

# Strategies for Creating a Sense of Belonging on Campus

Belonging, Identity and Success For Underrepresented Students

KIPP COLLEGE PARTNERS CONVENING

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# Abstract

**Achievement and satisfaction in college is determined by factors beyond academics, particularly for students from underrepresented communities. Academic preparation and applying oneself academically are certainly critical, however, other variables such as sense of belonging, institutional supports, and removing barriers to success are equally paramount. The work of faculty and staff on campuses is to ensure that students reach their highest achievement level and graduate with levels of satisfaction and belonging parallel to academic accomplishments. This is the promise of higher education.**

# WHAT THE DEMOGRAPHICS SAY ABOUT UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS.....

- ◆ **24% of four-year college students are first generation, and from low income families.**
- ◆ **25% of first generation students leave college after the first year.**
- ◆ **Most first generation and students of color attend public colleges/universities.**
- ◆ **Latino student enrollment has increased while Black student enrollment has leveled.**

# WHY BELONGING MATTERS....



# SENSE OF BELONGING and *Success*

*“Students’ perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g. faculty, peers).”*

Strayhorn, T. (2012) *College Students’ Sense of Belonging*

# TWO STORIES: BELONGING AND PERSISTENCE

**Alejandra** is a first generation Latina from a southwestern city. She engaged with the ALANA Center and the Latino student organization. No real struggles academically and is a charismatic, influential member of the Latino student community. After her sophomore year, there are academic challenges but nothing threatening. At home, there is pressure from the family to return home to assist in supporting the household.

**Malcolm** is a first-generation African American student from Louisiana. He has two younger brothers and his mother is the sole parent. Malcolm, like Alejandra, does well academically and also connects with key faculty of color on campus. Malcolm is not very active in student organizations but hangs out in the cultural center.

# FACTORS THAT ENHANCE BELONGING AND SUCCESS

- ◆ **Positive self-concept.**
- ◆ **Family support.**
- ◆ **Relationships with peers.**
- ◆ **Relationships with faculty/staff.**
- ◆ **Strong Institutional support systems/resources.**
- ◆ **Race- and class-conscious institutional practices.**



## VASSAR COLLEGE PROFILE



- ◆ Private Liberal Arts, Residential
- ◆ 2400 students
- ◆ 24% Acceptance Rate
- ◆ 22% Pell Eligible Students
- ◆ Average Class Size: 17
- ◆ Four and Six Year Graduation Rate: 86% and 90%

*Source: Vassar Fact Book (2015-16)*



# KEEPING THE PROMISE...ACCESS, BELONGING AND SUCCESS

## ◆ Pre-matriculation Program

**TRANSITIONS** is a matriculation to graduation program, consisting of a 4 day pre-orientation program, for incoming first-generation, low income, and/or undocumented students. Now in its eighth year, Transitions was built on the thoughtful work of a group of students and faculty. Up to 50 students enter the program each year.



# KEEPING THE PROMISE...ACCESS, BELONGING AND SUCCESS

## ◆ Academic Advising and Support Systems

Deans, class advisors, and faculty intervene early to monitor academic progress and meet at the end of each semester to review student academic records and campus supports. The Committee on Student Records is collaborative and proactive---not punitive.



# KEEPING THE PROMISE...ACCESS, BELONGING AND SUCCESS

## ◆ FACULTY MENTORING

**Ford Scholars and the Undergraduate Research Summer Institute (URSI) foster intensive academic mentoring relationships between faculty and undergraduates, leading to significant research, graduate school opportunities, and interest in teaching.**



# KEEPING THE PROMISE...ACCESS, BELONGING AND SUCCESS

## ◆ CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT

Students who are involved and connected to the campus through groups/peers are likely to experience “belonging.” Cultural and social spaces are also critical for many first generation and students of color.



# DELIVERING ON THE PROMISE ...

Moving beyond the diversity buzzwords



Students from KIPP: STAR College Prep, Harlem, NY

*Photo by Hope Crocker, VC '07*

# DELIVERING ON THE PROMISE ...

Moving beyond the diversity buzzwords



# CLOSING THOUGHTS

- ◆ **Moving beyond access is critical in building stronger support systems for underrepresented students.**
- ◆ **Creating inclusive and affirming campus environments is not only essential but is the socially just thing to do.**
- ◆ **Reframe deficit narratives and focus on the success behaviors students have exhibited in getting to college.**
- ◆ **Students' sense of belonging is a path toward satisfaction and achievement.**

# RESOURCES

**Consortium on High Achievement and Success (CHAS), liberal arts colleges collaborating to support underrepresented students, <http://commons.trincoll.edu/chas/>**

**EAB (2016), Transforming the First Generation College College Student Experience, <https://www.eab.com/research-and-insights/student-affairs-forum/studies/2016/transforming-the-first-generation-college-student-experience>**

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**Hurtado, S. and Carter, D.F, “Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on Latino students' sense of belonging,” *Sociology of Education*, 70(4), 324-345, Oct. 1997.**

**Hurtado, S. (1992). The campus racial climate: Contexts of conflict. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 63(5), 539–569.**

**Pittman, E. (1994). Cultural centers on predominantly White campuses: Campus, cultural and social comfort equals retention, Last Word. *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 11(October 6), 104.**

**Strayhorn, T.L., (2012). *College Students Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students* New York: Routledge.**

**Vassar College Fact Book (2015-16), Vassar College Office of Institutional Research.**