Meaningful Connections: Mentor-Mentee Relations And Their Promotion Of Sense Of Belonging Amongst First Generation College Students

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Background

- First generation college students (FGCS) are typically defined as students that are first in their family to attend post secondary institutions. This, however, is not consistent across literature.[1]
- There is a need for institutions to recognize the effects of these students' many intersecting identities[2] to "characterize as fully as possible the conditions and circumstances of early life" and the barriers these students face while adjusting to these institutions.[3]
- Higher education culture is often in conflict with the home culture of FGCS students thus leading to the lack of belonging these students feel in these spaces.[4] Thus accounting for their already low levels of socialization on campuses.[5]
- Rather than placing the responsibility on the student to fit in, whether it be through telling students to make use of resources and assimilate to college culture, institutions should work towards providing a supportive and equitable environment to their FGCS population.[4]
- Interpersonal relationships with academic, peer, or employment mentors played a positive role in FGCS' development and college success.[6] They also benefit from "high-impact educational practices" such as learning communities and programs. [7]

Research Goals

- **Find** actionable ways in which these interpersonal relationships can enhance a first-generation student's sense of belonging.
- **Apply** my findings directly into the FIRST Resource Center's peer leader mentorship program.
- **Provide** FGCS a platform to speak on ways that universities can better serve them and help them feel more connected
- **Build** awareness on the significance of these mentorship programs and the funds needed to support them.

Belonging is about "the ways in which social place has resonances on stability of the self, on feelings of being part of a larger whole and the emotional and social bonds that are related to such places."(Anthias, 2009).

Research Question

What role does social support through mentor-mentee relations play in the promotion of sense of belonging among first-generation college students (FGCS) at pre-dominantly white institutions?

Methodology

- Qualitative methodology through a series of interviews conducted virtually with First Generation College Students (FGCS) at Tufts University. Interviews will observe the following topics: Identity, Sense of Belonging, and Mentorship
- **Participants:** 10-15 current FGCS (those who are first in their family to attend a 4-year university like Tufts) who have been at Tufts for at least a year (Class of 2023-2021); Must be 18-years or older
- **Recruitment:** The FIRST Resource Center at Tufts will generate a list of ~ 30 FGCS students via randomized sampling for a ratio of 1:3 for race and 1:4 for class year. Participants will be contacted by the FIRST Resource Center
- **Analysis**: Interviews will be analyzed alongside previous literature on FGCS, Mentorship and Sense of Belonging. Interviewee's sense of belonging will be assessed through a 4-item sense of belonging scale (Morrow et al.,2002)

"Access without support is not an opportunity" (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008)

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