Taking Volunteering to the Next Level: Co-curricular Service Learning programs fostering a community for low-income and first-generation students.

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Upper Midwest Conference 2016
Learning Outcomes

• Development and implementation of programs that combine service learning and support first-generation and low income students.

• Identify strategies to involve both campus and community partners to increase diversity of opportunities offered to students and to encourage continued relationships.
Question:

How many of you work closely with first-generation and/or low income students in your current role?
First-gen students & academic success

• “The results suggest that first-generation students more frequently encounter obstacles that compromise their academic success as compared to non-first-generation students, such as job responsibilities, family responsibilities, perceived weak English and math skills, inadequate study skills, and feelings of depression.”

Breaking Down Barriers: Academic Obstacles of First-Generation Students at Research Universities, MICHAEL J. STEBLETON AND KRISTA M. SORIA

• Academic Engagement and participation in high-impact practices (Kuh, 2008)
Background

• Undocumented Students
  – Financial Aid
  – Scholarship Resources
  – Background checks
  – Required internships
  – Research opportunities
Service-learning for first-gen and low income students

• Surprising similarities, as well as important differences (Wilsey et al., 2014)

• Freshmen: Service Learning and LCs (Kuh, 2013)
  – Parity among racial/ethnic groups
  – Fewer 1st gen students
  – Fewer part-time students
  – Fewer transfer students
  – Fewer older students
First-Generation College Students at NIU

- Current enrollment: 15,000 undergraduate students
- Ethnicity: Asian 6%, Native American 3%, African American 21%, Latino/a 14%, 56% White

- 44% Low-income (NIU)
- 45% first-generation college students (NIU)
- 50% first-generation college students (nationally)
Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning

• **Undergraduate Research**
  – Research Rookies
  – Summer Research Opportunities Program
  – Student Engagement Fund
  – Undergraduate Special Opportunities in Artistry & Research Program

• **Themed Learning Communities**
  – Living Learning Communities

• **Community Engagement/Service-learning**
  – Huskie Service Scholars
  – NIU Service Leaders

*Your Future, Our Focus*
Huskie Service Scholars

• Program pilot in 2012 to provide an service engagement opportunity to first-generation and low-income students
• Initially only monthly meetings
• We’ve since added professional development opportunities/workshops, Community Engagement Showcase requirement, Blogs, Peer Mentor reflection, and have developed partnerships
• Eligibility – FGCS or low-income; non-U.S. citizen
NIU Service Leaders

• 2015 – Financial Aid and Human Resources: a Federal Work-Study and additional service-learning and engagement opportunities to first generation and low-income students.

• Eligibility – FGCS and Work-Study eligible; U.S. citizen

• Critical feedback from partners – Latino Resource Center and Asian American Center
Networking and Strategies for best practices - Program Partners

– Scholarship Office, Financial Aid, Human Resources

– Campus partners (Center for Black Studies, Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, Latino Resource Center, Center for Latino and Latin American Studies, Center for South East Asian Studies, Student Involvement and Leadership Development, OSEEL, STEM Outreach, Academic Advising Center, Outdoor Adventures)

– Community Partners (Little John Elementary School, TAILS Humane Society, Hope Haven, DeKalb Area Women’s Center, Feed ‘em Soup)

– NIU SL – DeKalb/ Sycamore School district, Literacy Clinic, STEM Outreach, STEM Read
Huskie Service Scholars vs. NIU Service Leaders

Partial tuition waiver

Campus partners
- Freshmen or first-semester transfer students
- Program requirements (300 hours)
- Population served (varied)
- Eligibility (non-U.S. citizen)

Community partners
- Federal Work- Study
- Community Engagement Showcase
- Cohort Meetings (professional development, Reflection, Blogs)
- Peer Mentor
- First-gen or low-income students
- Learning outcomes
- Program duration

Population served (youth)
- Eligibility (U.S. citizen)

Upper classmen
- Program requirements (flexible schedule)

Your Future, Our Focus
Can you identify practices that your institution/program currently uses that could be revised to better serve the growing population of first-generation and low income students?
Discussion

• How do we help first-generation students experience true student engagement when they have more personal responsibilities outside of their university experience?

• How do we create an awareness on campus of the obstacles for first-generation students and modify existing programs to include resources and support for this unique subgroup of students?
Conclusion

- Program Implementation Tips:
  - Program eligibility requirements
  - Flexibility with application process (Skype interviews, computer access)

- Skill development for success
- Building networks

- Intentional campus partners (cultural centers)
- Create opportunities for growth (peer mentoring, etc.)
“...I thought to myself “if they can do it, I can do it”. I want to make a difference in my community.”  
– Erin Hernandez

“These experiences have contributed to my total education by teaching me lessons that have helped me grow as a person. They have also taught me the leadership, communication, organizational, and analytical skills that I possess today.” – Shareny Mota

“When I first arrived at NIU I couldn’t see myself being involved on campus, and I definitely didn’t see myself as a leader. However, through this program, I have grown in so many ways and leadership is just one of them.” – Hannah Kean

“Working with all types of people, having all different needs, has helped me accommodate [the] way I speak to people, handle situations, work well with others, as this flexibility and adaptation will be very needed when I join the workforce” – Diana Garcia