

Generation Merr1mack



National Association of Colleges and Employers Annual Conference, Orlando, Florida June 2013

Dr. Heather N. Maietta, CDFI

Director, O'Brien Center for Student Success Merrimack College 978.837.5038 | maiettah@merrimack.edu

Tia M. Roy

Peer Advisor, O'Brien Center for Student Success Merrimack College generation1@merrimack.edu facebook.com/GenerationMerrimack

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30-50% of college students nationwide are first generation (G-1). Being first generation affects every dimension of life as a student, yet very few programs exist to address the specific needs of this population. The O'Brien Center for Student Success at Merrimack College launched a program fall 2012 designed to assist G-1 students as they make their transition into, and through college.

GenerationMerr1mack is a first generation college student–focused program lead by first generation college student leaders, staff, faculty and alumni. These individuals serve as program coordinators; session facilitators; and G-1mentors.

Why was *Generation Merr1mack* developed: There is a fundamental correlation between overall graduation rates and the success of first-generation students (Davis 2010). The purpose of this program is to provide participants with positive peer mentor connections; exposure to academic resources; understanding of their role as first generation students; exposure to professional connections; and the support needed to become the first in their family to graduate from a four year institution.

What is included in *Generation Merr1mack*: G-1 students receive support and instruction in the following areas: What is a G-1 student and why am I different?; Imposter Phenomenon; navigating financial aid and salary negotiations; course scheduling and registration; study skills and study sessions; self-exploration; family dynamics; Cultural and Social Capital; decision-making; time management; professional networking; and importance of experiential learning to the overall college experience. Participants also gather together during the semester at various on and off campus events to foster sense of community.

How was it implemented: During fall 2011, research on G-1 student support programs began. Much work was done with Institutional research to understand the current and incoming student population, and whether there was a need for such a program to exist. Spring 2012 began the planning phase for the launch of *GenerationMerr1mack*. The O'Brien Center sent personal invitations (via email and US Mail) to all incoming G-1 students to participate. At the same time marketing campaign for program began, as well as campaign to attract and onboard peer mentors who were also G-1 students. Training for mentors and an introduction to the program for incoming G-1 students was held during Orientation. Thereafter workshops and group activities were held throughout the academic year. Center worked closely with Academic Enrichment for mentor training.

Participant Learning Outcomes:

- Knowledge of the program intends to raise awareness and educate about the G-1 student population, and unique challenges associated.
- Education leads to faculty and staff having a better understanding of how to recognize and reach out to G-1 students.
- Program data collection can help gauge retention rates, help track academic majors, and allow G-1 student follow up and intervention to facilitate their success.
- Program creates a participant pool for the Alumni Mentor Program (networking; social capital)
- Program creates a natural pipeline to paid experiential learning opportunities (financial; professional networking; experiential learning)

Presenter Contact Information:

Dr. Heather N. Maietta, CDFI
Director, O'Brien Center for Student Success
Merrimack College | 315 Turnpike St | N Andover, MA 01845
978.837.5038 | maiettah@merrimack.edu

Tia Roy, Class of 2015, G-1 Student Career Peer Advisor, Program Coordinator Merrimack College | 315 Turnpike St | N Andover, MA 01845 978.837.5480 | generation1@merrimack.edu