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**Spring 2008: New FCFG Course!**

As a joint project between our departments, we are pleased to offer **Sociology 135 or Anthropology 135: First Generation to College**.

We will chronicle, from the lenses of sociology and anthropology, the experiences of those who are first in their family to attend college. We will examine national research on challenges facing first generation students; plus we will enrich the SMC community by integrating their efforts into our collective consciousness. We will also help support first generation students launching their academic careers and link our students to future “foundation generation” students by actively outreaching to Kindergarten through Grade 12. The first generations’ challenges and success in college, as well as their family history, will become part of a shared collection to honor the legacy of the foundation generation—those who pave the way for future generations of college students.

**First Generation to College** is a service learning course sponsored by the “Walk the Talk” grant and funded by the American Association of College and Universities Core Commitment (Social Justice Initiatives).

### Scholarship

In addition to holding courses, the Foundation Generation Project contributes to first generation scholarly research.

“Assessing the Learning Styles of First Generation College Students,” for example, explores how the Collegiate Seminar experience affects freshmen First Generation students. What do they learn, what type of bonds do they forge? What strengths do they bring into the curriculum? What challenges do they face?

These first generation testimonials:

- look at unexplored factors in success of first generation students.

- refine current definitions of “first generation”.
- bring “counter stories” to the academy.
- encourage a social justice shift toward cultural citizenship.

Research for “Assessing the Learning Styles” was made possible through the Lasallian Scholar Grant and St. Mary’s College of California Office for Faculty Development.
The Lasallian Core Principles
*Faith in the Presence of God
*Concern for the Poor and Social Justice
*Quality of Education
*Inclusive Community
*Respect for All Persons

Student Successes

One hundred and thirty-one life histories collected over the course of eight classes provided crucial insight into the world first generation students but also yielded the following success:

- Dr. Phylis Martinelli supervised Elizabeth Limones’ Sociology senior thesis “Mexican American Ethnic Identity and Success in College” (Fall 2008). Elizabeth’s first generation life history was the inspiration for the project.
- One student developed a short film highlighting her mother’s journey as a Chinese immigrant.
- A young woman’s autobiography was published in the 2006 edition of St. Mary’s College Spectrum Literary Magazine.
- At the 32nd (2005) and 33rd (2006) “Annual Western Anthropology and Sociology Undergraduate Research Conference” hosted by Santa Clara University, three students presented their original research based on the data collected for their life histories.

The Lasallian Mission

How are first generation students related to the Lasallian Mission? “The Foundation Generation Project” chronicles first-generation college students’ challenges and successes in college, as well as documents their family history by collecting their narratives in an academically rigorous way. This long-term project addresses the achievements and needs of first generation college students. According to a significant body of research they are increasing in numbers in college enrollment; however, they are somewhat at risk for degree completion.

St. John Baptist de La Salle’s original mission had little focus on higher education, although we believe the rapidly growing number of first generation students would please him. He would likely be concerned about the perils of their high drop out rate and the tendency for academic institutions to expect those who do well to suppress the “life voice” of their humble origins.

Thus, a strong foundation based on the Lasallian core principals helps those from diverse backgrounds contribute to modern spiritual, social, economic, political and educational life.

Community Service and Support

Through conferences, pamphlets, readers on topical research, The Foundation Generation Project assists a number of existing entities on campus with information on how to support first generation students: Anthropology and Sociology Departments, the Recruitment Office, High Potential, Admissions, Academic Advising and Support, the Counseling Center, Catholic Institute for Lasallian Social Action (CILSA), CILSA Fellows, Faculty Technology Group (FTG), Collegiate Seminar Program, College Communications, and the January Term Program.

These programs have subsequently engaged in the conversation regarding first generation issues and together we produced the following:
Community Service and Support continued

- January Term 2006: First Generation Panel Discussion
- Spring 2006: First Annual Conference featuring Dr. Laura Nichols, Sociology Department, Santa Clara University, Center for Multicultural Learning, “Entering the Ivory Tower”: Exploring the Differences and Similarities Between First and Continuing Generation College Students.
- Summer 2006: Alumni Magazine article by Barry Schiller, "Opposites Attract" features Drs. Martinelli and Herrera
- Fall 2006 August: Weekend of Welcome Panel features First Generation SMC Faculty and Staff
- Fall 2006 August: Introduce the Foundation Generation Project at New Faculty Orientation
- Fall 2006 October: Parent and Family Day presentation of FCFG
- January Term 2007: First Generation Panel
- Spring 2007 April: Second Annual Conference featuring Dr. Rina Benmayor, Institute for Human Communication, California State University of Monterey Bay, “Narratives of Empowerment And Belonging: First Generation College Students of Mexican Heritage”
- Summer 2007: Alumni Magazine article: Erin Hallisy, "Dreams Come True: A Growing Number of Saint Mary's Students are the First in Their Families to Attend College”

Conference Presentations

Papers based on the data collected through the Foundation Generation Project have been presented at

- “Honoring the Lasallian Mission through the Foundation Generation Project: First Generation College Students and Asset Based Community Building” for the International Lasallian University Leadership Program at the “Partners in Catholic Lasallian Higher Education: Enhancing Understanding. Eliciting Commitment.” Conference (Rome, Italy June 2007).

“Ask God today for the grace of watching so well over the children confided to you, that you will take every possible precaution to shield them from serious faults.”

--St. John Baptist de La Salle
Technology and Pedagogy

The Foundation Generation Project © website <http://firstgeneration.stmarys-ca.edu> benefits from the generous funding of the St. Mary’s College Faculty Technology Group (FTG) “Academic Technology Grants.” For more information please visit the FTG website at <http://www.facultytechnology.org>.

Welcome to “The Foundation Generation” © website. This site is the product of “Setting the Foundation: Articulating the Experiences of First Generation College Students,” a 2006 and 2007 January Term class at St. Mary’s College of California dedicated to focusing on the family background and college experience of those who are the first in their immediate family to attend college.

To learn more about the course, click on the "About Us" link above or go directly to Profiles to begin reading about first generation college students.

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Download or view the Foundation Generation support brochure here:

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