



Supporting First-Generation University Students Series
PART 3: Strategies for Encouraging Academic Engagement

Pascarella et al. (2004) emphasize the importance of academic and classroom engagement for first-generation students. They contend that first-generation students may benefit from their academic experiences comparatively more to their continuing-generation peers because these experiences build cultural capital they might otherwise not have access to (Pascarella et al., 2004). Additionally, access to consistent, timely feedback can help first-generation students as they acclimate to the differing demands associated with academic work in college. Here are a few ways you can promote engagement in your classroom, while also encouraging students to access and utilize feedback:

Strategies	Teaching Suggestions
Encourage students to set goals	Encourage students to set their own learning goals and develop a personal plan for achieving them. Have them reflect on those goals throughout the term, so that they can see their own progress.
Implement reflection activities	Incorporate student reflection, self-assessment, and peer-review activities. These type of activities allow students to engage actively not only with their own learning process, but their peers' as well.
Incorporate more active and collaborative learning	Implement active learning activities, and provide students with numerous opportunities for collaboration. See our resources on active and collaborative learning (linked below in Additional Resources).
Help students relate course objectives to their lives	Motivate students by helping them see how course materials and course experiences may relate to their lives and goals, as well as those of their families and communities
Create opportunities for outside engagement	Direct students to activities that blend personal and community engagement, such as service learning, undergraduate research, and internships

Encourage students to seek help and feedback

Current research on supporting the retention of first-generation students emphasizes the importance of providing students with resources for accessing academic support, both inside and outside of your classroom (Brazil-Cruz & Martinez, 2016; Coffman, 2011; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Swecker, Fifoit, & Searby, 2013; Wibrowski, Matthews, & Kitsantas, 2016). Some strategies for this include:

Strategies	Teaching Suggestions
Make feedback an important part of class	Make help- and feedback-seeking an integral part of your class activities. Help students see that it is normal to be vulnerable, seek support, and receive feedback. See our series on " Effective Feedback " for more suggestions on this.
Point students to other resources on campus	Be aware that many students may lack knowledge about, and access to, academic resources such as the Library. Plan for an activity that introduces students to the Library , its services, and the type of help that they can receive from a librarian.
	Help students navigate the higher education system and identify resources where they can receive the help. Include information on various university support services in your syllabus (e.g., SASC Writing Assistance , Student



[Disability Center, Leadership Programs, Veterans Resource Center, and Counseling Services](#)).

Adapted from: Lohman, 2015

Additional Resources

- [Q&A: Stanford's Hazel Markus](#)
- [Grand Valley State University Resource on First Generation Students](#)
- [First generation: Best practices for faculty. \[UC Irvine\]](#)
- [First year experience. \[UCLA\]](#)
- ["I fit in neither place." Article from Zamudio-Suarez in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.](#)

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