-conferring groups. Cultural capital is not widely owned and must be acquired over time. *Social capital* refers to individual and family connections that help an individual gain access to education, occupational and economic opportunities.

college culture shock – is a common state of anxiety or frustration that new students *may* feel as they learn what is expected of them at the university.

hidden curriculum – the set of rules, guidelines or expectations that are often not taught directly but are assumed to be known. In higher education, this curriculum may be manifested in the classroom, architecture, and university activities.

imposter syndrome – feelings of inadequacy, despite evidence to the contrary. High-achieving individuals may fear being “found out” as a fraud, believing that everyone else around them possesses knowledge, skills, and competencies they do not. These individuals often feel they do not deserve the success they have achieved and downplay their accomplishments as luck or timing.

(myth of) meritocracy – refers to a social system in which individuals get ahead and earn rewards in direct proportion to their individual efforts and abilities; the concept of the American Dream” is rooted in this idea. However, there exists a variety of non-merit factors (including wealth and discrimination) that suppress, neutralize, or even negate the effects of merit and create barriers to individual mobility.

privilege – an advantage that certain individuals have over others. Common forms of privilege that surface in first-gen studies include institutional knowledge, mentorship, financial literacy, and social capital.

survivor’s guilt – in higher education, a concept that describes the feelings of guilt associated with leaving family and friends behind in pursuit of new opportunities.