

Inside Higher Ed
Faculty Tips for First-Gen Students
June 3, 2014
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<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/06/03/video-series-aims-help-instructors-help-first-generation-students#sthash.j0bLvI8C.dpbs>

When a U.S. Senate committee sought to highlight successful practices in educating minority and other underserved students at a hearing last month, it turned to officials at an urban two-year institution (Long Beach City College); a historically black university (Fayetteville State University); and Heritage University, a private institution that is located on tribal land in Washington State and where about three-quarters of students are the first in their families to attend college.

Congress isn't the only party poised to benefit from Heritage's experience and expertise with first-generation students. The university's faculty has created [a new video series](#) to help college instructors there and elsewhere better-serve such students in the classroom.

Much of the work colleges are doing to help first-generation and other historically underserved students thrive in college focuses on tutoring and mentoring, but "there isn't much to help faculty -- there's very little to help them in their [classroom] role," says Sister Kathleen Ross, whose Institute for Student Identity and Success created the video series.

Ross, who was Heritage's founding president, says the series grew from the idea that students learn many of the practices and skills that lead to academic success subliminally, through socialization, rather than being directly told or taught them.

And first-generation students, because they tend to be educated in schools and grow up in homes where such signaling may happen less, often come into college with fewer of those skills.

Heritage first set out to find out -- through a survey of students -- which faculty members helped them the most, and what the instructors did that most helped them. Then Ross and her team conducted in-depth interviews with the professors "whose names kept surfacing," she says.

Out of those discussions emerged a set of practices or theories that, validated by research in other settings, seemed to work with first-generation students. Each instructor then filmed a video describing the practice and how to implement it. The videos are all under five minutes.

Some of the strategies consist of [using analogies](#) to help first-generation students grasp the big picture. This is supposed to help them not feel overwhelmed or discouraged.

Another focuses on "Attendance and Classroom Community." This strategy aims to build a community within the classroom, informing the class that missing a day affects everyone. The idea is to reinforce students' identities as members of the community. One instructor has a four-

step process for [giving her students feedback](#) that strikes a balance between directness and supportive encouragement.

Ross says she originally wanted to publish the strategies on individual tip sheets, but feedback from some faculty members was that people wouldn't take the time to read them. The video was the best way to convey information.

"The visual part works because the faculty we are trying to reach are very busy with their discipline and don't often take time to research what works well in the classroom," says Ross. "It also helps for them to see regular professors talking."

Sharing the Wealth

Heritage faculty have found success in implementing these practices, and Ross hopes they will help instructors elsewhere, too. But the university is encouraging other colleges to submit their own best practices as well.

So far, two institutions are interested in making videos with Heritage. Holy Names University is one.

Beth Martin, vice president of academic affairs there, says that when Ross approached her about contributing to the video series, she thought it was a great idea. At the time, Holy Names was already forming its Center for Excellence, Teaching and Learning -- with the goal of supporting faculty by providing useful resources. The university gathered and archived materials for faculty members to use to help engage first-generation students.

"We thought it would be very appropriate to add [the videos] to our archives and to begin showing them to faculty," she says.

It is too early to say if the strategies are working for the Holy Names faculty, said Martin, because while the videos have been shared, instructors haven't discussed them. The main focus, right now, is deciding which videos to produce for Heritage, says Martin.

Matt Rubinoff, executive director of "[I'm First!](#)," an online community that provides resources for first-generation college students, says he's glad to see institutions sharing their ideas. "The more that we can share the good work that everybody is doing on behalf of first-generation college students, the better," he says.

Colleges usually focus on finding ways to better-acclimate incoming first-generation students through summer bridge programs, first-year transition programs and campus networks. "We don't see enough colleges thinking more from an academic perspective about how first-generation college students need special attention or can be catered to in the classroom," he says.

"That's why I really appreciate the breakthrough strategies video series," Rubinoff says. "They're helping faculty better-understand the unique needs and interests of first-generation students."

Read more: <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/06/03/video-series-aims-help-instructors-help-first-generation-students#ixzz33btrueaw>

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