Cultivating and Capitalizing on the Strengths of First-Gen Students

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Session Abstract

First-generation students have gained much attention recently, but some areas, such as strengths, have been overlooked due to a deficit approach to research on this population. This interactive session seeks to provide knowledge and strategies to support first-generation students in their college environments through a strengths-based approach. It is particularly important that we understand how to assist the positive growth and development of first-generation students, who may struggle with belonging and academic self-efficacy. Strategies for ascertaining the strengths of first-generation students, assisting in self-discovery, and techniques for classrooms and program development will be discussed.
Session Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will garner strategies to facilitate strengths-based conversations with first-gen students to assist them in identifying their personal strengths.

2. Participants will know and understand the strengths of first-generation college students.

3. Participants will develop strategies to incorporate strengths-based approaches into first-gen programs and classroom experiences.
Session Outline

• Introductions
• Science of Character (Video)
• Discussion:
  • What are our strengths and how do we use them in our work with first-gen students?
  • What tools can we use to help our students identify their strengths?
• The Strengths of FG Students (Activity)
• Discussion:
  • How do you incorporate a strengths-based approach into your programmatic work and classroom practice?
  • How does OHIO First Scholars incorporate a strengths-based approach at Ohio University?
Introductions, Us

Angela Lash

• Associate Director
  Allen Student Advising Ctr
• Director, OHIO First Scholars
• Ohio U, Bachelor’s in 2004
  First-Generation Graduate!
• Ohio U, Master’s in 2010

Taylor Snider

• Graduate Assistant
  OHIO First Scholars
• Bowling Green State University,
  bachelor’s in 2015
  First-Generation Graduate!
• Currently pursuing a Master’s
  of Education in College Student
  Personnel at Ohio University
  (April 2017)
Ohio University

- Established in 1804
- 4 year public institution in Ohio
- More than 17,000 undergraduate students on the Athens Campus
- Over 4,000 new first-year students each year
- 25% of new first-year students are first-generation
- Increase in first-gen retention from 73% (2012-13) to 77% (2015-16)

OHIO First Scholars

- Established in 2015
- Committed to supporting the success, persistence, and engagement of first-gen students
- Focuses primarily on students in their first-year, but includes upper class students in some components
- Includes supplemental advising, proactive outreach and communication, mentoring program, seminar course, specialized living experience, student organization, first-gen awareness campaign
Introductions,
You
The Science of Character
Identifying Strengths and Facilitating Strengths-Based Conversations

• What are your top strengths? How/when did you identify them?

• How do you utilize the strengths to support your students?

• Does one of your strengths ever get in the way of your work with students? How do you navigate this challenge?
Resources to Assist Students in Strength Identification

• Questions from video
  • Who do you admire and why?
  • Finish this sentence: “I want to be…”

• Strengths Finder
• VIA Strengths Assessment
• Appreciative Advising Model
• Other ideas?
What are the Strengths of First-Generation Students?

- Individually, use the Post-it notes on your table to list adjectives or anecdotes that illustrate the strengths of first-gen students.
- Post the notes on the wall under the appropriate category from our video.
- Review anecdotes as a group and discuss ways that we can help students notice and utilize these strengths.
How do YOU Incorporate a Strengths-Based Approach?

• What strengths-based strategies do you incorporate into your work with first-gen students?

• How do you implement a strengths-based practice in the classroom?
OHIO’s Strengths-Based Approach for First-Generation Student Programming

- Orientation Session
- Weekly Communication and Proactive Outreach
- Mentoring Program
- Student Organization
- Seminar Class
- Awareness Campaign
“What great leaders have in common is that each truly knows his or her strengths — and can call on the right strength at the right time.”

— Tom Rath, Strengths Based Leadership
Cultivating and Capitalizing on the Strengths of First-Gen Students

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