

DIG College 1 Faculty Interview Summary 2018

Introduction

Interviews were conducted with College 1 faculty to obtain their perspectives on student success and equity in their College 1 classrooms. The 12 interviewees included a mix of counseling and content area faculty with varied levels of teaching experience. The interviews lasted approximately 1.5 hours and were conducted by UCLA evaluators.

Findings

Instruction and Instructional Supports

- Faculty provide two-tiered supports based on perceived student needs: supplemental and interventional. Successful students receive, and often seek, specific supports from the instructor related to counseling-type services (e.g. transfer information, goals, and educational planning). In contrast, struggling students receive support framed as an intervention and designed to prevent course failure (e.g. phone calls home, homework support, referrals to their coach).
- Faculty select lessons from the model curriculum based on two criteria: faculty strengths and student needs. These may or may not be mutually exclusive. Those who base their lessons on student needs build their curriculum around students' expectations for the course, student interests, and priorities. Content delivery is secondary to addressing immediate student needs (e.g. parking or access to computer labs), learning how to express and accept differences in opinion, finding allies in the course, and identifying transferrable skills that students bring to academia.
- Student strengths/assets are identified via the Culture Box activity and student information surveys. The majority of faculty use student information to identify those who may be "at risk" of dropping out. Other instructors use student information to identify how they can better serve their students. Faculty describe strengths through a skill-based, academic lens, such as high assessment scores or ability to craft a well-written essay. Two faculty describe student strengths in broader terms, such as age-related knowledge (i.e. knowledge specific to Gen Z), worldly knowledge, technical knowledge, cultural knowledge, awareness of politics, openness to new experiences, and a desire to learn. It is the role of the instructor to identify transferrable *skills* that students bring to academia and to facilitate students' awareness of their own *strengths*.
- Two mutually exclusive College 1 course goals resonate throughout the interviews: 1) learn how to do the assignments and turn in the work, 2) find and form students' identity. Faculty who focus on the later recognize the students themselves as a resource, use College 1 as a space to discuss and challenge core beliefs, support students as they find their voice, and encourage students to expand their narratives.
- Explicit discussions of race most frequently occur during the One Book, One College lessons. The One Book curriculum creates a space for rich dialogue about diversity and difference, provides opportunities for expressing and respecting different opinions, generates discussions about communication norms, and fosters discourse about race that is explicit and public.

Diversity and Difference

- Faculty interpret classroom difference and diversity based on their own identity. For example, faculty who identify as first generation describe their students in terms of first generation status; faculty of color discuss core beliefs and student identity that is not defined by dominant culture; faculty who struggled in college recognize and support learning differences in their classrooms, and faculty from impoverished backgrounds view diversity through an economic lens.
- The majority of faculty lack the fluency to discuss race/ethnicity. While faculty are mindful of how issues of equity might impact success in the classroom, it is not what first comes to mind when they think about student success. Despite a fundamental awareness of the equity gap, student success in College 1 is rarely informed by race.
- Faculty interpret spontaneous, student-driven discussions of race/ethnicity as either “uncomfortable” or an opportunity for growth. Proactive faculty will respond to racist or homophobic comments by inviting a guest speaker to discuss micro-aggressions; watching the documentary, 13th; or self-disclosing one’s experience confronting racism. Faculty who feel ill-equipped to discuss issues of race will quickly resolve the conflict and resume business-as-usual.

Student Success

- On average, faculty describe successful students as individuals who fit the template of a “good” college student. Successful students do the work, show up to class, complete assignments, put in the effort, take an active role in class, enter class with a plan, proactively meet with the instructor, are present physically and mentally, share, participate, and engage. One instructor noted that success is more nuanced. Success, for some, is more complex than obtaining a passing grade.
- Faculty describe unsuccessful students in terms of barriers: internal, external, and institutional. Two faculty ascribe differences in success to cultural barriers.
 - *Internal barriers*: Student success is defined in terms of deficits. Students are not strong in reading and writing, do not purchase the textbook, arrive without a path, are not college-ready, do not want to be in college, are not socially mature, lack internal motivation, lack well-defined personal goals, do not have role models, come to campus grossly unprepared, lack preparation, require resources to bring them up to a level that meets expectations, and procrastinate.
 - *External barriers*: Students have “a lot going on” in their lives, homeless, pregnant, work outside of school, support families, lack transportation, lack course materials, lack internet access at home, care for siblings, work too many hours, and are hungry.
 - *Institutional barriers*: The structure of College 1 may not be meeting the needs of some students and more students of privilege enrolled in College 1 may be negatively affecting those students for whom the program was originally designed.
 - *Cultural barriers*: Faculty-student cultural disconnect, lack of cultural understanding, and unequal power structures within the college system.
- Faculty identify best practices to promote student success: limit direct instruction, pose “a lot” of questions, use inquiry-based methods, encourage cooperative learning, cultivate student voice, support student engagement, and adopt a teacher-as-facilitator role.

Equity

- Faculty define equity as equal opportunities, access to resources, and “leveling the playing field.” To work within the analogy of three students of different heights looking over a fence from their perch atop the same size boxes, faculty note that they need to adapt resources to give students appropriate sized boxes. Instructors attempt to adjust the height of the boxes through flexibility in the classroom, tailored teaching, and resource awareness and referrals. For example, faculty extend deadlines; help students prioritize assignments; ensure that students know how to access computers on campus; and refer students to coaches, the Lancer Pantry, and counseling services.
- For some faculty, equity is complicated. It is more than equal access. It is not just about two different people taking College 1. Equity is not having to conform, assimilate, and compromise what is great/strong about one’s culture. Equity addresses unequal power structures that are many generations old and hard to shift. They admit that it is not an easy thing to talk about or address.

Professional Development

- Half of the faculty expressed a desire to collaborate with their colleagues. The instructors seek a community/space to share best practices and to study, discuss, and better address the equity gap in their classrooms.