

Pedagogy + Andragogy: First Generation Students, Adult Learners, and their Challenges

Over the past 25 years, the value of a college degree has increased substantially. In 1972, males aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's or higher degree earned 19 percent more than their counterparts with only a high school diploma. By 1995, this figure had climbed to 52 percent. As the earnings gap between those who hold a bachelor's degree and those who do not has widened, the number of students enrolling in postsecondary education has significantly grown (U.S Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *The Condition of Education 1997*, Washington D.C.).

First-Generation College Students

First-generation students – students who are the first in their families to attend a postsecondary institution – are an increasingly significant force in higher education. These “new students” to higher education often face unique challenges in their quest for a degree:

- **Straddling two cultures** – one of the greatest challenges facing first-generation students is their position on the margin of two cultures – that of their friends and family and that of their college community (London, 1992). Going to college marks a significant separation from the past; parents, siblings, and friends who have no experience of college or its rewards, may be non-supportive or even obstructionist. Those who still live at home may not have or be able to create a designated place or time to study, and may be criticized for devoting time to school rather than family responsibilities (Padron, 1992). Particularly, as students begin to take on the symbols of the college culture – be it style of dress, taste in music, or range of vocabulary – first-generation students often sense displeasure on the part of acquaintances, and feel an uncomfortable separation from the culture in which they grew up. Such tensions frequently require the students to “renegotiate relationships” with friends and relatives, something which is “not always done easily or with a happy ending” (London, 1992).
- **Lack of preparation** – added to the challenges of living on the margin of two cultures is the knowledge of many first-generation students that they are less well prepared for college life than are their classmates who come from college-educated families. In addition to inadequate academic backgrounds, students interviewed by Richardson and Skinner (1992) cited lack of experience with or knowledge of time-management, the economic realities of college life, and the impersonal, bureaucratic nature of institutions of higher education as obstacles to getting a degree (Padron, 1992).

In this issue:

Pedagogy +
Andragogy: First
Generation
Students,
Adult Learners, and
their Challenges

Faculty and Staff as
Helping Resources

CAPS: Your campus
Educational Partner

Presentation &
Referrals

**Strategies
implemented to
recruit and retain
minority students
– specialized
outreach,
tutoring, and
mentoring
programs –
frequently work
for first-
generation
students as well.**

(Padron, 1992).

“Once enrolled in postsecondary education, first-generation students tend to work more hours off campus than their non-first-generation counterparts, complete fewer total course hours during their first year, and receive less support from family and friends for their enrollment.” (P.T Terenzini, et al., “First-Generation College Students,” 1996).

“First-generation students were less likely to be white, non-Hispanic, than their non-first generation counterparts and more likely to be Hispanic (11% V 5%). Comparing with their counterparts, first-generation students were also more likely to be female (57% V 51%).”

(Source: U.S Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics)

Adult Learners

Compared to younger learners, adults have special learning needs and requirements. The pioneer of adult learning, Malcolm Knowles, identified the following characteristics of adult learners:

- Autonomous and self-directed.
- Knowledgeable and experienced with work-related activities, family responsibilities and previous education.
- Goal-oriented.
- Relevancy-oriented.
- Practical.

Adult learners also present with special concerns and justified fears:

- Balancing commitments to multiple responsibilities.
- Fear and concern about being “rusty.”
- Feeling of discomfort when surrounded by “younger, technologically-savvy” classmates.
- Previous ‘stop-outs’ or ‘drop-outs’ may be anxious about being able to complete this time around.
- A need to maintain ‘old’ skills, and/or learn ‘new’ ones.
- A need to adapt to job changes, or a need to learn in order to comply with company directives.

First-generation adult students are:

- ***less likely to suffer from the culture shock of entering the college community.***
- ***more likely to be juggling conflicting responsibilities.*** (Zwerling, 1992)

Faculty and Staff as Helping Resources

Over the past five years, Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) has experienced a consistent increase in demand for services. Many students seek help directly, but just as many turn to faculty and staff members of the IUPUI community.

Several First-Generation Students and Adult Learners successfully cope with their respective challenges, but some find themselves overwhelmed. Because emotional distress typically interferes with a student's academic performance and/or social interactions, faculty and staff are often in good positions to recognize students who are in trouble. By communicating interest and concern to a distressed student, faculty and staff may play an important role in helping a student regain emotional the balance needed to cope with stress.

Characteristics of troubled students:

- Declining academic performance.
- Excessive absences.
- Unusual or noticeably changed interaction patterns in classroom.
- Depressed, crying, or apathetic mood, excessive activity or talkativeness.
- Noticeable change in appearance and hygiene, missed tests, or inability to remain awake in class.
- Repeated attempts to obtain deadline extensions or postpone tests.
- New or continuous behavior which disrupts class or student interactions.
- Inappropriate, exaggerated emotional reactions to situations, or lack of emotional response to stressful events.
- Violent or other extremely disruptive behaviors: hostile, threats, assault.
- Obvious loss of contact with reality: seeing, hearing, feeling things not apparent to others; thoughts or behaviors inconsistent with reality.
- Disturbed speech or communication content: incoherent, grandiose, disorganized, rambling.
- Suicidal or other self-destructive thoughts or actions.
- Homicidal threats.

Tips for Helping Troubled Students

- Arrange to talk in private setting – a few minutes of attentive listening can help provide encouragement and a sense of direction.
- Ascertain both thoughts and feelings – reflect and repeat the essence of the message.
- Assist in exploring possible alternative solutions to the problem – discussing pros and cons of each option, refrain from judging and/or evaluating.

IUPUI Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) –
Your campus educational partner

CAPS, a department in the division of Student Life and Diversity, is located in the Union Building, room 418. Contact CAPS at 274-2548, capsindy@iupui.edu or for additional referral information <http://life.iupui.edu/caps/refer.asp>

CAPS offers 6 FREE Individual counseling sessions after payment of an initial \$15.00 application fee. The professional staff of psychologists, counselors and graduate-student Interns can assist with a wide variety of personal concerns. Services are confidential, available to all IUPUI students, and available weekdays and by appointment during evening hours.

Initial appointments can usually be scheduled within a week, depending on demand for CAPS services at the time. In emergency situations, CAPS makes every effort to promptly assist a student and/or provide consultation to the campus community.

CAPS welcome requests for classroom presentations, facilitated support groups, and consultation services.

<http://life.iupui.edu/caps/outreach.asp>

When to refer

Circumstances that may necessitate a referral to CAPS include:

- Personal feeling of discomfort in dealing with the student or topic
- High level of stress in own personal life
- Lack of time
- Personal feelings that may interfere with objectivity
- Student's stated desire for professional assistance
- Potential conflict of interest with other roles in student's life
- Student's desired assistance is beyond faculty or staff's professional expertise

**"It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy
in creative expression and knowledge."**

– Albert Einstein.

CAPS Upcoming Event:

Depression Screening Day

Thursday, October 5th

10am – 4pm

UC Lobby

**Counseling and Psychological
Services (CAPS)**

620 Union Dr. Suite 418
Indianapolis, IN
46202

Phone: 317-274-2548

Fax: 317-278-0948

Email: capsindy@iupui.edu

<http://life.iupui.edu/caps/>

*The Division of
Student Life and
Diversity*