

**Long Beach City College
LEARNING AND ACADEMIC RESOURCES DEPARTMENT
Faculty and Staff Flex Credit DLA #2 (6 hours)**

FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM

Whether you are teaching your first class at LBCC or you've been teaching classes for 40 years, you've undoubtedly noticed the overwhelming number of first generation college students in your classroom(s). First generation students are defined as being the first in their family to attend college. For these students, attending college may be their only chance to 'make it out' or to 'break the cycle.' Consequently, they feel the pressure to succeed but do not know the resources that can help them do so. And, because their families can offer little guidance in the process, most of these students become discouraged and drop out.

For that reason, the purpose of this Faculty Flex Directed Learning Activity is to:

- ✓ Help you become aware of what first generation college students are going through
- ✓ Help you to recognize some of the warning signs of a struggling first-generation student
- ✓ Give you tools to help you address the needs of your first generation college students

Hopefully, the information in this DLA will assist you in handling students who may be in need.

Let's get started!



A. AWARENESS

Questions to get you thinking about first generation students:

1. In your experience, what have you noticed about first generation students, or what might teachers assume about them? Think about this in very broad terms (i.e., classroom participation, overall confidence, attendance, homework submission, etc.)

2. What concerns or challenges might LBCC's first generation students face (or what concerns have they shared with you)?

3. Have you noticed any warning signs to indicate your first generation students are struggling or in distress? If so, what are they? If not, what do you think some of the signs might be?

First generation college students typically apply to and attend college without any guidance from parents and siblings. This makes college feel foreign and confusing to them. They often don't understand what they need to do to succeed and may feel a variety of negative emotions about college. Nationally, first-generation college students are more likely to quit college after their first-year than non-first generation students.

What are they feeling as they enter college?

First generation students often experience a range of feelings about being the first in their family to attend and complete college. What are some of these common feelings?

Excitement and Anxiety – Many students are thrilled by the idea of college, but also somewhat frightened, asking themselves, “Am I cut out to be a college student?” despite their stellar academic performance in high school.

Responsibility – Many first generation students have to help pay for their education, perhaps more so than students of higher socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition to financial responsibility, these students may be pressured by family and friends to continue to be available to help with siblings, hang out, etc., and may receive mixed messages about their changing identities (e.g., wanting to succeed, but not wanting to be different from the rest of the family or their peers).

Pride – These students often feel an overwhelming sense of pride about being the first in their families to attend college. A college degree can provide many opportunities. This is an important goal to them.

Guilt – In addition to pride, many first generation students may feel guilty about having the opportunity to attend college while others in the family did not have that opportunity. These students may wonder if it is fair for them to be at school while their parents struggle financially at home. They may feel the need to support their families. First generation students may also feel guilty about their academic performance if it is not as good as they or their families would like.

Embarrassment and Shame – These students may feel embarrassment over their socioeconomic status or the level of education in their family. First generation students may try to act like their family is more highly educated or financially advantaged than they really are. There may be embarrassment around being different from their peers at college, particularly if their peers have a long lineage of family members attending college or if they seem to know the ‘lingo’ when a first generation student may not.

Confusion - First-generation students may feel ‘out of the loop’ when it comes to college processes and procedures such as office hours, enrollment deadlines, website navigation, etc. They may not be aware of the resources available to them.

Being aware of our first generation student population is only step 1. Click on or copy and paste this link into your browser to hear more about what first generation students experience.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXsbnmPSaDc>

B. WARNING SIGNS OF WHEN A FIRST GENERATION STUDENT IS STRUGGLING



As mentioned by the students in the video, first-generation students typically experience a wide range of emotions about college. Some of these emotions are positive, and some negative. These feelings are common. However, many first generation students experience stress/issues when transitioning from high school to college. They may be stressed academically, financially, because of family, work or other social issues during their time at Long Beach City College. Sometimes students will seek advice and support from academic advisors, faculty and staff. But often, they are too embarrassed to tell anyone of their struggles. You are often one of the first (and sometimes the only) people who recognize that students are not functioning well, academically or personally.

The warning signs might be shown in various ways, including:

Academic Performance

- Drop in class attendance
- Incapacitating test anxiety
- Pattern of dropping classes
- Poor academic performance
- Severe reactions to poor test/paper grade
- Unrealistic career goals
- Chronic indecisiveness or procrastination
- Academic probation
- Poor study, reading, and/or comprehension skills
- Academic dismissal
- Excessive appointments to see you during office hours
- Frequent requests for accommodations



Unusual Behavior

- Disruptive class behavior
- Aggressive/threatening behavior
- Dramatic weight change
- Prolonged or extreme emotionality
- Significant decline in personal hygiene
- Inappropriate or bizarre conversation

Life-Circumstance Concerns

- Illness (loss of health)
- Relationship breakup
- Difficulty making and keeping friends
- Desire to be alone
- Shyness
- Excessive sleep



There are many reasons first generation students struggle to enroll and complete college. Some of these reasons include

- ✓ Lack of family knowledge/guidance through the process
- ✓ Lack of support from friends/family with higher education goals
- ✓ Conflict between balance of family/cultural expectations or responsibilities vs. academic commitment and responsibility
- ✓ Lack of academic preparation

Although these signs and symptoms may serve as warning signs that a student is in distress, most by themselves do not necessarily mean that a student has a serious problem that warrants psychological help. (References to suicide are obvious exceptions). In general, the more of these behaviors you observe, the more cause there is for concern, particularly if these behaviors persist over a period of time. These are signals that suggest you should consider expressing your concern to the student and possibly referring them to campus or other resources.

1. Name as many LBCC resources that you can think of to help our first generation student population:

Although financial aid, scholarships, academic counseling and other resources are useful for first generation students, it is YOU they see on a regular basis. Often, students feel most connected with their classroom instructors. For that reason, we would like to offer you some tips on how you can help first generation students adapt more easily to college life and expectations.



C. STRATEGIES TO HELP YOU ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF YOUR FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS

The following video clips and follow up questions are intended to get you thinking about ways you can help your first generation students succeed in college. For each section, watch the brief video and answer the related questions.

1. *Attendance and Classroom Community*

As professors at LBCC, we know it is important for ALL students to attend every class; their success in the college depends on it. However, it is not uncommon to have students miss class sessions, and that includes our first generation student population.

- a. What do you think are some of the biggest obstacles for first generation students attending class regularly?

b. How do you think first generation students will specifically benefit from regular attendance?

c. **Watch: Attendance and Classroom Community** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4ad36ppR-0>

d. How can you encourage your first generation students to attend and participate in your class regularly?

2. ***Building Student Confidence***

If we are able to build our first generation students' confidence, it's more likely they will attend and participate in class regularly, right? In the long run, that will help them to succeed.

a. What are some common observations you've made of students who have low confidence?

b. Watch **Building Student Confidence** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56VVqEpWe9o>

c. Why is it important for students to gain confidence? What will be the benefit of high level confidence?

d. What can you do in your classroom to help build the confidence of your students?

3. Embracing an Academic Identity

Most first generation students have no idea how to study at the college level and wonder how they will succeed. They have been told in the past what to do and when to do it. Because college is different than high school, where they have a more rigorous academic program, and more freedom and choices, they often find it hard to keep up and find success.

- a. Watch **Embracing an Academic Identity** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EIkMTKCs6c> to see how this professor encourages them to find their talents in order to find success.
- b. What does it mean to “bend your life” in order to re-define one’s talents and aspirations?

- c. How can you use this idea in your classroom to help your first generation students embrace their personal academic identity?

4. Using a Syllabus/First Day Lesson Plan to Engage Students From the Start

Traditionally, professors simply go over the syllabus in the first day or two of a semester. In the following video clip, the professor explains how he creates and uses his syllabus to engage his students, help them feel welcomed and motivated.

- a. Watch **Using a Syllabus to Engage Students** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOGv24rCViw>
- b. As noted in the video, first generation students often enter college with a negative mindset, feeling as though their instructors are unapproachable, and they won’t make connections with their classmates. In order to help your first generation students to overcome these fears/assumptions, how could you use your syllabus, or first week’s lessons, to help them prevail over these fears?

5. Overcoming the Fear of Asking Questions

As you saw in the last video how the professor begins his semester by having the students ask questions of their classmates, the course and the instructor. This helps to create a feeling of inclusiveness. Many students can experience some hesitation about asking questions in class, but how can we help those who have so little self-confidence that they wouldn't dare to ask a question in front of everyone?

- a. What do you think are some of the barriers first generation students face when it comes to asking questions in class? In other words, what is it that holds them back from doing so?

- b. Watch **Overcoming the Fear of Asking Questions** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXSbL4OgVZg>
This professor shares a strategy that can help even the most timid student develop this essential skill.

- c. When students ask questions, how does it benefit their learning?

- d. What could you do in your classroom to help students feel more comfortable asking questions?

6. Guided Journaling

As you've likely noticed, most of the focus in this section has been on building the confidence of our first generation students. Oftentimes, students need to think things out before they feel comfortable sharing in a classroom of peers. Journaling is a good way to reflect on an idea before it is discussed in class, and may help with student confidence and engagement.

- a. Watch **Guided Journaling** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkQmdS95KYg> to see how this professor uses guided journaling in her classes to help her students do higher-level thinking and become engaged learners.

- b. Guided journaling can be used in almost any course. Describe a lesson where guided journaling might be/is incorporated in your class.

- c. What positive results could come from this application of guided journaling?

7. Using Analogies

All students, including first generation students, at times have difficulty understanding a concept. It leaves them feeling dumb – because they assume everyone else understands. In reality, there are others who can't wrap their head around the idea either. First generation students can be left feeling overwhelmed and discouraged by this feeling. As teachers, we might see that blank stare of confusion, which is a sign that we need to further explain.

- a. Watch **Using Analogies** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyAneppJgwo> to hear how one professor shows the importance of perseverance by use of analogies with her first generation students.
- b. What analogy could you use with your students to encourage them when they feel discouraged by the difficulty of a course, or college in general, and want to give up?

- c. Now, develop another specific analogy for one of the more prominent concepts in one of the courses you teach (for example, an important concept in a medical assistant course might be professionalism in the workplace).

8. Giving Effective Feedback

One of the fears first generation students have is inability to meet the high standards of their professors. Some students are disheartened when they receive assignments back with only criticisms written by the professor. At the same time, it can be difficult for professors to find the balance between providing honest feedback as well as supportive encouragement to their students.

- a. Watch **Giving Effective Feedback** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=angMump9ymA> to hear how this professor has found this balance with her first generation students, thereby promoting their success in her class.
- b. Give examples of how you can provide effective feedback to your students, both verbally and on written assignments.

- c. In what ways can providing effective feedback to first generation students be a benefit to them?

9. Using a Seminar Format to Engage Students

Often, when we assign students a reading, we let them know they should be prepared to discuss it in class. Most students assume that “discussion” means the teacher does all the talking and a handful of extroverted students in the class will answer the questions posed by the teacher. Needless to say, this does not help those passive students better understand the material, nor does it offer the opportunity for them to become comfortable speaking and responding in class.

- a. Watch **Using a Seminar Format to Engage Students** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJc6IBWHztl> to see how one professor demonstrates how he adapts a traditional seminar format to foster thoughtful discussion in larger classes.
- b. Describe how using a seminar format could be helpful in engaging first generation students in your classroom.

- c. Describe a lesson using a seminar format that you could use in your classroom and tell how you would facilitate it.

10. Overcoming Stereotypes by Building Professional Skills

First generation college students are faced with a college and professional culture that might stereotype them.

- a. Describe some of the conventional images you are aware of (assumptions that are made about first generation students).

- b. Watch **Overcoming Stereotypes by Building Professional Skills** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nwSDerlC-o&list=UU9kHMI1fr8uGxezYyF3eqjQ> to hear one professor share his strategy in helping students develop the skills to overcome stereotypes they may encounter.

- c. How can you help students in your classes overcome the stereotypes others have about them?

11. Student Engagement Through Textbooks

Students, in general, assume a textbook will be boring and difficult to understand. Often, this leads to procrastination in the purchase of the text, but the professor in this video uses a strategy to get the students familiar with the text right away, and helps to tear down those preconceived ideas they have about the textbook when they enter his classroom.

Watch **Student Engagement Through Textbooks** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XxKStM6xFAw> . This professor employs a strategy that helps them see the value of the information in a textbook and how to use it.

- a. How can you address the common beliefs/concerns students have about the textbook for your class?

- b. Describe/create a textbook engagement activity to use within the first two weeks of the beginning of a semester with one of your courses. The activity need not be content related. For example, you could create an activity to help students familiarize themselves with the format of the text. Or, you could ask them to participate in a textbook scavenger hunt!

12. Writing a College Paper

Writing a college paper can be scary for any student. First generation students tend to lack confidence when it comes to this task and often struggle getting their ideas onto paper.

- a. What do you think are some of the barriers first generation students have when faced with writing their first college paper?

- b. Watch **Writing a College Paper** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i454Nc3VaQ4>
c. When first generation students sit down to write, what problems might they have?

- d. What are some strategies you can use to help first generation students find their own ideas about a topic?

13. Time & Place to Study

Many first-generation students can't find the time or a quiet place to study at home because family and family-related activities come first. As a result they have trouble keeping up with coursework, and are frustrated and stressed.

- a. Name some of the struggles you can imagine first generation students having with inability to find time and space to study.

- b. Watch **Time & Place to Study** - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XDj_4gho_8 and hear this professor's strategy to help his students get their demanding coursework done.
- c. What suggestions can you provide to help your students find solutions to their time/study challenges?

Congratulations! You are now more aware of what our first generation students experience and hopefully are walking away with some concrete ideas as to how you can help them find success in your classroom! **Be sure to fill out the Faculty Flex Verification information on the next page and submit this entire packet to Faculty Professional Development for Flex Credit.**

For more information, resources, and tips about First Generation College students, visit the **First Generation-Faculty web page** - <http://www.lbcc.edu/LAR/firstgenfaculty.cfm>
And remember, the Learning and Academic Resources (LAR) Department faculty and staff are here to assist you throughout the semester.

Stop by or ask for a class orientation.

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FLEX ACTIVITY FOLLOW UP

Please complete the following and submit this page to LBCC's Faculty Professional Development Office as your verification for the work accomplished.

Please attach this completed Activity to your *Flex Report Form*.

Name:

Date:

Time:

Department:

Full-time

Part time

Flex Activity: **LAR Directed Learning Activity #2**

Title of Activity: **DLA #2: FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM**

Purpose of Activity:

What did you learn from this activity?

How will the information covered in this DLA be applied in classroom instruction and/or contribute to your professional development?