



First-Generation Symposium

Friday, March 26, 2021

Session Details

11:00am to 12:00pm Sessions

First Session

11:00am to 11:20am

First-Gen is Best-Gen

Presenter: Yulia Tikhonova

First-Gen is Best-Gen situates the campus art gallery as the crown jewel for first gen civic education. The campus gallery is a truly democratic space with no teachers, assignments, or grades. We are a politically secular space. All voices and experiences are heard and debated in the context of art works themselves widely open for interpretation. John Dewey wrote about the special power of artwork to communicate new ideas without alienation or objectification. The artworks we present follow Dewey's concept and break through the hard crust of convention. "Artists have always been the real purveyors of the news," according to Dewey. Today's news means the gallery is concerned with issues of equity and inclusion. For Dewey, along with Maxine Greene, it is the artist's responsibility to help bend the arc of the moral universe towards justice. The questions that first gens will debate vigorously among themselves or at home - about race, gender, immigration, climate change - will be the subject of gallery exhibitions. First gens will be called to action!

Maxine Greene's idea of the social imagination is particularly relevant in this context. First Gen must often construct their college lives without depending on their parents for guidance. Greene asserts the power of social imagination, quoting Jean-Paul Sartre that "it is on the day that we can conceive of a different state of affairs that a new light falls on our troubles and our suffering, and that we decide that these are unbearable."

"This day" takes place each time first gen students enter the art gallery. There, they see art works that illuminate social, economic, and cultural inequities. This day, social action begins.

I will be showing gallery projects that support an on-going civic education for first-gen students that is also open to the entire campus community. At the end of my presentation, I will invite everybody to visit the Art Gallery to discuss our potential collaboration with regards to first gen civic education.



11:20am to 11:40am

Engaging Students Through Performing Arts

Presenters: Kristen A. Morgan and DeRon S. Williams

The Performing Arts Department at Eastern, guided by a mission to bring diverse voices to our stages, has been partnering with STEP-CAP for the last three summers, in order to provide arts enrichment and a deep collaborative experience to students. Evidence shows that retention and student success are increased significantly when students participate in meaningful “signature” work during their first semester on campus. The Performing Arts component of STEP-CAP is threefold: it seeks to enrich students’ introduction to the liberal arts; it instills in students the importance of collaborative work; and it centers work which celebrates the experience of marginalized populations. Through working together to produce a public performance, students recognize that their voices are valued on our campus, and that they have a structure for expressing their truth through artistic expression. In this presentation, we will discuss the evolving structure of the Performing Arts element of STEP-CAP, including challenges and successes; the enfranchising of former STEP-CAP students as leaders in the Theatre Program and New Media Studies major; and future directions for the initiative.

11:40am to 12:00pm Questions and Answers

Second Session

11:00am to 11:20am

Writing Center – Undergrad research on Writer

“Perceived versus Evaluated Concerns of First-Year Writers: Comparisons of First-Generation and Non-First-Generation College Students”

Presenter: Robert Murray

Writing is one of the most difficult exercises requested of college students; however, not all students are equally prepared to respond to this difficult task. To understand the writing process, this study focuses on two research questions: Is there a difference in the perceived needs of first-generation college students and non-first-generation students? And do first-year writers perceive their needs accurately to how tutors observe their needs? This study will be conducted during the Spring 2020 semester at Eastern Connecticut State University by a writing center tutor embedded in the Intro to College Writing Plus classroom. The writers will engage multiple times throughout the semester with the tutor who will hear the writers’ concerns, provide solutions, and collect data. By the end of the study, the data will be analyzed for patterns in the perceived needs and the observed needs of writers, then relate those potential patterns to the demographic information of the writers to identify possible correlations between those needs and their statuses. This research is meant to expand discussion on how tutors of first-year writers can address to the dynamic needs of students of different backgrounds. By finding patterns, tutors have the capability of providing writers the kind of support that will most effectively improve the writer’s work as well as the writer’s confidence in their work.



11:20am to 11:40am

OER as a Student Success Strategy

Presenter: Kevin Corcoran

Student access and engagement with course materials is major barrier to student success. With commercial textbook costs rising close to 90% over the past 10 years (and over 1,000% over the past 40 years), financial barriers prevent students, especially low-income and many First-Generation college students, from being prepared on the first day of class. Many first-time students are unaware for the need to budget for textbooks and may not have suitable funding to cover the \$600/semester average for course materials.

Representation and relevancy of the course materials to this student population may also impact engagement and overall success.

Openly license educational materials, OER, grant not only free access for students, but empower faculty to revise their instructional materials to be more representative and relevant to their student audience as well as provide students with the opportunity to become more engaged through co-creation and contribution on an OER

11:40am to 12:00pm Questions and Answers

1:00pm to 2:00pm Sessions

First Session

1:00pm to 1:20pm

“First Generation College Students at Eastern Computer Science”

Presenters: Kehan Gao and Sarah Tasneem

According to the National Center for Education Statistics “30 percent of all entering freshmen are the first in their families to attend college. Only 11 percent of students who begin their post-secondary journeys at two-year institutes and community colleges, go on to complete bachelor's degrees” (www.firstgenerationfoundation.org). In fall 2019 out of total majors enrolled 29.34% are first generation college students, including some DACA students. In spring 2020 data will be collected and analyzed to learn how computer science study at Eastern may have changed their views of college study and facilitated employment as computer scientist, a career oriented major. The present research will initiate dialogue how the department may move to remove structural barriers to first generation students and help improve self-confidence and eventually expand their minds.

1:20pm to 1:40pm

College Graduates in Connecticut: The Psychology of Major Choice and Wage Differentials

*Presenters: Brianna Halladay, Margaret Letterman, and Maryanne Clifford**



This paper investigates the mechanisms driving the major selection decision of college graduates, including first generation college students, in Connecticut and the financial implications of this choice. By examining the selection of a graduate's major by gender and ethnicity, we empirically study how this decision differs by ethnicity between men and women. Additionally, we analyze the distributional difference across majors between men and women as well as the psychological reasons for this shift toward higher paying majors for women among Black and Hispanic students.

1:40pm to 2:00pm Questions and Answers

Second Session

1:00pm-1:20pm

The Academic Success Center: Supporting the Academic Journey

Presenters: Alison Garewski, Director, Academic Success Center ; Damali Abbensetts, Assistant Director, Academic Success Center ; Darius Turner, Eastern student, Communication major, Academic Success Center Office Assistant

The Academic Success Center (ASC) provides advising and support services to all Eastern students to promote academic success and timely graduation. Join ASC staff for a discussion as they provide historical data on the GPA discrepancies between first-generation and non-first-generation students and break down data on utilization of services. Afterwards, listen in on a student's perspective, as he explores his own experience of how different ASC services have supported his academic endeavors.

1:20pm to 1:40pm

The Center for Internship and Career Development: Developing the Life after Graduation

Presenters: Clifford Marrett and Nicholas Diaz

We will first do a brief presentation of the Center for Internship and Career Development and how it supports every students at Eastern Connecticut State University. Following this presentation, a first-generation college student who used the Center as a resource before becoming one of their student worker will present his experience. Nicholas Diaz will explain how the Center helped him to reinforced his strength, provide important information, develop his network, and improve his professional skills.

1:40pm to 2:00pm Questions and Answers

Third Session

1:00pm to 1:30pm

A Professor Shares Lessons Learned as a First-Generation College Student

Presenter: Kim Ward

Most college students view us only in terms of our role as a college professor and rarely consider the obstacles we needed to overcome. As a first-generation and low-income college student, I faced significant academic, social, emotional, financial and bureaucratic challenges and the lessons I have learned are relevant to students experiencing similar challenges today. First-generation college



students are invited to this presentation during which I will facilitate a discussion on research-based approaches to building, maintaining and strengthening self-efficacy and persistence to graduation.

1:30pm to 2:00pm

Promoting First-Generation College Students or how to use your social and cultural capital to succeed in college?

Nicolas P. Simon

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu developed the concept of social and cultural capital to explain how some students are more successful than others. His first idea is that students do not succeed alone. They receive the help of their social capital. In this workshop, First-Generation College Students will be invited to identify the members of their social network and recognize how each member supported and helped them when they faced difficulties and concerns. Pierre Bourdieu's second idea is that students use their cultural capital, or the knowledge they possess, to succeed in education. In this workshop, First-Generation College Students will be invited to identify the knowledge that helped them to succeed.

2:00pm to 3:00pm Sessions

2:00pm to 2:30pm

African-American students in a Predominantly White Institution or how the intersection of gender, ethnicity, culture and parental education affect African-American conformity, assimilation, and resistance.

Presenter: Janell Martin

The African American community is still considered to be a minority in the United States and it affects the experience of its members in Higher Education. The purpose of this discussion is to highlight the intersection of gender, ethnic background, culture, and parental education level. The question at the origin of this discussion is: how do African-American students conform, assimilate, separate and/or resist in a predominantly White institution? Most African American students coming into college are coming from areas where they are the majority, in close-knit communities where they are surrounded by people who look like and share a similar culture to them. Coming into a predominantly White institution can cause a huge culture shock and the transition can be difficult and stressful. This conversation will highlight these difficulties so people outside of the African American community can further understand the true experience of African-American college students.



2:30pm to 3:00pm

How the Model Minority Myth Impacts First-Generation Asian-American College Students

Panelists: Tara Nguyen

The model minority myth is a stereotype that is harmful to Asian-American students. In particular, the model minority myth fails to encompass the lived experiences of low-income and/or first-generation Asian-American college students. In this presentation, we will first examine the disparities amongst various Asian-American ethnic groups. Next, I will describe my own experiences with the model minority myth as an Asian-American student. Lastly, I will explain the ways in which Eastern helped me succeed as a first-generation college student who did not adhere to the concept of the "model minority."