

TRIO

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICE PROGRAMS

RESOURCE COLLECTION

**Advising in TRIO Student Support Services:
Advancing Educational Equity and Student Success**



An initiative of the Advising Success Network and the
National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience® and Students in Transition

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National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition
University of South Carolina

in partnership with the
Advising Success Network

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About the Advising Success Network

The Advising Success Network (ASN) is a dynamic network of five organizations partnering to engage institutions in holistic advising redesign to advance success for Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander students and poverty-affected students. The network develops services and resources to guide institutions in implementing evidence-based advising practices to advance a more equitable student experience to achieve our vision of a higher education landscape that has eliminated race and income as predictors of student success. The ASN is coordinated by NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, and includes Achieving the Dream, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, EDUCAUSE, NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, and the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

What We Do and How We Do It

Holistic advising interplays with many other facets of the institution, such as course selection, the student experience, and institutional culture. This means that an effort to redesign these services has broader implications for institutional transformation. This process can quickly become complicated and must therefore be done with intentionality and purpose to achieve the desired improvements in institutional and student outcomes.

The ASN has a deep understanding of the interconnection between advising, broader institutional goals, and student success. As thought leaders and experts in the field of holistic advising, we are able to provide resources on best practices in the field of advising as well as change management services to the institution more broadly. We believe this will result in new and reviewed structures and systems for advising that were designed to address racial and socioeconomic inequities and contribute positively to institutional goals and student outcomes.

We recognize that there is a large amount of variance in organizational structures, advising models, and student needs among higher education institutions. We therefore begin each engagement by aligning on a shared vision for success, including metrics (e.g., equity outcomes, retention & graduation rates, ROI) and reviewing existing advising processes, policies and structures, always with the joint goal of creating more equitable experiences and outcomes for students from poverty-affected backgrounds, as well as African American, Black, Latinx, Indigenous peoples, Alaskan native, Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander students.

About the Publisher

The National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition was born out of the success of the University of South Carolina's much-honored University 101 course and a series of annual conferences focused on the First-Year experience. The momentum created by the educators attending these early conferences paved the way for the development of the National Resource Center, which was established at the University of South Carolina in 1986. As the National Resource Center broadened its focus to include other significant student transitions in higher education, it underwent several name changes, adopting the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition in 1998.

Today, the Center collaborates with its institutional partner, University 101 Programs, in pursuit of its mission to advance and support efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education. We achieve this mission by providing opportunities for the exchange of practical and scholarly information as well as the discussion of trends and issues in our field through convening conferences and other professional development events such as institutes, workshops, and online learning opportunities; publishing scholarly practice books, research reports, a peer-reviewed journal, electronic newsletters, and guides; generating, supporting, and disseminating research and scholarship; hosting visiting scholars; and maintaining several online channels for resource sharing and communication, including a dynamic website, listservs, and social media outlets.

The National Resource Center serves as the trusted expert, internationally recognized leader, and clearinghouse for scholarship, policy, and best practice for all postsecondary student transitions.

Institutional Home

The National Resource Center is located at the University of South Carolina's (USC) flagship campus in Columbia. Chartered in 1801, USC Columbia's mission is twofold: to establish and maintain excellence in its student population, faculty, academic programs, living and learning environment, technological infrastructure, library resources, research and scholarship, public and private support and endowment; and to enhance the industrial, economic, and cultural potential of the state. The Columbia campus offers 324-degree programs through its 15 degree-granting colleges and schools. In the 2022 fiscal year, faculty generated \$237 million in funding for research, outreach, and training programs. South Carolina is one of only 32 public universities receiving both Research and Community Engagement designations from the Carnegie Foundation.

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FOREWORD



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The higher education community has committed to provide students a high-quality education that enables them to achieve their academic, personal, and career goals, regardless of their starting point, race, income-level, or any other social identity. As a result, institutions are working to improve traditional structures, policies, and practices that may have impeded students along their path toward a degree. In this pursuit to become more student-centered, one approach institutions have used is to create a more holistic and integrated suite of support services designed to better address students' diverse and unique needs.

Advising is a critical component to this holistic approach and, if implemented correctly, can be an excellent tool to help more students see the success higher education promises. This notion of student success through holistic advising can be achieved by developing an advising structure that effectively integrates academic, career, financial, and basic needs counseling and encourages strong advisor-advisee relationships, in which students have developmental conversations with advisors throughout their tenure at the institution. Holistic advising also includes nonacademic supports, such as student success courses and one-on-one time with faculty and staff. By implementing these foundational aspects, institutions are more equipped to proactively identify student needs and to provide a more tailored and seamless experience for students.

This is especially important because at every juncture of a student's college experience, there is an opportunity to make a decision. Such decisions are often critical and complex. In addition to seeking guidance on how to balance college and other competing priorities, students may look to staff and faculty to guide them through several unfamiliar situations and decisions. For example, a student may explore their options for selecting a major with the intent to understand how a career in that field might lead to certain earnings upon completing a credential. In a similar example, some students may start their decision-making process about whether to apply for a loan to cover college expenses by considering if job prospects after graduation will make repayment feasible. As students navigate these and other multifaceted decisions, high-quality and holistic advising is more vital to their progress than ever.

Klempin et al. (2019) state that coordination among student support providers of various types can result in better aligned services. To see the full benefit holistic advising can have on the student experience, institutions need to understand the current state of their advising program, establish greater coordination among student support offerings, and provide the necessary resources for campus staff to effectively perform their roles and responsibilities. This type of holistic advising effort works well when systems and processes are in place that ensure professionals have the technology, training, and knowledge to appropriately advise students across domains. Holistic approaches also require ongoing communication and consistent feedback cycle from students, faculty, and administrators to address emerging needs. Institutions that commit to providing high-quality advising services will need to invest significant time and resources. However, the return on that investment will be worth it, as the efforts will prepare students to make their most important college decisions.

Throughout the years, institutions have made progress at achieving this ideal of holistic advising. Now as institutions reaffirm their commitment and continue in their pursuit to provide a high-quality education to students, there is an opportunity to accelerate progress by focusing more on the advising experience. Investing in holistic advising will bring greater clarity and alignment between advising and other relevant student supports and foster a more student-centered institution where all students have a clear path to success.

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INTRODUCTION



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TRIO History

It is no coincidence that the birth of TRIO Programs happened during the Civil Rights era. With the mission of equality for marginalized peoples, both sought to address poverty and social ills with access to education. TRIO Programs are designed to serve first-generation and potential first-generation students and adults from low-income families and those with disabilities.

Funded through the U.S. Department of Education, TRIO Programs address barriers to educational opportunity for students who are first-generation, low-income, and those with disabilities, with the premise that education is an effective solution to poverty and marginalization. Additionally, TRIO provides motivational services and support to students as they pursue a college education. Born out of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, TRIO started with the Upward Bound program in 1964 as part of the Economic Opportunity Act (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Soon after, the 1965 Higher Education Act created the Educational Talent Search program, and the first reauthorization created the Student Support Services (SSS) programs in 1968 (McElroy & Armesto, 1998). The name TRIO was coined to represent the three initial programs. Today, that name is a misnomer. TRIO Programs have expanded and now include five additional programs: Veterans Upward Bound, the Educational Opportunity Center, TRIO Training Programs, the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Program, and Upward Bound Math and Science. The programs serve students enrolled in middle school to enrollment in graduate school. The Council of Opportunity in Education, an organization that works closely with

TRIO to provide access to postsecondary education for first-generation, low-income students with disabilities, reports that the number of students receiving benefits from TRIO Programs has grown from 3,261 participants to over 854,929 in the years 1965 to 2021 (Cahalan et al., 2022). Today, TRIO professionals are members of a vibrant professional network.

Addressing the barriers that prevent access to higher education, family income, educational background, and physical and mental impairments, TRIO serves first-generation and potential first-generation college students from low-income backgrounds and those with disabilities. The U.S. Department of Education provides the following definitions as criteria for program participants (The Higher Education Act, 1965):

- A *First-generation* student's parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree.
- *Low-income* refers to a student whose family taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150% of an amount equal to the poverty level determined by the U.S. Census.
- An individual with a *disability* is defined in section 12102 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Two-year and four-year higher education institutions host SSS programs to retain and support students while they complete a post-secondary degree. SSS helps students acclimate to academic and social requirements in college (McElroy & Armesto, 1998) through academic tutoring, course instruction, academic advising, financial aid assistance, counseling, assistance applying to graduate or professional school, mentoring, and intrusive advising practices. In addition to a dedicated professional staff, SSS students develop a support system with peers from similar backgrounds using Assertive Accommodation communication methods. In the Assertive Accommodation method, students use their similar backgrounds as first-generation students to develop sound academic strategies for academic success (Orbe & Groscurth, 2004). The family-like network of peers encourages students to share their first-generation experiences genuinely.

In the Fall of 2022, with support from the Advising Success Network (ASN), the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition developed a virtual SSS Professional Learning Community (PLC) to facilitate meaningful connections and conversations between SSS colleagues interested in augmenting advising work within SSS programs. The community's goals include amplifying the voices of professionals engaged in equity work in higher education, fostering conversation on the success and solutions to challenges in SSS work, contributing to scholarly and practice knowledge bases, and expanding the participant's professional network.

The PLC provided multiple virtual engagements beginning in September 2022 and ending in April 2023. Session topics included *Creating Experiential Learning Opportunities*, *Peer Mentoring Programs*, *The Social Adjustment of SSS Students*, *Creating a Sense of Belonging/Administrative Buy-in*, and *Financial and Economic Literacy*. In October 2022, the National Resource Center hosted an in-person Symposium in Atlanta, Georgia. The day-long meeting allowed the participants to network, share best practices, and attend the National Conference on Students in Transition.

The Collection

The two-part resource collection highlights evidence-based initiatives TRIO professionals use to address equity and student success through sound advising practices. Part I introduces two case studies from diverse institutions that demonstrate best practices that lead to student retention, a sense of belonging, and high engagement in intercultural learning. Part II features field practices of two TRIO professionals and a professional directing work with first-generation students whose work is guided by TRIO efforts. The field practices allow the writers to self-reflect and make connections to equity, advising, and student success, in their work. Major themes in the Collection include a holistic approach to meeting TRIO students' academic, social, emotional, and financial concerns, focusing on strategies to promote academic success and multiple opportunities for touchpoints throughout the year. These services provide TRIO students with a sense of connectedness to the program and

institution, leading to a strong sense of belonging and self-efficacy. These services are effective advising practices for TRIO students but also effective for all college students.

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GLOSSARY

OF DEFINITIONS



- **Developmental Advising:** Advising process focused on shared responsibility between the advisor and students in which the primary goal is for students to take ownership of their decisions and actions (Frost & Brown-Wheeler, 2003).
- **Educational equity:** The Advising Success Network defines racial and socioeconomic equity as centering the lived experiences, talents, and aspirations of students from low-income backgrounds, as well as Black, Latinx, Native American, and Asian/Pacific Islander students. The network seeks to raise awareness from an institutional perspective, focusing on how the institution’s design systems, policies, and processes either build healthy inclusive cultures or perpetuate systemic inequities. Moreover, the network seeks to change the institution’s understanding of how legacy practices and policies affect student performance, and impact student economic mobility and personal, academic, and career success—to address systems of power, privilege, and race through analysis of advising policies and procedures (Advising Success Network, n.d.).
- **Equity gap:** Another alternative to “achievement gap” evokes the notion that institutions have a responsibility to create equity for students (Zeigler et al., 2021).
- **Experiential learning:** Experiential learning describes the ideal process of learning, invites you to understand yourself as a learner, and empowers you to take charge of your own learning and development (Kolb, 2020).

- **Federal Pell Grants:** Federal Pell Grants usually are awarded only to undergraduate students who display exceptional financial need and have not earned a bachelor's, graduate, or professional degree (Federal Student Aid, n.d.).
- **First-generation:** Defined as: (a) a student neither of whose natural or adoptive parents received a baccalaureate degree; (b) a student who, prior to the age of 18, regularly resided with and received support from only one parent and whose supporting parent did not receive a baccalaureate degree; or (c) an individual who, prior to the age of 18, did not regularly reside with or receive support from a natural or an adoptive parent (Higher Education Act of 1965).
- **Holistic advising redesign:** The process of identifying, implementing, and refining high quality, effective institutional practices that support students as they work toward achieving their personal, academic, and career goals. Recognizing that changes in advising will impact other areas of an institution, this type of redesign typically requires cross-functional collaboration with a focus on aligning people, processes, and technology. Successful holistic advising redesign promotes an institutional culture of being student ready (Nixon, 2022).
- **Intrusive Advising:** Proactive interactions with students, with the intention of connecting with them before a situation occurs that cannot be fixed (Varney, 2007).
- **Low-income:** An individual from a family whose taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150% of an amount equal to the poverty level (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).
- **Opportunity gap:** An alternative to the phrase "achievement gap" that recognizes the inequality of opportunity in education, or "education debt," characterized by a long history of discriminatory gaps in educational inputs (Ladson-Billings, 2006).
- **Prescriptive Advising:** Advising process focused on academic matters and sharing information for degree program progression where most student follow the advice of an advisor without much personal engagement. (Barbuto et al., 2011).
- **Retention:** Institutional measure for a student staying at the institution until the completion of a degree (Hagedorn, 2006).
- **Sense of Belonging:** Sense of belonging generally refers to a feeling of connectedness, that one is important or matters to others (Strayhorn, 2018).
- **Student success:** The outcome of a personal, rigorous, and enriching learning experience that culminates in the achievement of a student's academic goals in a timely manner and fully prepares them to realize their career aspirations (Lawton, 2018).
- **TRIO Student Support Services:** Through a grant competition, funds are awarded to institutions of higher education to provide opportunities for academic development, assist currently enrolled students with basic college requirements, and to motivate students toward the successful completion of their postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

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PART 01

CASE STUDIES

In partnership with the Advising Success Network, the National Resource Center aims to improve advising practice and advance success for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. Therefore, recognizing the success of Student Support Services (SSS) programs in integrating advising with other student services is a top priority for the National Resource Center. To add to the scholarship on SSS programs, practitioners from two institutions wrote case studies describing the impact of SSS programs on their campuses. Each case study addresses implementing an SSS program. The first case study discusses administering Federal SSS mandates at a junior college while the second case study focuses on developing a specific initiative at a four-year institution. Together these case studies provide a broad and narrow look at SSS programs.

TRIO WORKS!

SUPPORTING STUDENTS THROUGH SUCCESSFUL ADVISING PRACTICES



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Founded in 1926 and nicknamed “The College of East Texas,” Tyler Junior College (TJC) is a two-year public higher education institution located in Tyler, Texas. Covering 145 acres, over 12,000 students are enrolled at TJC, with approximately 2,100 high school students taking advantage of the institution’s dual credit program (TJC, 2015). TJC’s vision statement “Educating everyone - the path to a better world” is seen in its diverse population (TJC, 2015).

Traditional and non-traditional students are visible throughout the campus, as well as different genders and races. Total enrollment for the Fall 2021 semester was 11,913 with women comprising 63% of the student population (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], n.d.). During the Fall 2021 semester, 80% of students were 24 years old and under (NCES, n.d.). The 2021 academic year affirmed 50% of TJC’s graduates were first-generation students. (Fast Facts & Institutional Data, 2022).

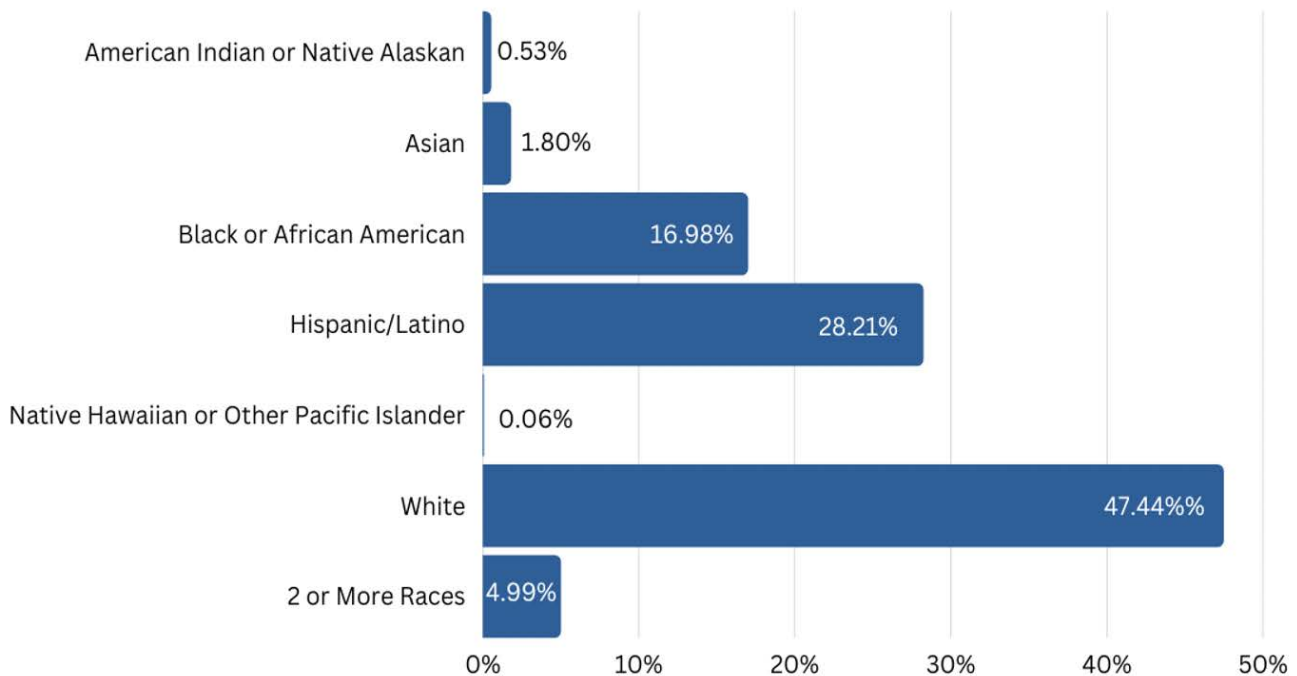
The institution offers a healthy financial aid package to assist students in their educational journey. Many of the students receiving financial aid are first-generation students. TJC uses the U.S. Department of Education’s (n.d.) definition of first generation as: (a) a student neither of whose natural or adoptive parents received a baccalaureate degree; (b) a student who, prior to the age of 18, regularly resided with and received support from only one parent and whose supporting parent did not receive a baccalaureate degree; or (c) an individual who, prior to the age of 18, did not regularly reside with or receive support from a natural or an adoptive parent. During the 2020-2021

academic year, 40% of enrolled students were considered to be economically disadvantaged and used the Pell Grant as a proxy (“Tyler Junior College Annual Performance Report, 2020-2021,” n.d.).

With TJC offering foundational first year and sophomore level courses, the institution has established key partnerships with several major universities in the state of Texas to encourage students to further their education and obtain a bachelor’s degree. TJC has special transfer agreements to allow students to experience a seamless transition with the following institutions: The University of Texas at Tyler, Stephen F. Austin State University, and Baylor University (TJC, n.d.).

Figure 1.1 Demographics by Race and Ethnicity

2021 Racial/Ethnic Percentage at TJC



Description of Student Support Services Program

Tyler Junior College’s mission statement states, “The College champions student and community success by providing a caring, comprehensive experience through educational excellence, stellar service, innovative programming and authentic partnerships” (TJC, n.d.). TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) helps the institution fulfill this pledge through educational resources and assistance for students that fall into the demographic of those who do not achieve academic success. TRIO SSS started at TJC in 1997 and specializes in assisting bachelor-degree seeking students who are either first generation, low income, or have a disability.

TRIO SSS provides a varying array of services to students promoting their success (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 TRIO SSS Services at Tyler Junior College

Services	Description
Academic Success Coaching	One-on-one weekly success meetings, in addition to study skills assistance, support for students with test anxiety, test preparation, and encouragement while students are fulfilling their coursework.
Transfer and Career Coaching	One-on-one assistance for students wanting to transfer to a university to obtain their bachelor's degree. The coach aids with completing applications to the transfer institution, securing housing, fee waivers, and scholarships.
Campus Visits	Students have the opportunity to tour various campuses in order to be exposed to universities that offer bachelor and graduate degrees. This allows students to better assess their educational options after graduating from TJC.
Tutoring	TRIO SSS offers professional tutors in both math and writing to help students gain a solid foundation that will help throughout their educational journey.
Computer Lab with Free Printing	Students have a computer lab that is equipped with webcams, as well as free printing in color and black and white. These services help relieve students of some financial burdens.
Workshops	Multiple workshops are offered each semester to foster community and impart information on how to be successful academically, financially, professionally, and personally. Workshops foster facilitation of discussion among students on how to use their past experiences to build future success.
Cultural Events	Cultural events give participants exposure to activities outside of the collegiate setting. Etiquette lunches are provided each year to show students the various elements of a fine dining experience. Attendance at museums complements what students have learned in class and gives more context through experiencing historical artifacts.
First-Generation Day	The annual First-Generation Day is a campuswide event that celebrates students who are the first in their family to attend college. To incorporate as many people as possible who identify as first generation, first-generation faculty and staff create yard signs with encouraging quotes for current students. First-generation students are given T-shirts to show their first gen pride and are entered to win a scholarship. In 2021 and 2022, a first-generation student was awarded a \$250 scholarship each year.

Cross-functional partnerships are paramount in meeting grant objectives. Due to its close proximity, significant collaboration has been made between the Honors Program and TRIO. Collaboration with the Honors Program resulted in additional resources available to qualified students and increased enrollment and retention in the TRIO Program. TRIO SSS also has a strong partnership with the Disability Services Office, which has allowed students to receive support from multiple sources, including interpreters and software designed for those with special needs. The program's strong alliance with the campus counselor has ensured students receive mental health services both in person and virtually.

TRIO SSS has continually been able to fulfill its annual goal of 200 participants in the program largely due to its partnership with the Education Department. This partnership allows students from various backgrounds to be exposed to the benefits of TRIO SSS, increasing enrollment in the program. TRIO students receive an additional six hours of tutoring each week in the library through collaboration with the institution’s Tutoring Center.

Additionally, administrative offices have offered strong support to TRIO students. The Financial Aid office has supplied a designated staff member specifically for TRIO participants and assists in making program participants aware of all possible sources of college funding. During each grant cycle, the Department of Institutional Effectiveness retrieves necessary data to show the need for the program. This has resulted in TRIO SSS serving students for the past 25 years at TJC.

Assessment Methods/Design

Educational excellence is one of four pillars in TJC’s 2020-2026 Strategic Plan (Fast Facts, 2022). To achieve this, two strategies were developed to ensure success:

Strategy 1: Enhance student success by eliminating barriers that prevent students from achieving their educational and career goals.

Strategy 2: Enrich curriculum to meet the needs of current career expectations.

The TRIO SSS program at TJC is pivotal in ensuring the success of educational excellence for all student types. TJC merges strategies of eliminating barriers and enriching the curriculum with the overall objectives of persistence, good academic standing, graduation rates, and transfer rates outlined by Federal TRIO SSS programs. By analyzing TJC’s success with Federal TRIO SSS objectives, TJC can track how successful the college is in fulfilling their pillar of educational excellence for their students (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2 TJC Educational Excellence

Objective	Definition
Persistence Rate	Sixty percent of all participants served in the reporting year by the program will persist from one academic year to the beginning of the next academic year or earn an associate degree or certificate at the institution and/or transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution by the fall term of the next academic year.
Good Academic Standing	Sixty-nine percent of all enrolled SSS participants served will meet the performance level required to stay in good academic standing at the institution.
Graduation	Twenty-two percent of new participants served each year will graduate from the institution with an associate degree or certificate within four years.
Graduation and Transfer	Nineteen percent of new participants served each year will receive an associate degree or certificate from the institution and transfer to a four-year institution within four years.

To measure TJC’s effectiveness at meeting each of the objectives, a mixed-methods assessment design was used to draw quantitative data from various institutional reports and qualitative data from student surveys. Each standard objective is measured in the following ways (Table 1.3):

Table 1.3 TRIO Federal Grant Objectives

Objective	Measure
Persistence Rate	To ensure the persistence goal was met each year, TRIO staff ran enrollment reports from the institution to see which students did not enroll in classes. TRIO staff followed up with these students to determine the root cause of their lack of enrollment and offered support and guidance.
Good Academic Standing	Students are in good academic standing by maintaining a GPA of 2.0 or higher. To satisfy the Good Academic Standing objective, reports are run from the institution each semester to determine which students have a GPA less than a 2.0. Interventions are then applied to students who are at risk of academic probation. Interventions include success meetings with the Success Coach, who completes a needs and gap analysis and supplies targeted focus to eliminate barriers to success. Also, professors are asked to complete a progress report each semester indicating any areas students could use additional support to be successful in their class. Collaboration with professors allows better efforts to pinpoint areas of improvement for student success.
Graduation and Graduation & Transfer Rate	With the ultimate goal of ensuring participants in the program graduate, TRIO staff offer multiple resources and support systems to ensure students achieve their goal of obtaining their associate degree and/or certificate. To assist with the transfer process, campus visits are offered once a month to allow students to tour institutions offering bachelor and graduate degrees. Having students engage in campus visits assists the program in fulfilling the graduation and transfer objectives.

The program's overall effectiveness of meeting its objectives is measured through quantitative data in the Annual Performance Report (the TRIO SSS annual grant report to the U.S. Department of Education, referred to as the APR) and the National Student Clearinghouse, which shows where program participants transferred to and the degree they obtained. Qualitative assessments were measured through a digital survey completed by students at the end of the semester. The survey asks students open-ended questions to gauge the quality of services they received and which areas of the program can be improved. The survey also allows students to voice which topics they would like covered at future events and which campuses they would like to tour in future semesters.

Assessment Findings

TRIO SSS at TJC has a history of surpassing objectives and the 2020-2021 academic year continued that success. The program far exceeded objectives for the 2020-2021 academic year. Surpassing the persistence goal by 28%, 177 students out of 200 enrolled in the fall term of the next academic year (TRIO Support Services, 2022a). During the same year, 90% of students in the program maintained good academic standing by earning a GPA of 2.0 or higher (TRIO Support Services, 2022a). Fifty-seven percent of students received an associate degree or certificate, far above the 22% benchmark, while 37% graduated and transferred to a senior institution, exceeding the 19% goal (TRIO Support Services, 2022a).

In addition to exceeding the TRIO SSS goals, students who successfully go through the TRIO SSS program have higher graduation rates than their peers within the institution. As mentioned earlier, in 2021, 57% of TRIO SSS participants who were served by the program in the prior four-year cohort completed an associate degree or certificate within four years of entering the program (TRIO Support Services, 2022a). Comparatively, in 2021, 31% of TJC students graduated with a certificate or associate degree (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board [THECB], 2022; Table 1.4).

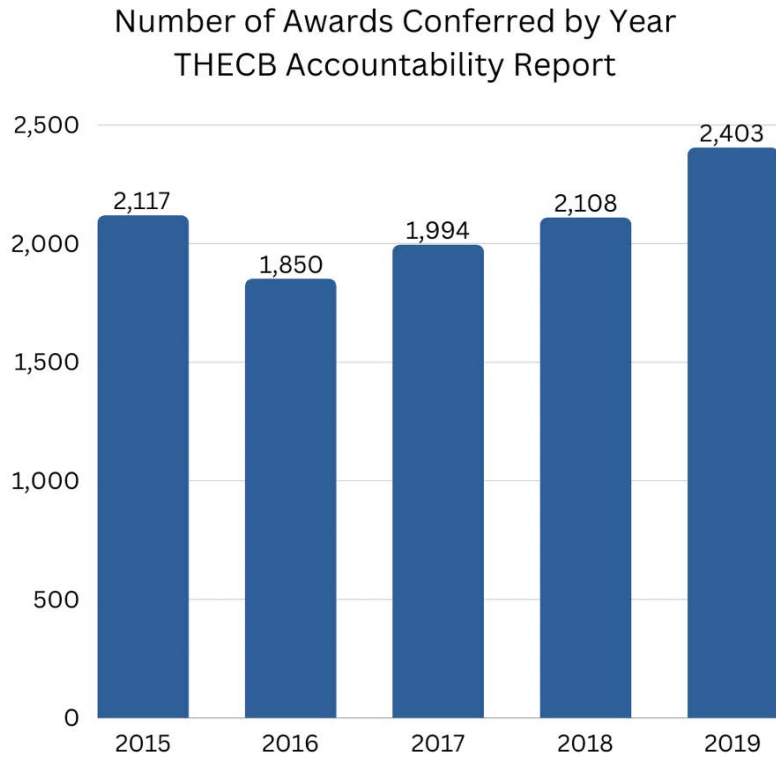
Table 1.4 Comparison of Graduation Rates Between TRIO and Non-TRIO Students

2019		2020		2021	
TRIO	TJC	TRIO	TJC	TRIO	TJC
61%	31%	40%	31%	57%	31%

End of semester surveys supplied qualitative data about the program’s effectiveness as well. Of all the services provided to participants, the relationships and interactions proved to be paramount. Respondents overwhelmingly stated that their positive experience in TRIO was due to the staff. Sixty-six percent of TRIO SSS staff are first-generation students themselves, so they have great empathy for the TRIO SSS students. In the 2021 student survey (TRIO Support Services, 2021), 50% of respondents attributed their positive experience to TRIO staff. This number climbed to 68% in the 2022 survey (TRIO Support Services, 2022b). When asked in the 2022 survey (TRIO Support Services, 2022b), what was the best thing about TRIO, one respondent replied, “The best thing about trio [sic] is the way they offer their help to me. When I was in a pinch TRIO was really there for me.” Another respondent stated, “I always felt cared for and heard when it came to TRIO. I was helped in every way possible. When it came to my classes, they gave me courage and motivation.” A respondent from the 2021 survey answered, “I appreciate TRIO very much. They were always helpful. I couldn’t have graduated without them.”

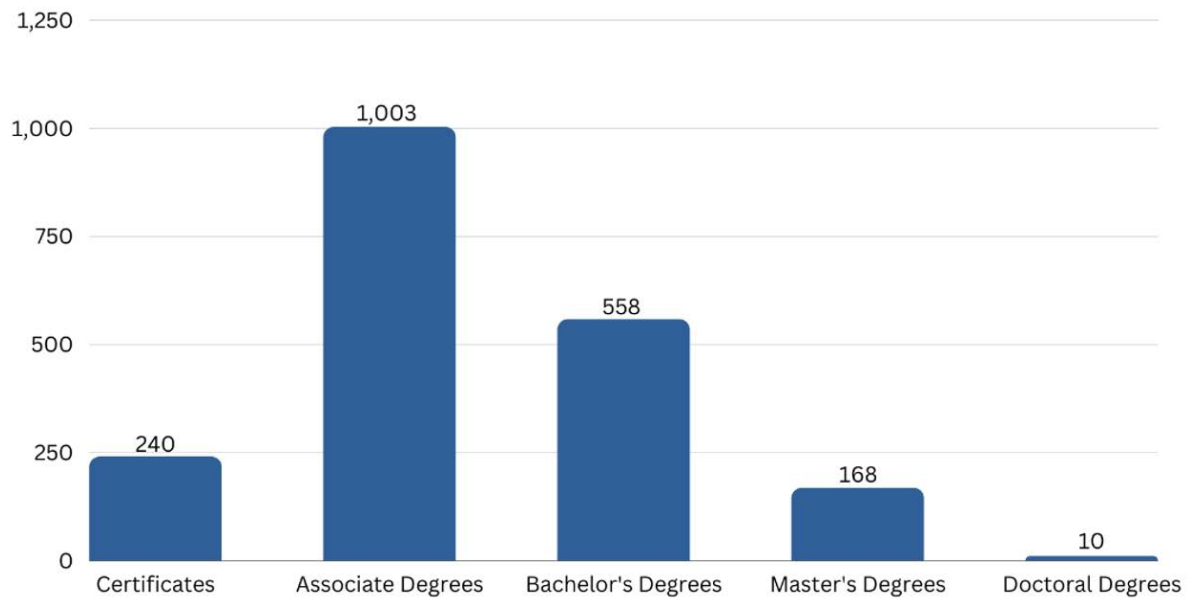
Looking at assessment more broadly, the success of TRIO SSS at TJC is also advancing goals set by the State of Texas. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB, 2020) has an initiative titled 60x30TX, with the goal that 60% of Texans between the ages of 25-34 will have a degree or certificate by 2030. Tyler Junior College and TRIO SSS are helping achieve this goal. Over 10,000 awards have been earned by TJC students from 2015-2019 (TJC Student Achievement Data, n.d.).

Figure 1.2 Number of Degrees Awarded at Tyler Junior College



TRIO Student Support Services (2022a) at TJC served 2,235 students from 1997 to 2022. Of the students served, data from the National Student Clearinghouse (2022) revealed that 1,979 degrees were awarded to program participants in the following capacity:

Figure 1.3 Number of Degrees Awarded to TRIO Student Support Services Participants from 1997-2022



After graduating from TJC, many TRIO participants matriculated to senior institutions to further their education, including University of North Texas, University of Texas at Tyler, University of Texas at Arlington, University of Texas at Austin, Baylor University, Stephen F. Austin State University, Texas Woman's University, Sam Houston State University, Texas Southern University, Lamar University, Texas A&M University, Texas A&M University – Commerce, LeTourneau University, Southern Methodist University, Texas State University, Texas Tech University, University of Oklahoma, Angelo State University, Indiana Wesleyan University, Parker University, and Southern New Hampshire University (National Student Clearinghouse, 2022).

As demonstrated by the assessment findings, TRIO SSS at TJC is not only exceeding goals set by TRIO, TJC, and the state of Texas, but most importantly, TRIO SSS is helping students successfully meet their educational goals through services and strong staff support.

Implications for Practice

President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty spawned the Higher Education Act of 1965 and the TRIO programs that exist today (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This federal grant program has a simple motto: TRIO Works! Successful advising of TRIO participants can be achieved through coaching, meaningful workshops, and fulfilling the personal and emotional needs of students. Through empathetic staff and adequate resources, our nation's students can acquire the education necessary to build a solid foundation for their careers.

The Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States: 2022 Historical Trend Report highlights the national success of TRIO SSS, stating, "SSS participants at 2-year colleges were 78% more likely to complete an associate degree, certificate or transfer to a 4-year college (50% for SSS participants vs. 28% for the national sample)" (Cahalan et al., 2022). With targeted interventions and academic and transfer/career coaching, students in the TRIO SSS program have excelled past their peers, making TRIO SSS a leader in advancing equity and student success. Student success demonstrated in TRIO SSS is attributed to the services provided. To improve student success in higher education at large, these types of services can and should be replicated outside of TRIO SSS on various types of campuses.

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FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY IN DIVERSITY, INTERCULTURAL INCLUSION, AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS



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Institutional Profile

The TRIO-Opportunity Scholars Program at the University of South Carolina Columbia (USC Columbia) operates with grant funding from the Federal TRIO Programs. The Opportunity Scholars Program (OSP) is also known as the Student Support Services Program and accommodates first-generation low-income students annually at USC Columbia. The University is a four-year public R-1 institution offering bachelor's, certificates, master's, and terminal doctoral degrees. The majority of the student population at USC Columbia are commuters, living in housing that is not owned or run by the institution. The percentage of commuter students to the university campus is 73% (Byrd-White, 2021, p. 59). The number of FTE undergraduate students at USC Columbia as of Spring 2022 was 31,087 (Office of Enrollment Analytics, 2022). Furthermore, 21% of the student body population on the USC Columbia campus is first-generation (Office of Enrollment Analytics, 2022). First-generation students at USC Columbia are defined as students for whom their parents have never completed a four-year institution of higher education (a college or university).

USC Columbia's racial category enrollment shows that Black or African American, non-Hispanic students are 10.2%, Native American students are 0.2%, Asian students are 2.3%, Pacific Islander students are 0.1%, and Hispanic/Latino students are 4.0% of the student population (Office of

Enrollment Analytics, 2020). USC Columbia's gender balance in undergraduate enrollment as of Fall 2021 is 45% male and 55% female ("University of South Carolina Student Life"). The total amount of Pell Grants received by students on the USC Columbia campus according to 2020 data is \$26,521,219. In the case of the TRIO OSP, the student demographics from the 2020-2021 academic year indicate that there are 13.33% Hispanic, 53.33% African American/Black, and 46.66% White students. Furthermore, TRIO OSP is 40% male and 60% female. The students in the TRIO OSP are 100% low income first generation/Pell grant eligible.

An Intercultural Inclusion and Diversity Learning Curriculum

This case study will provide an outline of the ways in which the Math, Intensive Writing, and Interactive Language Center (MIWIL Center) in the TRIO OSP at USC Columbia has successfully incorporated strategies that encourage the academic success, scholarly interest, identity development, and interpersonal advocacy in its student population. This study provides colleagues with a framework that supports the holistic success of first-generation, low-income, and other minoritized college students in R-1 colleges and universities. The focus of this study is on the OSP's first year curriculum and its building-block strongly concentrated on Intercultural Inclusion and Diversity Learning (IIDL).

The MIWIL Center has been in existence in its current format for 11 years. It contains three in-house units: (a) tutoring, (b) supplemental instruction for English (SI), and (c) interactive language.

Students in the OSP receive in-house tutoring and SI in primarily first year college math and English courses. Tutoring for first year OSP students is also offered in 100-level speech and history courses. A select group of OSP upperclassmen who successfully completed courses in the above-mentioned disciplines are hired to facilitate SI and tutoring to their first-year first-generation student colleagues in the OSP. The tutoring and SI initiatives within the MIWIL Center not only support academic success but also create a helpful community atmosphere through practical advisement, mentorship, and leadership skills offered by OSP students for OSP students.

Beyond receiving assistance with first year college math and English courses, OSP first-year college students also gain intercultural competence that enhances their ability to understand and become comfortable with their differences, and the differences of others in the environment. This occurs primarily through the Interactive Language unit within the MIWIL Center. The Interactive Language unit within the MIWIL Center operates in consort with tutoring and SI, yet moves beyond academic support, to include a holistic approach to supporting students' personal development by providing them with practical tools to understand, see, and communicate interculturally.

Thus, the Interactive Language unit, which was added in 2011, has proven to support students' ability to develop their social, interpersonal, and communicative skills coupled with an intellectual knowledge about different people and cultures, thus giving them greater access to (inter)national, (inter)regional and global professional success and competency. This type of cultural capital and intercultural communicative skill that OSP students develop within the Interactive Language unit occurs primarily through the IIDL initiative which provides workshops and other learning activities that introduce scholars to the multiple ways of knowing in various minoritized communities in the United States and beyond. These IIDL activities and workshops are designed with the understanding that people and cultures operate and develop in consort. The motto of the IIDL initiative is that students must understand each other in order to better know themselves. Through their required participation in the IIDL initiative, students from these various minoritized groups within the OSP develop a sense of belonging and a degree of inclusiveness that they learn to affirm by way of the cultural focus of the IIDL initiative. Their sense of belonging is reinforced as they begin to understand themselves as first-generation students of a particular ethnic belonging, thus enhancing a self-affirmation consciousness that transcends into multiple differences and cross-ethnic communities.

This culturally relevant approach adopted in the IIDL initiative in the OSP aligns with the Inclusive Excellence Institute which is housed in the Office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion at USC Columbia. Similar to the objectives of the Inclusive Excellence Institute, the TRIO OSP-IIDL initiative develops students'

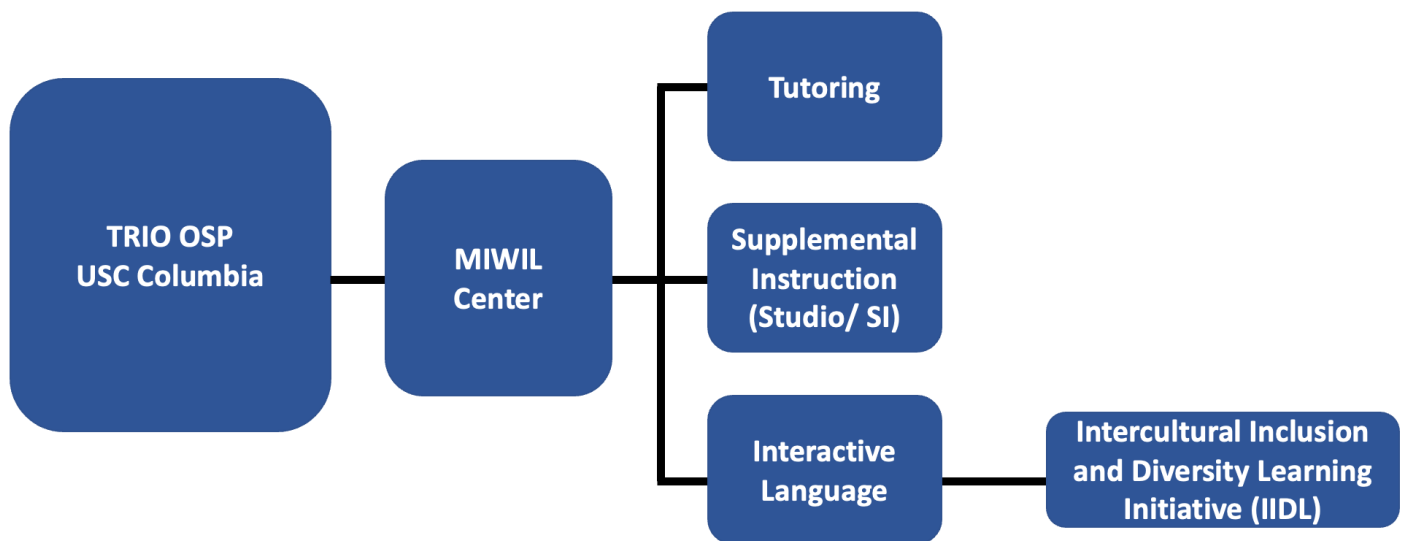
capacity to understand their own culture, identities, intersectionalities, perspectives, competencies, and the role of diversity, equity, and inclusion in their lives and the society. This intersectional and relevant focus on the cultures of African American, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian and Pacific islander, and white students in a United States-based historical context in the OSP is done to promote inclusive practices in our student body.

The above summarizes how the MIWIL Center aligns with the larger institutional objectives for low-income, first-generation, minoritized Latinx, Indigenous, and African American students' academic success and personal development. The U.S. Department of Education uses very specific language in regard to SSS projects and their incorporation of cultural learning initiatives. The language from the Department of Education reads as follows, "SSS projects may also expose students to cultural events and academic programs not usually available" (U.S. Department of Education, 2023.). This language reflects the U.S. Department of Education's support for cultural initiatives in SSS programs. I contend that the IIDL initiative in the OSP at USC Columbia has embraced the idea of intercultural inclusion as a central and required component to academic success, personal development, and sense of belonging of first-generation students. This case study illustrates the importance of (inter)cultural initiatives to the holistic development and academic success of first-generation low-income college students.

TRIO OSP at USC Columbia understands that in order for first generation college students from minoritized populations to feel like they belong, we should prioritize the visibility of their ethnic and racial existence in higher education pedagogy.

Figure 2.1 provides an outline of how the IIDL initiative is structured into the OSP curriculum.

Figure 2.1 How IIDL Initiative is Structured into the OSP Curriculum



Assessment Methods/Design

The success of the IIDL initiative within the OSP-MIWIL Center is measured by analyzing the overall critical assessment of students after their participation in the initiative activities. The case study assessment was compiled from 75 student reflection papers about the required IIDL workshops and learning activities in which students participated during their first year. The 75 papers are from the entering first-year cohorts between the Fall of 2018 and Fall of 2021 exclusively. The one-page reflection paper prompt included the following: (a) name and date of the activity/workshop/event, (b) summary of the activity/workshop/event, and (c) student's critical assessment of the IIDL activity/workshop/

event (what they learned or did not learn from the event). Reflection papers for this study were selected based on the degree of thorough responses to the IIDL reflection paper prompt.

Table 2.1 Learning Outcomes of the IIDL Initiative in the MIWIL Center

Learning Outcome #1:	Event/workshop/activity expanded students' perspective about their own ethnic cultures and the cultures of others. Thus, providing them with a sense of pride and acceptance of self and others in the college environment
Learning Outcome #2:	Event/activity/workshop enhanced students' ability to make connections between scholarship, curriculum, identity development, and interpersonal advocacy
Learning Outcome #3:	Event/activity/workshop facilitated students' ability to move from a survivalist mentality to self-confident advocates in the college environment

Assessment Findings

The findings from this qualitative analysis indicate that students who described an improved understanding of their own culture, identities, intersectionalities, perspectives, competencies, and the role of diversity, equity, and inclusion in their lives and the society as a result of attending the required IIDL events have been successful in one or more of the following five academic success evaluation categories: (a) campus leadership; (b) intercultural communicative activities; (c) mentors, peer leaders, and student advisors; (d) requirement for graduation with leadership distinction; and (e) requirement for on time graduation. See Table 2.2 for a selection of quotes from IIDL reflection papers between 2018 and 2021.

All the students who produced these reflections went on to become student leaders and have completed one or more of the five academic success evaluation categories listed above.

Table 2.2 Selected Quotes from IIDL Reflection Papers 2018-2021

Event Name	Event Description	IIDL Reflection Paper
IIDL-First Generation Learning Panel Discussion	A panel of diverse OSP upperclassmen engage in an interactive talk about their experience with belonging and inclusion at USC Columbia. The focus was on their first year.	At the event, I noticed that I have experienced a lot of what these panelists discussed in just my first semester of college. For example, I also felt like I did not belong at the beginning of the year just as the panelists did in their first year of college. We also both overcame this problem with time and making good grades in our first year. Also, they discussed how they were treated differently by their family after enrolling in college. I have also experienced much of the same thing during my first semester at Carolina as my family asks a lot of questions about college.

table continues on page 34

Event Name	Event Description	IIDL Reflection Paper
IIDL-Student Activism Learning Panel Discussion	A panel of diverse OSP scholars talk about controversial social and political issues that impact them in higher education and society at large.	This event has impacted me by educating me on being a student activist and explaining how it doesn't have to be a negative situation. You can just voice your opinion by talking rather than yelling and arguing. This panel educated me on other cultures such as the trans culture and African American culture.
IIDL Recognized Office of Multicultural Student Affairs Event-Step Afrika Show	Performance group "Step Afrika" share the African American step tradition with student participation as the audience.	By attending the event, I learned that Step Afrika is the first professional dance company dedicated to the tradition of stepping. Step Afrika was founded in 1994. Through performance, Step Afrika blends percussive dance styles practiced by historically African American fraternities and sororities, African traditional dance, and influences from a variety of other dance and art forms. Step Afrika defines "stepping" as a long and rich tradition in African-based communities that uses movement drawn from African foot dances, words, and sound to communicate. I aligned my experience at this cultural event with Pratt's (1991) theory of clash of cultures, which she likes to call the "contact zone." It refers to "[a social space] where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (Pratt, 1991, p. 34). This experience allowed my ethnic background to meet with the backgrounds of my friend.
IIDL-Zoot Suit Riots Film and Learning Discussion	Celebration of Hispanic Heritage month: Film showing with opening lecture presentation and discussion following the film.	This event taught me a part of American history that was not taught to me during high school or middle school. It was interesting to see how far people would easily get offended by how Mexican Americans would wear the zoot suits. This event about the zoot suit riots was educational and I learned something new that took place in American during World War II.

table continues on page 35

Event Name	Event Description	IIDL Reflection Paper
IIDL-Gender Violence Learning Panel	A discussion of global gender violence with film presentation and panel discussion.	Before I attended this event, I did not really go in expecting to learn anything. My generation hears about gender violence and inequality all the time, and there are always new ways to learn about it. Because of this, I did not go in thinking that I would hear anything new. I was surprised to find out how wrong I was.

Implications for Practice

Holistic, Intersectional, and Liberatory

The IIDL initiative in the TRIO OSP-MIWIL Center at USC Columbia offers a holistic approach to pedagogy and student development. The intercultural and inclusive learning activities, workshops, and coursework center the lived experiences, talents, and aspirations of students from low-income backgrounds, as well as Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, and other minoritized student communities. More specifically, the activities supported by the IIDL initiative offer implicit and explicit modes of advisement that allow students to come to their own realization of possible professional and communicative involvement related to their future careers. Hence, it is an exemplary curriculum that intersects scholarship, identity development, and interpersonal advocacy. The initiative has proven to be a successful approach to moving students from a survivalist mentality to self-confident advocates in the college environment. Hence, because of the self-reflective nature of the IIDL events and activities, students learn how to perceive and understand themselves in the higher education environment, which, in turn, gives them new ways to advocate for themselves. The curriculum and approach to student pedagogy in the TRIO OSP at USC Columbia could provide faculty and professional staff at other institutions of higher education with a framework that support the holistic success of first-generation low-income college students at R-1 institutions.

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PART 02

FIELD PRACTICES

To aid in amplifying the voice and experiences of Student Support Services scholars and practitioners, this collection includes three field practices written by invited experts and leaders in TRIO and first-generation work. Written in first-person and highlighting the authors' lived experiences, these field practices give insight into the background of these professionals and their work with TRIO and first-generation students. Most importantly, the authors highlight the important elements of TRIO (or TRIO inspired work) that benefit students. Each field practice discusses initiatives these authors worked with at their institutions, from First-Generation Initiatives to Leadership Advancement Programs.

LEADERSHIP ADVANCE: LEADERS ADVANCE, THEY DON'T RETREAT



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The Journey to Leadership Advance

For nearly 25 years, I have worked with diverse student populations in higher education. My educational background is varied but related. I hold a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with an option in Financial Management from Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina. I continued my education and earned a Master of Arts in Community Agency Counseling from Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia. Later, my educational journey led me to receive another Master of Arts in Human Behavior and Conflict Management from Columbia College in Columbia, South Carolina. In 2016, I graduated from Clemson University in Clemson, South Carolina, with a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Leadership with a higher education emphasis. My research topic explored the relevance and success of TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) projects in South Carolina. Specifically, my study was to determine whether the services provided by TRIO SSS projects lead to successful outcomes and whether the communities in which the institution served impacted the projects' success (Canty, 2016).

Each position in my career has allowed me to grow professionally. Most of my professional career has been spent working with students from diverse populations in many different capacities. Some of my duties included leading an academic support program, directing a learning center for

developmental studies students (collaboration with academic affairs), and overseeing the operations of a tutorial program. Further, I coordinated counseling and academic advising services for students and other supportive services for students with disabilities. Lastly, I taught leadership and college skills courses.

In addition to the abovementioned duties, I handled complaints between students and staff, responded to student disciplinary issues, levied sanctions when necessary, and responded to student health and mental health crises. Those experiences shaped my understanding of my role in higher education and led me to create an intensive self-awareness weekend for students in crisis or at risk.

Although I worked at various higher education institutions, I am drawn to the community college. The educational setting in which I am most comfortable is the community college system, and my heart and soul are invested there. Although community colleges educate students with strong academic and social backgrounds, it has primarily become a place of refuge and redemption for those students who require more support. Because of this focus, when possible, we must develop cocurricular opportunities to fine-tune challenges students faced. Hence, they flourish and go on to make their educational and career aspirations come true.

I oversee two TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) projects that serve first-generation, low-income, and students with disabilities. Through assessment and observation, we realize some barriers are still not addressed by SSS services. In addition to the usual barriers this population faces, some of our project's participants still exhibit low self-esteem, have trust issues, require cultural competency, and lack coping skills. Lowes (2020) states that "meaningful and impactful" interactions are essential in changing outcomes. Therefore, my staff and I decided to address these concerns by initiating Leadership Advance, a weekend retreat for project participants to gain more self-awareness, create relationships with other project participants and provide a "safe place" to do so. Without this intervention, students may not avail themselves of other project services, thus, stymieing themselves from progress.

Moreover, I used a case study to illustrate the intentional strategies and methods in the Leadership Advance self-awareness weekend. The study includes a description of the institution and its students. Further, the study provides information on the SSS projects I oversee that sponsor Leadership Advance, the design and methods used, outcomes, and implications for practice.

Case Study

Institution

York Technical College (YTC), a public South Carolina community college, is a two-year associate degree-granting institution in Rock Hill, South Carolina. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges accredited the College to award associate degrees, diplomas, and certificates. The College exclusively serves commuter students in York, Chester, Lancaster Counties, and the Catawba Indian Nation on a rural reservation in York County. YTC has an open admissions policy.

YTC is uniquely located in the Charlotte, North Carolina, metropolitan area. Financial services, technology, energy, and healthcare industries in that area continue to expand beyond the state border to drive the local economy in York, Lancaster, and Chester (South Carolina) counties. YTC students gain employment skills in the area and find meaningful and financially rewarding work in diverse fields within their local communities.

Table 3.1 presents a representation of the YTC student demographic from Fall 2021. Total enrollment was 3,835; nearly two-thirds of students were female.

Table 3.1 YTC Student Enrollment Fall 2021

Category	Number	Percent
Female	2,321	61
Male	1,514	39
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>		
African American	857	22
White (Non-Hispanic)	2,231	58
Hispanic/Latinx	339	9
Asian	65	2
Native American	21	1
All Other Races (including unknown)	322	8
<i>Age</i>		
Students aged 24 and under	2,761	72
Students 25 and older	1,074	28
<i>Other</i>		
Pell Recipients	862	23
First-Generation ¹	1,879	49
All Students FTE (Fall 2021)	3,835	

Notes: From *Student Fall Enrollment 2021*, Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research (IER), York Technical College.

¹York Technical College defines first-generation as neither parent attending/completing a college degree.

Program – Student Support Services

The PROMISE Program is the classic SSS project at YTC and has existed at the College for over 30 years. In addition, the institution also has a STEM-focused SSS project called the STEM Scholars Program. Both programs aim to provide participants with the tools necessary for success. The programs' staff continuously strives to prepare, retain, and graduate its participants through academic, cultural, and personal support services, which provide a positive and motivational experience to ensure the success of the students.

Students. PROMISE is funded to serve 200 students. The STEM Scholars Program, the STEM-focused SSS project, began serving YTC students in 2015. It is funded to serve 120 students. Both projects exclusively work with first-generation, low-income, and students with disabilities. Cauty (2016) defines these three terms as follows:

- A *first-generation* student is a student whose parent figure who the student lived with has not obtained a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).
- *Low-income or low income* refers to a student's family annual taxable income not exceeding 150% of the poverty level based on U.S. Census data (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).
- *Students with disabilities* can verify a physical or intellectual disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

According to SSS Annual Performance Report data for PROMISE and STEM Scholars and the projects' databases, at least 70% of the participants of the SSS projects at YTC are first-generation and low-income. On average, the projects' students are 46% African American and 63% female.

Project Services. SSS projects have mandatory objectives to support the project's overarching purpose: (1) participant persistence, (2) academic achievement, (3a) graduation rates, and (3b) assisting students in transitioning from one higher education level to the next (U.S. Department

of Education, 2022). These objectives address the purposes of the program and the identified needs of participants and are clearly described, specific, measurable, and ambitious but attainable. Also, projects are required to provide certain services and are permitted to provide other wrap-around services for the holistic benefit of their participants. Table 3.2 details those services and which objective(s) they affect.

Table 3.2. Required and Permissible Services

Required Services	
Academic Tutoring (Objectives 1 & 2)	The project will provide tutorial services for general education courses the College offers. The Learning Coordinator is primarily responsible for ensuring the availability of a qualified and caring staff of tutors and academic coaches. Students could be assigned four hours of tutoring per week per course for the entire academic term or until they no longer need it. To the extent possible, students will receive at least two hours per week alone with the tutor to maximize the student's ability to benefit from the tutoring service.
Academic Advising Assistance (Objectives 1-3)	The Academic/Career Coordinator and Transfer Coordinator will assist project participants with course selection for every academic term the participant is enrolled and participating in the project to prepare for transfer or career placement.
Financial Aid Advising (Objectives 1 & 3)	As part of the advising session, project coordinators advise participants about all financial aid packages available, specifically those for which they may qualify.
FAFSA Assistance (Objective 1)	During the spring semester, project participants are advised to complete and submit the FAFSA. Reminders are sent to each participant via all communication modalities.
Transfer Services (Objective 3)	The Transfer Coordinator will assist the project's transfer students in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep project participants aware of opportunities with the neighboring universities and innovative partnerships available on campus; • Make initial contacts with admission personnel at four-year institutions to obtain application forms and other relevant documents; • Assist in completing and proofreading transfer applications; • Identify sources of financial aid and help students complete application forms; • Arrange and conduct campus tours of four-year institutions • Coordinate and conduct relevant workshops • Coordinate a college fair
Financial Literacy Advising (Objective 1)	New participants receive a financial literacy assessment, and the project's coordinators debrief the results and discuss consistencies and inconsistencies. In addition, new participants are required to attend a seminar on creditworthiness.

table continues on page 41

Permissible Services	
Individualized Personal and Academic Counseling (Objectives 1-3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each participant is assigned to a specific coordinator dependent upon their goals (transfer or career) • A debriefing session for new participants for each assessment (career assessment, study skills, learning styles, and financial literacy) • An Individualized Education Action Plan, which includes recommendations for assistance, is created for all participants • Academic counseling is scheduled at least twice per semester. The first session occurs just before midterm, and a later session is during the academic advising period. Before the midterm session and mid-term progress report, one of the program’s counselors or coordinators address the student’s academic progress if additional services are warranted • Professional development workshops for participants (time management, stress management, diversity, etc.) • Referrals to other campus resources (counseling services, disability services, grievance processes, etc.) • Referrals for assistance obtaining emergency food, clothing, and shelter • Year-End Recognition Banquet for project participants
Career Exploration Activities (Objectives 1-3)	<p>Our approach to career exploration is unique. New participants are required to complete an online personality assessment and expose them to real-world knowledge and experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The online assessment will allow participants to gain insight into themselves and use the knowledge to choose satisfying careers and lives. • Career tours to tour regional and neighboring corporate sites to connect the classroom experience with their chosen career fields.
Cultural Activities (Objectives 1-3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities are held at the local university or sponsored by the city; participants are provided two (2) tickets to the event with a friend. • Project-sponsored and College-sponsored culturally-oriented events like African American History Month, Hispanic Awareness Month, and current events discussions and seminars are offered. • Participants must attend at least two semesters of cultural or other enrichment activities, events, experiences.

Along with the services outlined in Table 3.2, the PROMISE and STEM Scholars programs sponsor a Leadership Advance program. The program targets project participants who are experiencing challenges or in transition. Even with the best efforts to provide services to SSS participants, some do not respond to standard interventions, which include tutoring, transfer services, academic advising assistance, and other services.

The purpose of Leadership Advance is to build community among participants of both projects, intensify counseling services offered, and provide a safe space for self-reflection. Participants are taken on a weekend (Friday-Sunday) trip where they participate in a series of activities that requires them to explore and uncover who they are, how that relates to others around them, and how that dictates their path toward their goals. Typically, the participants leave the experience more equipped to lead their lives successfully.

Both projects' staff identifies participants that need additional services. In particular, they look for participants who would benefit from more self-awareness and strategies to help them grow. The framework chosen is Johari's Window (Luff & Ingham, 1955). The staff select practical activities demonstrating the concepts to be learned.

Program Design and Method

In 2017, the U.S. Department of Education charged SSS projects to intensify their counseling efforts with participants. With an SSS project, counseling can consist of academic, career, transfer, or personal counseling. It was an excellent opportunity to increase our efforts in personal counseling. The project staff explored options that would influence the engagement of participants, provide thought-provoking concepts, and project change within the individual. After researching many self-awareness models, we selected Johari Window (Luff, 1961) because it fits well with our aims. Johari is a personal development tool that uses a simple visual and a series of exercises to examine your own personality and assists in improving trust with interpersonal relationships. After examining Johari, we realized we could not implement this series of activities on campus with limited distractions; therefore, it was decided to have a weekend away. Although Johari provided a sound framework, we needed additional activities to provide an experiential way of driving home the presented concepts.

Calling the weekend Leadership Advance instead of a leadership retreat was purposeful. Students in crisis or in transition are never referred to positively. The need to make sure the weekend's participants would come away from the sessions with a sense of pride and tools for growth was necessary. From the onset, participants needed to know they were leaders and that they did not turn back from challenges. They move forward because they are more self-aware and know the direction they seek. Succinctly put on t-shirts for participants and staff who attend, "Leadership Advance: Leaders advance ... they don't retreat."

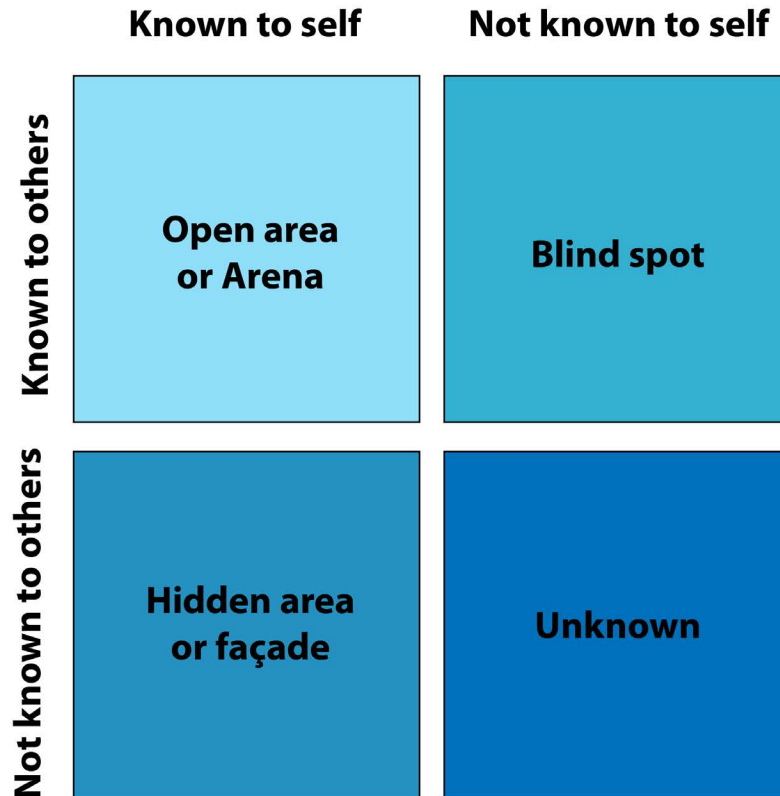
Coordinators and Counselors of PROMISE and STEM Scholars select students from their caseloads to participate in the weekend. The goal is to take at least 15 students. Then, once students are selected and agree to participate, they are divided into three groups of five, with one male and one female staff member as group facilitators. Further, Coordinators and Counselors decide on rooming assignments based on the general personality traits of the students selected to pair them with a hotel-style room. In addition, students may also request a specific person if they feel the roommate assigned is not a good fit. All assignments are intentionally done to create relationships between participants within the two SSS projects.

Day One. Before beginning the Johari process, students are expected to participate in a few activities to set the tone of the weekend experience. First, an overview of the weekend's events and activities is presented. Then, everyone (including staff) is asked to create a self-symbol or support mantra. Using markers and a poster board, each person draws a picture or writes a phrase representing their motto. The posters are displayed around the room for the duration of the weekend. Each person is given time to present their self-symbol/motto to the group and explain why it was chosen. Next, the three groups are asked to build a tower with a newspaper. Each group is given supplies (string, scissors, sheets of newspaper, etc.) to accomplish the task. They have 10 minutes to plan their strategy and 15 minutes to build the tallest tower without talking. After this activity, each group reflects on their challenges and lessons learned about working together as a trusting team.

Then, we discuss the goals of the weekend that we want to build community among them via intentional connections and self-awareness by providing a safe environment for sharing. Then the tenets of the Johari Window are introduced. The Leadership Advance self-awareness weekend for students participating in the PROMISE and STEM Scholars programs use Johari Window as a framework. The Johari Window model uses four panes or quadrants to help individuals increase self-awareness by engaging with others (Luff & Ingham, 1955). The American psychologist Joseph Luff and Harry Ingham created the Johari Window in 1955. The model is often used in team building.

Sternberg (2003) described self-awareness or insight as interpersonal intelligence that gives the individual information to regulate one's life. Figure 3.1 is a diagram of the panes used during the self-discovery exercises.

Figure 3.1 Johari Window Model



Note: Revised from Cipriani, 2004.

The Open Area is initially small but gradually gets more prominent as students share more about themselves with others, which is information a person is willing to share. The Blind Spot is information you may not be aware of that is known to others about you. The Hidden Area contains information about you that you may not want to share with others or fears you may be covering up.

The project staff presents a stretching demonstration skit to culminate the first night's activities. Each staff member dramatizes an area they would like to overcome or had to overcome. This activity is pivotal to the weekend because the participants see they are not being asked to do anything the staff is unwilling to do.

Day Two. Day Two begins the Johari sessions. Ground rules are set so that all participants know the information shared is confidential and everyone is treated respectfully during sessions. Three of the four panes, the Obstacle Field Trust Exercise and the Student Stretching Show, are completed on Day Two. The real work begins during this full day of self-exploration. During sessions, facilitators introduce a concept, an activity follows, and then there is time to reflect.

Session I (Open Area) allows participants to identify descriptors that represent their identities. Individuals may share to broaden information about what others know about them. Participants are asked to put these adjectives that describe them on a small dry-erase board from the list of descriptor adjectives provided. Then, they are asked to transfer that information to a poster board once the session is completed.

In Session II (Blind Spot), a person may not know these characteristics about themselves. Each individual stands up in front of the group as each member circles four positive and three challenging descriptors and places the scorecard in a basket for that person. After each person has stood in front, they take the scorecard for themselves, record it on their dry-erase board, and then transfer it after the session.

Session III (Hidden Area) discusses things others do not know about you. A person writes personal fears anonymously on an index card and puts them in an envelope. The facilitator picks an envelope, reads the index card's content, and discusses how the person who wrote this must feel. Others chime in, and sometimes, the person explains their feelings concerning what was listed. Specifically, during Session III, the session can become intense and emotional depending on how comfortable students are and how much they are willing to share. Tears are shed during testimonies, and participants and facilitators give thoughtful responses and support.

The Obstacle/Trust Exercise allows participants to work on their relationships and trust issues, which is why they are paired in teams. One person is blindfolded, and the other directs them through a maze of cones without touching the blindfolded person. The challenge requires excellent listening skills and the ability to let go and trust the person who sees the end goals.

Later that evening, participants dramatize growth areas for them in a skit called a Stretching Show. The Stretching show can enlighten participants because they have become aware of things that need improvement. Their peers offer suggestions and recognize their behaviors by watching their cohorts.

Day Three. This is the last day of the weekend. Session IV (Unknown Arena) illuminates what was learned from the process. Participants share what they learned about themselves and, in some cases, exhibit new behaviors. After the last session, we have an awards ceremony. Facilitators recognize participants in their specific groups who fully participated, showed emerging leadership skills, and experienced growth. Also, participants receive a certificate of completion for their participation.

Findings

We collected qualitative data and quantitative data from Leadership Advance. We collected qualitative data from the weekend experiences held in 2018 and 2019. Students who attended Leadership Advance in those years allowed us to record their responses from the Johari Window Model (1961) panes. Also, we followed the academic progress of the participants who attended concerning their persistence, graduation, and transfer, which are SSS's success measures.

Qualitative. The qualitative data involves words the participants used to describe themselves as they followed the Johari Window Model (Luff & Ingham, 1955) from the Open and Blind arenas. As stated earlier, the Open area allows participants to identify descriptors representing their identities from 68 words, such as *able, dignified, motivator, proud, and idealistic*. In 2018 and 2019, the most used descriptors used by students to describe themselves were *caring, friendly, calm, listener, and loyal*. In the Blind Arena, students were asked to describe others in their group with positive and challenging descriptors from sixteen words: *aggressive, complex, impulsive, self-conscious, and others*. In 2018, students used challenging words to describe their peers, such as *complex, dominating, silly, searching, nervous, bold, and impulsive*. In 2019, students added *demanding, self-conscious, quiet, and tense* as the most used challenging words.

In the following two panes (Hidden Area and Unknown), participants used phrases and statements to explain fears and what they learned from the process. The Hidden Area students were asked to write personal fears anonymously on an index card and put them in an envelope. Envelopes were placed in a basket. The facilitator picks an envelope, reads the index card's content, and discusses how the person who wrote this must feel. Some of the most significant phrases and statements from students in both 2018 and 2019 were as follows:

- Fear of past failure
- I will never be good enough.
- Afraid of not being successful
- Having trouble with forgiveness
- Storms, tornadoes, spiders, and no relationship with my sister
- Driving, drawing, dying
- Being disliked by my classmates

- To be publicly criticized
- Scared to love
- Tired of being hurt
- I push people away before they hurt me.

In the Unknown Area, students reflected on their experiences during the weekend. They were eager to share what they had learned about themselves. Some found out they allowed obstacles and frustrations to hold them back. While others recognized some of their behaviors created obstacles, like being impulsive. Others uncovered traits they had not used, such as wisdom and inspiration. One student summed up their experience this way:

I learned people perceive me very differently than I perceive myself. I am judgmental and demanding of myself, and I need to be kinder to myself. It's ok to be vulnerable with people because they can surprise you and give you the energy back what you have been holding onto.

Quantitative. As stated previously, SSS projects have mandatory objectives to support the project's goals toward participant persistence, academic achievement, graduation rates, and assisting students in transitioning from one higher education level to the next after receiving a credential. All of these are considered success measures. Specifically, we monitor Leadership Advance participants' progress. For each cohort, we examined success measures. The chart below describes these outcomes.

Table 3.3 Success Rates

Cohort	Number of Participants	Percentage Met at Least One Criterion
2017 (<i>n</i> = 15)	15	80%
2018 (<i>n</i> = 16)	12*	88%
2019 (<i>n</i> = 12)	7*	83%
2022 (<i>n</i> = 7)	7	100%

*Some students were allowed to participate in more than one cohort. The number reflects actual new students who attended.

In the first year, at least 80% of the participants met at least one success criterion (persistence, graduation, or transfer). To date, 41 students have participated in Leadership Advance. Overall, 67% of those who participated in Leadership Advance have graduated or graduated and transferred.

Additional Outcomes. Much of what is done with SSS projects are pursuing quantitative outcomes in persistence and graduation. However, other outcomes are equally important because they permit quantitative and qualitative data collection. Dowland (2014, p. 1) asserts that easily acquired quantitative measures tend to ignore intangible information. Thus, additional information through observations is needed to construct a clearer picture of outcomes. After each Leadership Advance weekend. Staff noted several changes from their observations:

- increased foot traffic within the office,
- participants felt like they belonged to a community,
- increased participation with provided services (tutoring, academic advising, etc.),
- more peer relationships were created,
- students exhibited more confidence in themselves, and
- improved interpersonal relationships with peers and staff.

Based on staff observations, the participants demonstrated broadened and enhanced skills. These include the ability to connect and make connections, feel and experience their emotions in a safe environment, and develop confidence and trust in their peers and the staff. Further, removing the students from their usual environment allowed them to reduce their stressors momentarily so they could identify the commonalities among their peers to facilitate deeper connections. Hence, they remain engaged with the campus community.

Implications for Practice

Student Support Services is a successful program. The projects consistently meet and exceed their thresholds and provide services identified by legislation, regulations, and best practices of the larger TRIO community (Canty, 2016). The specific populations that SSS projects serve have certain characteristics and barriers that hinder their success. Regardless of the success of the projects as a whole, some students still need additional support. Leadership Advance provides the additional intervention needed.

The purpose of Leadership Advance is to build community among participants of both projects, intensify counseling services offered, and provide a safe space for self-exploration and reflection.

Leadership Advance is successful based on outcomes from the four years that students participated. Quantitative data shows that at least 80% of students who attend are academically successful after attending. Student responses also reveal personal growth on the part of the student as a result of the weekend sessions. Furthermore, student engagement increased after trust and relationships were established among the students and staff. Students' overall experience with project staff was improved.

Other SSS projects could develop a Leadership Advance program to augment their services. The activities can be altered to suit any group of students. It can be adapted for all male or all female groups and other variations. Also, the weekend could include students outside of TRIO who are experiencing similar concerns or not because learning interpersonal intelligence (Sternberg, 2003) is beneficial to all students.

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THE SUCCESS OF TRIO

INSPIRED INITIATIVES WITHIN FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT SUCCESS PROGRAMMING



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Overview

Historically, Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) were created to provide federal outreach and student service programs to individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, individuals with disabilities, and first-generation students. TRIO includes eight programs that assist students with progressing through the education pipeline, ranging from middle school to postbaccalaureate programs. TRIO programs, such as Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services (SSS), currently motivate and support students who are in pursuit of a college degree. Out of those students, an estimated 790,000 first-generation and low-income students are being served by over 2,800 TRIO programs.

Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) is a technological research university serving over 40,000 students. Georgia Tech's mission is to develop leaders who advance technology and improve the human condition. Its mission and strategic plan are focused on making a positive impact in the lives of people everywhere. Georgia Tech students experience holistic learning across science, technology, engineering, math, arts, humanities, business, and social sciences. The Institute is committed to lifetime learning, from assisting K-12 in STEM education to partnering with business to develop graduate degrees and professional education. Georgia Tech's mission statement, vision, and

goals set forth in the strategic plan includes amplifying impact, championing innovation, connecting globally, expanding access, cultivating well-being, and leading by example.

With more than \$1 billion annually in research awards across all six Colleges and the Georgia Tech Research Institute (GTRI), Georgia Tech is among the nation's most research-intensive universities. While Georgia Tech doesn't have TRIO on its campus, the Institute and First-Generation Student Initiatives currently serves 2,307 first-generation students and 2,819 low-income students.

My Journey to Serving First-Generation Students

I grew up in rural North Carolina in a small town called Lumberton. My parents divorced when I was ten years old. My mom and my extended family, including grandmothers, grandfather, aunts, and uncles, raised me. My mother and father did not graduate from college. I wasn't exposed often to others who looked like me who had graduated from college. However, I had an aunt and uncle who were enrolled in college in the early 1980s.

When I was in fourth grade, my aunt and uncle took me and my cousins to visit the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I fell in love with not only the campus, but the experience of being on the campus. The experience helped cultivate my dream of going to college one day. I saw the goal of this African American girl going to University of North Carolina (UNC)-Chapel Hill as being attainable. However, there were no institutions coming into our communities to talk about college preparation or the application process.

I was a pretty ambitious teenager, so I figured out the process of applying to college on my own. When I was in eighth grade, I requested a UNC-Chapel Hill application through the mail so I could review the requirements for admission. I spent my freshman through junior years making sure that I followed the path toward admission. I didn't find out about the local TRIO program through UNC-Pembroke until I was a rising senior in high school. While my friend was in TRIO, I didn't understand the its concept or if I could apply at that stage in my life.

After being admitted to UNC-Chapel Hill, I was excited about achieving my goal. Everything that I had worked so hard for in high school had paid off. However, when I began my freshman year of college, I had no idea of what to do next. In addition to facing both academic and financial challenges, I experienced several personal twists and turns that detoured me from my original career goal. It was mentorship that changed my trajectory in college. Pamela Cheek, my direct report at my campus job, became my mentor. She shifted my whole perspective and direction in life and provided me with access to knowledge and resources that helped shape my future.

I never knew that I was first-generation and what that meant until I was in graduate school. There were no programs in existence specifically for first-generation students on campus at that time. I always asked myself if there had been a first-generation program on campus, how far would I have gone in my career. What I did know is that I didn't want any first-generation students in high school, college, or graduate school to experience the challenges I had faced. It was my experience as a first-generation student that led me on my journey in this work and to launching a first-generation learning community at Georgia Gwinnett College in 2017.

Launching of First-Generation Student Initiatives

After establishing First-Generation Student Support at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), I arrived at Georgia Tech to launch First-Generation Student Initiatives in 2021. Georgia Tech has six strategic focus areas; however, our department aligns strongly with expanding access. As part of the Office of Undergraduate Education's Academic Success and Advising unit, First-Generation Student Initiatives collaborates with diverse campus and community partners to provide support through cocurricular programming for first-generation students. The department was created to build community, strengthen well-being, develop leadership, cultivate academic success, and foster retention and graduation among Georgia Tech's first-generation and low-income students. In addition, First-Generation & Limited-Income Student Initiatives works to:

G1. Educate students through experiences that support their personal development, academic success, and social growth.

G2. Creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for first-generation and low-income students.

G3. Provide opportunities, support, and programs that enrich a student's engagement and development through asset-based approaches.

G4. Use evidence to create strategies for improving first-generation and low-income student learning, development, and success.

Our work focuses on removing barriers for underrepresented populations, which is inspired by TRIO's goal of removing barriers to education. Our department also collaborates with community partners to inspire first-generation and low-income students to pursue learning and career in science and technology.

One of our TRIO inspired signature initiatives is the First-Generation College Institute. Closely resembling Upward Bound, the First-Generation College Institute, is a statewide, summer initiative at Georgia Tech designed to amplify the Institute's impact by identifying, engaging, and preparing first-generation and low-income eighth through 12th grade students for the transition from high school to college and aptitude in STEM. This initiative is a partnership supported by First-Generation Student Initiatives, the Center for Education Integrating Science, Mathematics, and Computing (CEISM), and the Office of Undergraduate Admissions. The goals of the program include:

- Uniting first-generation high school students around the shared identity of being a first-generation college student.
- Preparing and empowering first-generation and low-income first to 12th grade students for the transition from high school to college.
- Connecting first-generation and low-income students with programs, resources, and people that will support their success at Georgia Tech.
- Engaging students through **high-quality academic and hands-on STEM enrichment learning.**

The program was offered on both Georgia Tech's Atlanta and Savannah campuses during Summer 2022. At both events, students participated in informational sessions on college preparation and planning, financial aid, college admissions, and hands-on STEM activities. One challenge that we faced in launching this initiative was the unexpected interest of parents wanting to attend the event. During the Atlanta event, many parents stayed instead of dropping off their children. We had to keep parents separate from the children during STEM activities and breakout sessions with our student leaders. The Savannah event was modified to include informational and Q&A sessions, specifically for parents.

Collaborating with CEISM and Undergraduate Admissions afforded the opportunity to increase our reach across the state of Georgia and be proactive in expanding access to underserved populations, especially in Georgia's rural communities. The earlier that first-generation students know the college preparation process and the aptitude in STEM that is required for an institution like Georgia Tech, the more prepared they will be for the college application process and their transition into college.

An important part of the launch of the First-Generation College Institute was assessing its effectiveness. Assessment of the institute was designed to collect formative data to support future programmatic decision making, as well as outcome data to assess the potential effects of the program. Post surveys containing fixed-response and open-ended items were administered to students and parents immediately after the event they attended. According to the evaluation report, the event attracted first-generation students who were already hoping to attend college and interested in STEM disciplines, but wanted more information on admissions, financial aid, and what to expect in college. Most Atlanta students were upperclassmen, reporting that they were in 11th or 12th grade (61%). Savannah students indicated they were primarily underclassmen, with 59% in ninth or 10th

grade. There was a similar percentage of eighth graders at both the Atlanta (12%) and Savannah (13%) events. A post survey showed that on average, students agreed that the First-Generation College Institute had a positive impact on their understanding of STEM careers, possible career choices, as well as helping them make decisions about their future. Their sense of belonging in college was also positively impacted by the event, agreeing that it helped them feel more like they will fit in at college.

As a result of the Summer 2022 pilot program and assessment, more campus and community partners want to participate in the institute. Additional partnerships and funding have led to the opportunity for first-generation and low-income students attending the 2023 First-Generation College Institute to gain a weekend-long, on-campus residential experience.

Another TRIO inspired program that we launched in the first year of the department's inception was the First-Gen Jackets Peer Mentoring Program. As mentioned earlier in my discussion about my journey to serving first-generation students, mentorship played a huge part. Our goals for the program included:

- Design and implement a high impact mentorship program at scale.
- Offer first year first-generation students personalized peer mentors.
- Through mentorship, deepen their sense of belonging and connection to the Georgia Tech community. Focus collective effort on the success of a diverse student community.

Some of the challenges that mentees faced reported by mentors included academic struggles, switching majors, and financial concerns. To help students overcome these challenges, we provide academic and financial resources.

Mentor Impact

Peer mentors appeared to feel a sense of purpose when given the opportunity to connect with lower classmen. Student testimonials show they were eager to share their experiences and campus insights to assist their mentees. Mentor satisfaction remained steady throughout the year, signifying that they felt confident in their ability to accomplish goals while having an empowered sense of self and community. Mentors were also extremely helpful in identifying possible areas of early intervention through the usage of early alert flags. Early alert flags are sent to Georgia Tech staff by mentors indicating mentee needs and concerns. Some of the top concerns that were reported are academic struggles, consideration of switching majors, and financial concerns.

Mentee Impact

Most mentees gave this mentorship program the highest grade of satisfaction with an average score of 6.5. Notably, the most engaged of the mentee group were underrepresented minorities (80%) – illustrating the effectiveness of catering to Georgia Tech's diverse student community. Many mentees referenced how mentors were providing effective solutions for managing challenging schedules, ways to stay motivated throughout the school year, and tips for managing stress.

While Georgia Tech does not have traditional TRIO programming, we do have TRIO inspired initiatives that expand access to first-generation and low-income students. Much like TRIO, our outreach to these underrepresented populations will continue to span preK-12 through post-graduate. As both parents and students share how much our initiatives have positively impacted their lives, I think back to my own journey and my why. It is important as an educator and first-generation graduate to continue expanding access in innovative and creative ways.

TRIO SSS DREAM, DESIGN, AND BUILD YOUR PROGRAM



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On August 16, 1986, I arrived at Morris College in Sumter, South Carolina, to unpack my belongings. I arrived at what was to be my home for the next four years with nothing but a suitcase and \$115 to sustain me. I finally arrived, but not without some hiccups. You see, going to college was not my first choice. In fact, it was my goal to join the Navy. However, in 1986, I was denied entry into the U.S. Navy because of asthma. It was after I received this devastating news that I decided to go to college.

My first months of college were an experience. I was the poster child for “imposter syndrome” before that was even given a name. I was an average student with an overall C average when I graduated from high school and was never considered a “brain.” My high school guidance counselor told me not to go to a four-year college but to stay in Langley, South Carolina, attend Aiken Technical College, and find a job. She did not feel that I would be successful at a “real” school.

My anxiety was present all throughout my first week at Morris College’s freshman orientation and apparently it was evident to some Student Affairs professionals as well. The Dean of Students, Mrs. Eliza E. Black, and history chair, Ms. Evelyn Hall, always seemed to be close by and helped to assuage some of my fears (but not all). I was told every day at the small group orientation sessions that failure was not an option because there were too many things in place to provide us with a safety net for success.

After freshman orientation ended, I was ready to attend my classes. Although apprehensive, I felt a little better about being there, that is, until I found out about my book situation. I was only provided \$115, and at the end of that first week, I was down to \$90 and change. I also found out that college was not high school and that we were meant to purchase our textbooks. Even though I was only three days into classes, I took this as a sign that I wasn't supposed to be in college. The next morning, I was planning to call Mom and Dad to come and get me, but first, I had to attend a meeting with my new Federal Work Study supervisor.

It was here that I met Ms. Stukes, the librarian who selected me to be her work study student. We were touring the various sections of the Morris College library when we came to the resource lab that housed a copy of every textbook sold through the bookstore and were available for student use. I was taken aback. I could get my work done as long as I read the textbooks in the resource lab. In the upcoming weeks that lab became my second home. One day, after I had been a semi-permanent fixture in the resource lab, Ms. Stukes came in to tell me that I was to meet with the president of the college immediately. My heart dropped. Why did President Richardson want to see me? Did he realize that he made a mistake and that I was not cut out for college? I was nervous to meet with the president, but our interaction was positive. We talked about my experience in the first weeks of college and chatted about my hometown. Before leaving, the president gave me an envelope to take to the bookstore manager. Little did I know that the president had given me a scholarship to cover all my books. At the end of my visit to the bookstore, the manager told me that later that night, after I figured out what clubs I wanted to join, I had to visit with Ms. Evelyn Hall because she had an opportunity that I need to latch onto, and latch onto quickly.

I discovered two things that night: the letter that President Richardson bestowed me was a book scholarship, and Student Support Services (SSS) was indeed a program that I was going to latch onto in order to ensure my successful matriculation from Morris College. It was this intervention which led me to a long and wonderful history with the Federal TRIO Programs.

TRIO: My Life's Work

In 1999, I applied for a job as an Upward Bound counselor at the Technical College of the Lowcountry (TCL). I was not familiar with Upward Bound as there were no TRIO programs in the county where I was raised. However, after reading the criteria, I knew that I would have qualified. When I received this job, I fell in love with TRIO programs all over again. I loved what they stood for and how they helped students succeed in both high school and college. After two years, due to a family issue, I moved to Tri-County Technical College where I obtained a job as the Upward Bound Director, and four years later, I returned to my former job at TCL for one year before being offered the TRIO Director role. I was ecstatic. The TRIO programs at the TCL, were revered and respected. The president of the college, Dr. Anne McNutt, understood the importance of TRIO. When I obtained the position as TRIO Director, she said, "We love Upward Bound and Talent Search, but we cannot afford to lose Student Support Services." I was not sure what she meant at that time, but I quickly grew to learn.

The TCL SSS program is instrumental in producing outstanding student leaders. Since 2007 there has been at least one SSS student who served as an officer on the Student Government Association Board. Also, since 2009 (when we began tracking) the annual TCL Student Awards has boasted, at most, 72%, and at its lowest point, 61% of the award recipients being SSS members. The TRIO programs make a huge impact on TCL. Our Talent Search programs funnel students from the high schools that we serve and converts them into TCL students. The SSS program is a shining example of exemplary students and our programs are always asked to help them find students to serve on various college committees and engage with important dignitaries that visit the campus.

The TRIO programs at TCL are extremely visible and accessible, located in the same buildings as Admissions, Student Records, Financial Aid, the Counseling Center, ADA Services, and the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, to name a few. The rapport that SSS has built with these offices is outstanding. They know what we do and help us recruit and maintain our numbers. We ensure that the students experience a convivial experience in all of these locations because SSS is perhaps one of the most diverse student "organizations" on campus. Faculty, staff, and community members know

for what we stand, what our mission is, and how we have been successful in telling the stories of our first-generation and limited income students.

Successful SSS Programming Efforts

The programming that we use within our SSS program is called the DDB program (DREAM, DESIGN, and BUILD) which are the three pillars used to funnel all SSS programs and initiatives. It is within the first pillar, Dream, that we encourage our students to DREAM BIG. We express to our students that no dream is too big and no goal (within education) is unreachable. Students are informed that they need to put in the work and research. As SSS practitioners and professionals, we assist the students with the research. We ask students to allow us to assist them, and we ask that they trust us, as well as the process, in order to help them bring their dreams to fruition. Many of the activities and programming of this pillar focus on career planning. Various assessments (LASSI, Holland) are used to help students sculpt their career goals and to provide them with some tools to achieve them. In this pillar the SSS staff also rely on other TCL offices such as Career Services, Veterans Resource Center, Counseling, and the Foundation. Some of the activities that we use are career fairs, college transfer fairs, and community workshops and speakers with expertise in careers and vocation.

The second pillar, Design, is structured so that it is continuously changing, and for students this pillar must remain flexible. While serving SSS students TCL, we are constantly reviewing and changing the program to meet the needs of our students in these ever-changing times. One big change in the 2022-2023 school year was utilizing more technology. We started meeting virtually out of necessity due to COVID-19, but when we returned to the office, students were skittish about meeting in person. We continued to meet virtually except for one in-person quick 10-minute follow-up. We discovered we were able to retain more of our students because they were able to fit us in via their telephones, laptops, iPads, or other electronic devices. We also found that we were able to connect them to other offices on the campus utilizing the same method. Because students were getting what they needed from our offices, and we were flexible with them, they felt as if we truly had their backs and their best interests at heart. This pillar is the most important to maintain to ensure that the other pillars remain standing firm. It is under this pillar that we also use the two Competitive Preference Priorities (CPP) to ensure success for all students in the SSS program.

CPP 1 states that the SSS programs should foster flexible and affordable paths to obtain knowledge and skills and to improve collaboration between educational providers and employers. Under the umbrella of this CPP we have incorporated four activities and almost all programming efforts that assist with careers and transfer fall under one of these areas. Below are the programs that we currently use at TCL that fall under each heading.

Help Students Choose and Enter Their Chosen Pathways (Career)

- co-advising session with a TCL navigator ensures the student is hearing the same thing from SSS and TCL staff,
- Dress for Success Seminar sponsored by Campus Life and Arts and Sciences division specifically for SSS students, and
- resume writing workshops-includes one-on-one meetings with employees of the Career Center and English tutors.

Help Students Stay on Their Path

- job shadowing (available both in person and virtually), and
- internships (paid and unpaid). Many students start with an unpaid internship to bolster their resume, but end up getting a paid internship because they are so good at the work that they do where they are placed.

Create Clear Curricular Pathways to Employment and to Further Education

- brown bag lunches with community members, faculty, staff are held monthly, and
- free forming mentor/mentee sessions. We allow students to help find their own mentors rather than to force a mentor/mentee relationship that may not work. Students play an active role and in doing so, the relationship usually thrives.

Ensure That Learning With Intentional Outcomes is Happening

- We provide Career Fairs in which we have various agencies and employees come to the campus to recruit our students and help them improve their resumes.
- We also provide Transfer Fairs in which we host various colleges and universities to assist our students who wish to transfer to a four-year college or university.
- BASK Program (Brothers and Sisters Keeper). A program that utilizes SSS alumni to give back to their alma mater.

CPP 2 states that the SSS programs should foster knowledge and promote the development of skills that prepare students to be informed, thoughtful, and productive individuals and citizens. Under the umbrella of this CPP, the TCL SSS program has incorporated three activities. Almost all programmatic efforts that deal with money and finances fall under this CPP umbrella and these three activities.

Financial Aid and You

- Although the Financial Aid office is extremely busy, they carve out time for our students to have one or more sessions to ask questions about their FAFSA, tax information, and other questions. This is done through a luncheon and students sign up prior to get the one-on-one attention that they need.

Financial Literacy and You

- Along with financial literacy tools, we incorporate community leaders in banking and the business industry to serve as speakers and guest lecturers. We also utilize many of our business faculty [who are also identified as First Generation (*neither parent has earned a four-year degree*)] who give their time to help instruct our SSS students on financial literacy.

Your College Degree and You

- SSS works with the TCL Alumni Association to connect with students before they graduate. The TCL Alumni Association emphasizes TCL's rich legacy, community, and role of alumni. Students are encouraged to return and do for others as TCL and SSS has done for them.

The third and final pillar is Build. This pillar goes hand and hand with the second pillar of Design, because without a design, one does not know where to begin to build. It is within this pillar that the SSS staff review our program and marry activities and initiatives to our goals and objectives. If there is an activity that does not fit within one of the goals, the SSS staff reviews extensively the activity to see if it

is needed and if it is worth putting time and energy into it. All activities and initiatives go through this strenuous test to ensure that all students are getting the maximum from the SSS project.

This pillar is one in which the SSS members have the most control. It is up to students to determine which aspects of their lives they want to *build* in order to successfully matriculate through TCL, and we express this to them as soon as they join in the SSS program. Students learn quickly that the SSS program is there to help, but it is up to them to take advantage of our services à la carte to ensure nourishment and fulfillment.

In the seven years in which we have implemented the BBD program, we have found that it definitely works. If students truly wish to successfully matriculate through TCL, then we in SSS will do everything in our power to align them with what they need to accomplish this goal. Because SSS has been at the college since 1992, we have an excellent track record and are held in high esteem and respected by other areas on campus. So, when we request extras for our students, more times than not we get them. We have done a lot to show the TCL family and surrounding communities that SSS is not a program only for Black students. We reiterate and show that it is a program for first-generation and limited income students, and the only race we care about is the human race.

TRIO's Return on Investment: Alumni

A program is only as good as the students that it graduates and the SSS program at TCL is no exception. We are proud of all of our graduates, but there is one who we feel truly embraced what SSS gave her and took it all the way through to other aspects of her life. Sonya came to us as a single mother of three who was looking to further her education. In her initial consultation meeting she stated that she wanted to show her children that "an education can take you far." At the time she was working two part-time jobs and the SSS staff was wondering how she was going to commit to taking classes on top of her already hectic schedule and life. Sonya took two or three classes at a time (depending on her schedule) and graduated in three years. After realizing that she could be successful, she decided to transfer to a four-year college and after two more years received a bachelor's degree. Having been inspired by her SSS heroes she inquired of each of them what they did to obtain a job in SSS. After hearing all of the stories she decided to enroll in graduate school. Sonya actually moved her family to attend graduate school in a city that was 2.5 hours away. She obtained her degree in two years, and after graduation, she was able to procure a job that she loved. This laid the foundation for her current job as the departmental Dean of Students, which she has held for five years. Sonya never let her circumstances get her down. Her story resonates with our students so she often participates in our BASK program. Not only does she tell students that if she can do it so can they, but she tells them that she is living proof that TCL's SSS program works. In fact, she is proof that TRIO works!

CONCLUSION



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This Professional Learning Community (PLC) and resource collection contributes to scholarship and practices in Student Support Services (SSS) advising techniques. It aims to provide SSS professionals who conduct advising work a medium to share best practices in work with first-generation and low-income students. These practices focus on creating programs that facilitate a sense of belonging on our campuses, implementing experiential learning opportunities, and supporting peer mentoring to promote student engagement and retention. Participants shared ideas on how to help students navigate challenges on their respective campuses, but most importantly, colleagues shared stories of the resilience and strength our students display daily.

In addition, the PLC allowed us to focus on the future of TRIO Programs and SSS. The Center for First-generation Student Success reported that 56% of undergraduate students were first-generation, based on the TRIO definition of first-generation (RTI International, 2019). As more students access higher education, the potential for first-generation students to enroll increases. There is excellent potential for TRIO to grow and serve more students, but advocacy is critical. SSS professionals must continue advocacy on campus and national levels to increase the number of students served. It is not enough for our campuses to admit first-generation and low-income students. They must also provide appropriate support to assist students in identifying career and personal interests so that they complete a degree. This is affirmed in Engstrom and Tinto's (2008) statement that "access without support is not an opportunity." Appropriate support includes services such as the ones provided by TRIO Programs.

The resource collection reveals the commitment to student success that SSS programs demonstrate in advising work. Community emerged as a continuous theme throughout the case studies and field practices. TRIO Programs at each respective college or university created an environment where students felt affirmed and valued. SSS students feel connected to other students with similar backgrounds, with staff who often meet one-to-one with them, and with faculty who intentionally employ culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom. As SSS programs approach advising holistically, we continue to advance equity and our students' success.

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