

Awareness Points for Assisting First-Generation/Low-Income Students

UW-Eau Claire Statistics

41% of students are first-generation (defined as neither parent having completed a 4-year degree)

11% of students are low-income (according to levels set by U.S. Department of Education)

Students who are both first-generation and low-income have a six-year graduation rate that is approximately 8% lower than the overall rate at the university.

Characteristics of First-Generation/Low Income Students

In comparison with other students, those who are first generation or low income are

- More likely to report that an important goal for them is to be well-off financially so that they can provide their children with better opportunities than they had.
- More likely to have non-academic obligations, such as work and family responsibilities, that interfere with study commitments.
- More likely to major in traditional degree programs, where the majors have direct correlation to occupations. Although they are more likely to express certainty about their major and career goals, these decisions may be based on incomplete information.
- More likely to report feeling they do not belong or do not feel welcome on campus.
- Less informed about the full costs of college attendance and more reluctant to take out loans. As a result, they may work an inordinate number of hours.
- Less likely to be informed about learning disabilities and accommodations available.
- Less likely to feel comfortable approaching faculty members, advisers, or student service providers for assistance. They tend to place a high value on being independent and self-reliant.
- Less likely to be informed about graduate and professional school options.
- Less likely to be involved in student organizations or other co-curricular activities.

Assisting First-Generation/Low Income Students

First-generation and low-income students will benefit from academic, social, and personal support. The following strategies may be used to promote their academic success:

- Enroll the students in a learning community or other type of structured first-year experience. Orientation courses can help students gain essential background knowledge about higher education and their own institution.
- Involve the students with faculty, staff, and other students, particularly in activities that are directed toward student learning. Formal mentoring programs, faculty-student research, and other types of collaboration can be helpful.

- Recommend courses that engage students in learning. These students tend to prefer classes that involve interactive, hands-on teaching methods. They will benefit from the use of learning strategies that call for students to work together inside or outside of the classroom. How well they perform in a class is often strongly influenced by the instructional methods and personal relationship established with the professor.
- Try to incorporate support services into the academic curriculum. One method to relieve students of the stigma of receiving assistance is to link academic support to the students' everyday learning needs. Time management and study skills instruction may be provided in relation to specific courses or assignments.
- Make intentional efforts to get the students integrated into campus life. Encourage them to participate in student organizations and activities that will allow them to develop leadership skills, form positive social networks with peers, and gain an appreciation of cultural events and global issues. The students may not attend such campus activities as the Forum lectures or the Artists Series events unless they are encouraged by faculty or required to attend for class credit.
- Provide the students with clear guidance regarding your expectations of what they have to do to be successful. Rather than waiting for them to seek help, it is desirable to reach out to the students as much as possible.
- Encourage the students to engage in experiences that will broaden their awareness of academic programs and career options. They may need more assistance than other students to secure internships, perform informational interviews, arrange career shadowing experiences, etc.
- Always maintain high expectations and set high standards for them.

Developed by Student Support Services staff, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.