

Academic Advisors as College Culture Brokers:

A Model for Serving First-Generation College Students

Sally E. Heilstedt

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Northwest University

TRiO Student Support Services, Lake Washington Institute of Technology

### Abstract

An increasing number of first-generation students (students whose parents did not earn baccalaureate degrees) are attending college in the United States. First-generation college students struggle to understand the college culture and to succeed in college, whether that is defined by quantitative measures or qualitative ones. Their needs center on good information and meaningful relationship. In order to better serve first-generation college students, academic advisors can adopt the role of college culture broker. Cultural brokers move between cultures and connect people and information from one culture to people and information from another. The roles of a cultural broker include liaison, cultural guide, mediator/mentor, and change agent. The cultural broker model is applied to advising and implications for practice are discussed with focus on meeting first-generation college students' needs for good information and meaningful relationship. Prior to outlining the model, first-generation characteristics, aspects of the college culture, and background regarding cultural brokering are provided.

*Keywords:* first-generation college students, cultural brokers, academic advisors, cultural competence, college, success

### Academic Advisors as College Culture Brokers:

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An increasing number of students with little or no exposure to the college culture now attend community and technical colleges, as well as four-year institutions (NCES, 1998). College advisors face new challenges when working with these students. Advisors can no longer take for granted that students have a working knowledge of the college entrance, registration, and attendance processes. Students also need coaching to develop an understanding of the expectations surrounding classroom interactions and course assignments. Students from traditionally underrepresented populations need assistance not only with the practices of the college culture, but also with the process of developing an identity that includes an academic dimension. College advisors can best support underrepresented students and address these issues by adopting the role of college culture broker.

Traditionally, academic advising has focused on the tasks of registration and educational planning. Students meet with advisors when they need to select courses and trust advisors to know the requirements of their degree programs. Quarterly, advisors register students for their new classes. At least one time during their academic career, students choose to meet with advisors to map out all of the courses they need to take and when they will take them. At some institutions, registration and educational planning with an advisor are not mandatory, and many students navigate the system on their own. Advisors may also help students select the academic program that is the best fit for them, as well as answer questions about possible career opportunities following graduation. If a student wishes to interact further with an advisor, to develop study skills or learn more about campus resources, he or she must take the initiative to do so.

Currently, academic advisors are pushed to help increase retention and degree completion. These are the quantitative indicators of student success. Many advisors have found that simply registering students for classes and developing educational plans does not do enough to ensure student success. The increasing number of students with no exposure to the college culture requires advisors to provide more assistance and to be the ones to take the initiative in offering study skills assistance and information about campus resources. With budget cuts and record enrollments, advisors find themselves pressed for time. They may focus solely on addressing the issue the student presents. Little time remains to work with the student on anything but registration, educational planning, and career guidance.

For the purpose of this discussion, underrepresented students was narrowed to include only first-generation college students. First-generation college students are those whose parents did not attend college. The Department of Education further defines first-generation college students as those whose parents do not have bachelor's degrees (Higher Education Act of 1965 & Higher Education Amendments, 1998). First-generation college students face both practical and emotional challenges when it comes to learning and adapting to the college culture, and research has shown that these challenges affect retention and other academic success indicators (Choy, 2001; Inman & Mayes, 1999; Ishitani, 2006; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). First-generation college students do not have parents who can walk them through the process of registering for classes and applying for financial aid. Often, the discussion of college and career does not occur in the home. However, as advisors are equipped now, they can assist students in those areas. It is important to note that at institutions that do not require advisor meetings, first-generation college students often experience frustration as they try to learn processes without support (Torres, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, & Ruder, 2006).

The processes for entering college are only an introduction to the college culture. Underrepresented students often struggle with more difficult to address issues once they begin classes. Students do not know how to take notes, read textbooks, or study for tests. They experience anxiety and do not feel confident enough to interact with their instructors. They feel isolated and may struggle to see the greater purpose to their education. In sum, they do not feel connected with the college culture (Orbe, 2008; Owens, Lacey, Rawls, & Holbert-Quince, 2010; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Issues of identity and voice arise, compounded by difficult circumstances outside of school, and many students drop out (Inman & Mayes, 1999). What is missing from their experience is meaningful connection with those who can help them feel a part of and valued in the college culture. According to Prospero and Vohra-Gupta (2007), students new to the college culture are most successful when they feel heard and are able to collaborate with instructors and other students. Academic advisors can serve an important role in facilitating integration by considering and applying the work of cultural brokers.

Cultural brokers collaborate with individuals and groups who are new to a culture. They introduce and explain cultural norms and practices and help facilitate the development of important relationships (Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001; National Center for Cultural Competence, 2004). Brokers offer insight that often takes someone from outside the culture an extended amount of time to gain on his or her own. Brokers have a stake in their culture and a role that gives them influence (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2004). Beyond their connection to their culture, brokers demonstrate openness and the ability to learn a culture as they teach a culture. They value individuals and understand that integration does not mean the shedding of identity but a new understanding of how cultures combine to inform an individual's concept of self. Cultural brokers help improve cultural competence and confidence, enabling fuller, more

successful participation in the new culture (Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001; National Center for Cultural Competence, 2004).

As more first-generation college students attend college, advisors must adapt and begin to act as cultural brokers. The new role requires the time to build relationships. With increased workloads, advisors may struggle to adequately assist students. Student success (retention and graduation/program completion) will remain at the level it is now or decrease in the face of the challenges students face. Student development departments, individual colleges, and state systems of higher education need to adopt policies and create positions that will allow advisors to act as cultural brokers. The investment of time and money will result in positive student outcomes and help not only first-generation college students but also other underrepresented student populations.

Presented here is a model for academic advisors who wish to act as college culture brokers as a means to connect with and support first-generation college students. I begin the discussion with a review of the literature about first-generation college students as a guide for understanding the background and cultural experiences of those students. The discussion is informed by my own experiences as an academic advisor who serves low-income and first-generation college students. Following the section on first-generation student needs and experiences is a brief discussion of the college culture. Academic advisors are encouraged to reflect on their own institutions' cultures and their experiences with the culture of higher education in general. Next, I provide a review of the literature in regard to cultural brokering. Finally, I outline and explain a model of cultural brokering as applied to academic advising with first-generation college students. The goal of this work is for academic advisors to feel

empowered to better serve their students, to assist students in understanding, navigating, and participating fully in the college culture.

### **First-Generation College Students**

For over a year, I have worked with low-income and first-generation college students as a Career Specialist (advisor) with TRiO Student Support Services at a two-year technical college. TRiO Student Support Services is a federally funded program that provides low-income and first-generation college students with academic and personal support through services such as study skills workshops, tutoring, academic advising, educational planning, and mentoring. It is from my work with TRiO that I began to develop the framework of academic advisor as college culture broker.

I consistently see themes emerge from the conversations I have with the students in my caseload. In one meeting with three students, the themes boiled down to two key needs: the need for information and the need for relationship. The students communicated that good information about the process of attending college from a credible and caring person would have made, or in some cases did make, all the difference in their college experiences, especially when they first began attending college. Through the framework of college culture brokering, I seek to meet those needs. Before developing the framework here, however, the characteristics and culture of the first-generation college student population must be explored. Not only do students need to understand and connect with the college culture, but academic advisors who serve as cultural brokers also need to understand and connect with students and their culture(s).

### **Characteristics**

First-generation students have been the subjects of numerous studies largely due to the fact that 53 percent of two-year college students and 34 percent of four-year college students are

the first in their families to attend college (Choy, 2001). At the technical college where I serve this population of students, 60 percent or more of the student body is first-generation.

National reports and follow-up studies document the background characteristics of first-generation college students (Bui, 2002; Choy, 2001; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). They are typically older than non-first-generation students when they attend college. They or their families have lower incomes. First-generation college students are more likely to be ethnic minorities and speak a language other than English at home. They are also more likely to work while attending college and have dependent children. The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report on first-generation students served as a primary source of data in identifying these characteristics (NCES, 1998).

While demographic background characteristics provide some insight regarding the first-generation college student population, other characteristics impact the work of college advisors, instructors, and administrators more profoundly. Bui (2002) found that first-generation college students feel less prepared for college, worry more about financial aid, have a greater fear of failing, and do not know as much about the college social environment as those students whose parents attended college. First-generation college students also experience lower self-efficacy and self-esteem (Inman & Mayes, 1999; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007). In my current position, I have heard first-generation college students describe how they feel like they do not truly belong in college, and they worry that someone is going to find them out. They do not feel integrated into the academic or social environments of the college (McConnell, 2000; Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007).

In the world of higher education, success is measured by persistence, academic achievement, and degree completion. In all of these areas, first-generation college students

struggle as compared with those whose parents attended college (Chen, 2005; Ishitani, 2006). According to Prospero and Vohra-Gupta (2007), only 52 percent of first-generation college students persist beyond the third year of college. First-generation college students have lower GPAs than non-first-generation peers and are less likely to complete a degree program, particularly a four-year degree (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Ishitani, 2006).

In spite of the disadvantages first-generation college students face, they possess valuable attributes that can help improve their chances of success in college. They wish to gain respect and honor their families by attending college, as well as help their families financially afterwards (Bui, 2002). Gardner and Holley (2011), working with first-generation college students pursuing doctoral degrees, voiced students' self-assessments: first-generation college students overcame many obstacles just to get to the college level; they are resilient and committed to college. In addition, Harrell and Forney (2003) noted that first-generation students increase the diversity of experiences, perspectives, and cultures represented at a college, improving all students' learning experiences.

### **Issues and Solutions Identified in the Literature**

Since the publication of the NCES report in 1998, subsequent articles and programs have targeted first-generation students' lack of preparedness. Pre-college programs, like the Achievers Scholars program in Washington State and federally funded programs such as Upward Bound, encourage students to take high school classes that will better prepare them for college, help them navigate the admissions process, guide them through career choices, discuss financial aid options, and acquaint them with the college environment through campus visits. Review of the literature reveals that pre-college programs are often seen as the best response to the issues raised by first-generation students' backgrounds (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006; Ishitani, 2006).

While pre-college programs are ideal for preparing first-generation students for college and thus for easing stress and increasing confidence, such programs are not available to all students, do not apply to adults attending college for the first time, and often do not offer support beyond the first year.

Programs like TRiO Student Support Services target first-generation students once they begin attending college. Engle, et al. (2006) recognized the short-coming of pre-college programs and recommend more support programs like TRiO Student Support Services. Programs for first-generation college students often include financial aid counseling, academic advising, mentoring, and study skills development. Students are also connected to other resources, both to meet academic needs and to address personal issues that affect success in college.

Recent studies recognize that the issues faced by first-generation college students go beyond academic planning, study skills development, and poor preparation for class work. First generation college students lack college cultural capital, the “general familiarity with the traditions and norms necessary to be successful at an institution of higher education” (Mehta, Newbold, & O’Rourke, 2011, para. 7). Inman and Mayes (1999) describe first-generation college students as experiencing a kind of culture shock when they begin college, not being acquainted with the norms and values of higher education. First-generation college students also experience the process of cross-cultural adaptation during their time in college. They feel stress and tension as they engage with the college culture, adapt to it, and grow from their experiences in a new environment (Orbe, 2008). They must face the traditional time of identity development for all students with the additional tension of home and school environments that are vastly different, multiple areas of life vying for their time and attention, and combating any misperceptions college faculty and staff may have about first-generation college students.

In order to assist students in navigating the college culture, researchers suggest additional support for first-generation college students through mentoring, support groups, and an overall shift in the college environment. According to Owens, et al. (2010), a welcoming atmosphere and special support could help first-generation students adapt to the new college environment. They strongly advocate mentoring as a means to do so (as do Harrell and Forney [2003]), as well as training faculty and staff to understand the culture of first-generation students and to provide opportunities for their experiences to be heard. Engle, et al. (2006) summarize their work and the work of others by indicating that first-generation college students would be more successful if they knew the campus and knew the people there. As with the student discussion mentioned in the introduction to this section, information and relationship emerge as themes.

### **Issues and Solutions Identified by First-Generation College Students**

One of the most impressive attributes of recent research regarding first-generation college students is the use of their own perspectives about their college experiences. First-generation students' voices are being heard and must continue to shape the understanding and addressing of crucial issues related to their success. During my time as a Career Specialist with TRiO Student Support Services, I have gained great insight through listening to and participating in student experiences. What follows is my understanding of the issues they have shared with me and the solutions they have suggested. Pseudonyms are used to protect student confidentiality.

**Information issues and solutions.** Recently, during Sarah's entry interview for TRiO, she communicated that her greatest frustration and source of anxiety was a lack of clear information and instructions regarding how to start college. As an older student and the first in her family to attend college, Sarah had no understanding of higher education and processes like enrollment and registration. She came to the campus, met with an advisor, got her schedule, and

was told when to show up for classes. She wished someone had told her more – more about what to expect in class, where she could go for help, how to buy books, etc.

Other students who come to TRiO for support share similar experiences. Many are looking for information about financial aid and how to approach their coursework. Others want to know more about how to transfer, what instructors have which teaching styles, and which classes are required for their programs.

Consistently, I meet with students who communicate that they do not even know what to ask. Logan asked for assistance from TRiO so that he would get information before he even knew he needed it. Barbara had a lot of information but felt like she could not sort through it all. In addition to receiving little or poor information and not knowing what information to look for, students often do as Torres, et al. (2006) found: they ask friends for information or look for it in pamphlets. In another recent meeting, Maria enthusiastically asked for more information about campus resources. She knew of no other way to learn about them except through the college website. Unfortunately, friends and college publications do not always provide accurate, clear, or complete information. Trying to put all the pieces together and straighten out misleading information later leads to more frustration and anxiety.

The most common phrase I hear from students in regard to the process of attending college is that they wish someone had been there to give them good information. Even those who express feelings of intimidation or distrust for those in authority acknowledge how important relationships with college staff and faculty are for obtaining the information they need to be successful. Information and relationship then are interwoven in such a way that first-generation college students need both (as they have recognized) in order to understand and adapt to the college environment and to achieve their educational goals.

**Relationship issues and solutions.** Adriana, a student hoping to transfer, shared that no one had given her complete information about what would be required for admissions to the four-year school of her choice. As she voiced her concerns, she articulated that students need someone to listen and ask questions, to get to know them. Through relationships the students can get the information they need and those assisting them can know what to offer. Sometimes listening, affirmation, and the act of simply being available is enough; relationship itself is the solution. Students who often feel out of place, lack confidence, or feel ignored instead feel heard and valued (Jehangir, 2008). More often, relationship adds security and becomes the means for acquiring, understanding, and applying the information needed to be successful in college. As with Engle, et al. (2006), I observe that “the relationship and trust they developed with program staff allowed them to be receptive to the support that helped them get through college” (p. 40).

Isaac and Jose both began working with TRiO for additional academic support. After their first few meetings with me, they slowly began to share more of their concerns. Isaac worried he would fail his classes and felt he did not belong in college. He struggled with anger, the source of which he could not identify. Both he and Jose felt extremely shy at school but not elsewhere. Eventually, they built relationships with other TRiO advisors and with tutors. The confidence they gained through affirming relationships empowered them to engage in class and connect with classmates as well. Today, Isaac and Jose eagerly share not only their concerns but also their life stories and current successes with TRiO advisors. They know they can be successful in college; both have been on the Dean’s List multiple quarters. Connecting with people who helped them understand the college culture, who made themselves available, and who listened empowered both students to work through identity formation issues and to experience greater success and enjoyment in college.

During the entry interview process, I ask students how TRiO can help them be successful. Not all the students directly express a need for relationship. Most seek assistance with specific courses, study skills, financial aid, and academic planning. After I note their responses, I always make sure to describe to them how I see TRiO (largely based on what students eventually express as most helpful to them). TRiO provides students with a team of support while they are in college. We are in their corner and available to help with any concerns they have. We will celebrate with them and listen when they feel overwhelmed. We can help them find academic resources and those for life outside of school. When I describe the type of relationship they have available to them, their anxiety about getting information visibly decreases. Students who sign-up for TRiO for primarily informational reasons but who end up building relationships with TRiO advisors come by to talk about many other issues than those for which they originally sought help.

First-generation college students often do not know who to turn to for assistance. They also do not know how to help themselves. When I asked students what they wish they had known when they first started college, an overwhelming majority replied that they wish they had known about TRiO sooner. They said the relationships they have with the advisors and the information they gain drastically improves their college experience. In order to better serve first-generation college students, I have come to understand that advisors must initiate relationship with students. Students express a need for someone to build a bridge, to help them sort out college, to share information before they know they need it, but they do not always know how to fulfill those needs. As Torres, et al. (2006) exhort, advisors must go to the students, build trust, and share useful and accurate information.

**(Mis)Perceptions**

The title of this section is borrowed from an article by Orbe (2008), who noted that first-generation status does not always bring to mind positive perceptions. While first-generation students play contributing and transformative roles in their family, community, and college cultures, first-generation status has a negative stigma at many colleges (Orbe, 2008). First-generation college students, therefore, face not only adaptation to a new culture but also must attempt to integrate into a culture that may feel hostile to them. It is important for academic advisors to note additional issues that may arise for students and for themselves as they work with first-generation college students.

The first issue to note is central to cultural competency: not all first-generation college students are the same. While this may seem like a statement of the obvious, assumptions of sameness affect all people who work across cultures. The information shared previously regarding first-generation college student characteristics and experiences is useful for understanding the cultural background of this group of students. Advisors can use the information to develop a foundation from which to work with first-generation college students. However, the role of relationship necessitates knowing each student's story and learning how to best serve the individual.

The second concern emerged out of reading the current literature on first-generation college students. Simply examining the data on persistence and attainment can lead one to conclude that first-generation college students will struggle to succeed in school, if they succeed at all. A lack of preparedness does not equal a lack of capability, however. Academic advisors, serving as college culture brokers, can help students, faculty, and staff overcome this assumption and provide all with tools to empower students to fully utilize their abilities. Important to

emphasize here is that first-generation college students have (mis)perceptions about themselves, often reinforced by others' assumptions.

Like many TRiO students, Robert's primary concern about college was that he would fail. College was a new start for him. He understood the immense value of higher education. He knew he had chosen the right program, but he lacked confidence in his own abilities because of his previous experiences and lack of preparation. He worried about others' opinions of him, that his instructors might think he could not do the work. In four quarters, Robert has not failed. He has struggled in some courses and has excelled in others. He has proven to himself and to his instructors that he is a capable and highly motivated student. The confidence Robert has gained with the support of advisors has transformed his understanding of himself and his strengths. That confidence has also led to greater openness with other students and faculty, further dispelling any (mis) perceptions they may have had towards Robert and other first-generation students.

Finally, upon reviewing the literature and in working with both colleagues and first-generation college students, I have come to realize the immense impact life outside of college has on first-generation college students. When students struggle, they do not always understand why or realize that not only do they face the struggle at hand, but they also face pressure at home, fighting misperceptions that have told them they cannot do it, and feeling like they do not belong. Similarly, those who work specifically with first-generation college students in program like TRiO share an insight that researchers, program funders, and administrators do not always grasp: students are juggling many areas of life and stopping out is not the same as dropping out (even though data documents it as a lack of persistence).

(Mis)perceptions add another dimension to the role of academic advisors. Even in the current, most common advising models, advisors are privy to information and interactions that

counter the (mis)perceptions. Later, in the college culture broker model, I will address how advisors can go beyond providing good information and meaningful relationships to first-generation college students and begin to impact faculty, staff, administration, and the culture of higher education itself.

### **College Culture**

Attending college requires students to understand and adapt to a new culture. Some students, those whose parents attended college, those who had access to pre-college programs, and those who planned to attend college throughout their secondary education experience, possess important knowledge and behaviors that allow them to navigate processes and understand language unique to the college culture. First-generation college students often do not have those same advantages. Academic advisors, fully steeped in the college culture may not have taken the time to examine the language, processes, norms, and assumptions of the college culture; they may take these things for granted.

Cultural sensitivity and cultural competence require the activity of examining and understanding one's own culture, of developing a cultural identity (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). In the field of education, self-reflection can be lost as more time is spent and value placed on intellectual or academic development. The purpose of this section is to encourage academic advisors to consider the college cultural norms they take for granted. The reflections here come from my own experiences with students and colleagues and many moments in which I realized I had not intentionally considered the college culture I sought to help students understand.

**Language.** Simply inquiring about college attendance presents students with a whole new vocabulary: enrollment, admissions, application, registration, and placement tests (usually advisors refer to these by name, like COMPASS, making the language more cryptic). Students

are encouraged or required to go to advising, orientation, and information sessions. They are told they will need a faculty advisor, to choose a major or program, and to fill out the FAFSA. Once in classes, they are expected to understand terms like plagiarism and citation. Instructors and advisors may refer to online platforms like ANGEL or Blackboard. Some college libraries use other names like learning commons. The language used with students can become a barrier to their choice to attend college and their success once there.

I first realized that I too take language for granted when a university colleague recounted a story to me. She was meeting with a new student, a transfer from a community college who wanted to pursue a teaching degree. At the end of their meeting, she referred him to the education major for further assistance. She did so by saying, “You need to talk with Ed. to find out more about how your classes will transfer.” The student replied, “Ed? Who’s Ed?” The anecdote made me take time to consider how the language I use impacts students, how many of those I had met with had probably left my office not knowing what a term referred to, afraid to ask and appear ignorant.

**Processes.** Behind each term used in higher education is a process. Processes, like the FAFSA and rules regarding plagiarism and citation, can be consistent across colleges and universities. However, most processes have unique steps and applications depending on the institution. As discussed in the section on first-generation college students, good information is crucial to student success. Much of the information students need relates to specific processes. Students, regardless of their exposure to college, need guidance through the unique processes of admission, registration, financial aid, etc.

Cultural processes also include where students should turn for assistance with an issue. Many students complain of experiencing the run around – being sent from one office to another

and another before getting the help they need, if they receive it at all. While students should understand that not all people can help with all processes, advisors can work with students when they first get to the college to better understand what campus resources are available for what issues.

**Norms.** Like many advisors, I cannot count the number of times I have heard students say, “I did not expect...” or “I wish I had known....” Cultural norms are often learned through experience, but academic advisors have the opportunity to help students gain understanding prior to learning the hard way. Academic advisors can also help students work through and gain different perspective on issues as they are happening or afterward. College cultural norms include study skills, relating with instructors, how to ask for help, the time required for course work, etc. Recently, through a campus-wide survey conducted by student government, I realized that many student issues come from poorly communicated and understood norms. Adopting the role of college culture broker allows advisors to address these issues with students, further supporting their success.

**Assumptions.** Further underlying the norms and processes in higher education are certain values and beliefs. These values and beliefs lead faculty, staff, and administrators to make and act on certain assumptions. Some of these assumptions affect the (mis)perceptions discussed earlier. Assumptions include mundane ideas like students know what materials to bring to class. They also include more impactful beliefs that not only affect how students are perceived but also how they are treated. Students who ask questions in class are more engaged with the material. Students who stop out are not invested in their education. A college education is the best pathway to a successful future. All students should be able to understand information delivered a certain way. It is the student’s responsibility to seek assistance, to connect with the instructor, to

learn his or her degree requirements. Not all of these assumptions are negative; many have valid thoughts behind them. Students new to the college culture, however, may not know these assumptions. They may not be able to address an issue that has its origin in these assumptions. On the other hand, faculty, staff, and administrators may not realize how these assumptions could negatively impact students, that they are operating on different assumptions from their students. Again, reflection on the college culture in general and at one's institution in particular is crucial for assisting not just first-generation college students but all students.

### **Cultural Brokers**

A cultural broker is an individual who moves between cultures and connects people and information from one culture to people and information from another. The role primarily occurs in the health care field and the majority of research addresses that context. Recently, however, researchers in the field of education have sought to apply the principles and actions of cultural brokering to school counseling and teaching (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Schalge & Soga, 2008). The research on cultural brokering across disciplines agrees on a few crucial concepts and practices in regard to the work of cultural brokers.

Cultural brokers must be culturally sensitive. According to Jezewski and Sotnik (2001), "Cultural sensitivity is the awareness of one person of the differences in values, beliefs, and behaviors of another, and the understanding that these values, beliefs, and behaviors are the basis for the way people interact with each other" (p. 5). In other words, cultural brokers seek to understand how culture impacts thoughts and actions. Cultural sensitivity involves not only reflection on the cultures of others, but also reflection on one's own culture (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2004). Self-reflection is crucial in any helping profession, but it is particularly beneficial for those who work with diverse groups of people. The process of

examining one's own thoughts and attitudes, and how those translate into action, allows for a stronger self-concept. A strong understanding of self allows on a secure place from which to interact with others who share different values and beliefs and who act upon thought processes and events differently. A cultural broker must be aware of his or her cultural development and use the understanding gained from self-examination to treat others with respect and without judgment.

As mentioned by Jezewski and Sotnik (2001), cultural sensitivity is the stepping stone to cultural competence, the ability to effectively interact with those with different cultural backgrounds in diverse cultural contexts. Another way of understanding cultural competence is as cultural sensitivity in action. Cultural competence allows cultural brokers to act as liaisons, cultural guides, mediators, and change agents (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2004). Using the National Center for Cultural Competence (2004) cultural broker roles, the rest of this document outlines and discusses how academic advisors can better serve first-generation college students when they act as college culture brokers.

### **Academic Advisors as College Culture Brokers**

Academic advisors already possess training, experience, and strengths that equip them to serve as college cultural brokers. Most hiring committees search for advisors who have degrees in education or social science, with a preference for those with counseling backgrounds. All of these programs include multicultural studies classes and now many job descriptions cite a preference for those who have worked in cross-cultural contexts. For those who have worked as advisors for some time, understanding of and interaction with diverse student populations provides first-hand experiences from which to understand the cultural broker model.

The National Center for Cultural Competence (2004) cultural broker roles include cultural brokers as liaisons, cultural guides, mediators, and change agents. These roles align well with the issues and needs facing first-generation college students. The goal of the following model is to explain how the role of college culture broker can assist advisors in better serving students, empowering them to be successful in college.

### **The Roles of Cultural Brokers**

**Liaisons.** The role of liaison allows academic advisors to meet students' need for good information. Liaisons "are knowledgeable in two realms" (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2004). They understand the college culture, its values, beliefs, and practices, or as discussed earlier, its language, processes, norms, and assumptions. They also understand the background and experiences of first-generation college students, especially their need for good information and meaningful relationship. Advisors who take on the role of liaison as college culture brokers find effective ways to communicate the college culture to first-generation college students. They develop multiple avenues for students to access good information. Their knowledge in both realms is the key to their ability to do so. In the adoption of this role, students have described advisors with TRiO as "go-to people" when they have questions about college processes and norms. The role of liaison then is tied with the other cultural broker roles (those that focus more on relationship). How each role impacts the others and is impacted by them will become more evident as this discussion progresses.

**Cultural Guides.** The role of cultural guide, while focused primarily on good information, begins to incorporate relationship. According to the National Center for Cultural Competence (2004), cultural guides are highly trusted by the community they represent. I would expand that trust to both of the cultures they work with, however. Cultural guides do more than

communicate between cultures; they demonstrate a deep understanding of both. Thus, they are respected and trusted in both cultures, in this case by both first-generation college students and by college faculty, staff, and administrators.

The National Center for Cultural Competence (2004) notes that cultural guides assist in the development of educational materials and the implementation of policies that impact both cultures. Academic advisors already serve in this capacity in many colleges, providing students with lists of resources, leading orientations, and presenting study skills material in various courses. Acting as college culture brokers in the cultural guide role, advisors can address many of the informational needs of first-generation students. In order to do so effectively, however, they will need to develop a deep understanding of both the college culture and the experience of first-generation college students. That understanding comes out of meaningful relationship with students as well as with faculty, staff, and administrators.

**Mediators/Mentors.** The role of mediator, adapted here to include mentoring, addresses the need for meaningful relationship. Mediators/mentors establish and maintain trust through relationship development (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2004). The investment of time required to build relationships demonstrates a commitment to students. Time also presents the greatest challenge to academic advisors. Advising models that encourage efficiency may help students find answers, but relationships are not always developed. Through relationship and relationship alone, advisors learn how best to support students. Relationship opens opportunities for advisors to address more difficult issues, issues that may go unaddressed otherwise. Both in the literature and through experience as an advisor, I have come to understand that meaningful relationship is the key to student success. While meaningful relationship can (and should) be developed with faculty or other staff, academic advisors serving as college culture brokers offer

students the opportunity for relationship that will empower them to reach their full potential in the college environment.

**Change Agents.** Finally, the role of change agent allows cultural brokers to impress upon others what they have learned about cultural sensitivity and competency and the impact of good information and meaningful relationship. According to the National Center for Cultural Competence (2004),

They initiate the transformation of a [educational] setting by creating an inclusive and collaborative environment for [faculty, staff, and students] alike. They model and mentor behavioral change, which can break down bias, prejudice, and other institutional barriers. (p. 4)

Adopting the role of change agent expands the work of college culture brokers to include the institution and issues within the college culture itself. As such, it may be the most challenging role for academic advisors.

Another way to understand the role of change agent in the context of advisors as college culture brokers is as student advocate. The (mis)perceptions discussed earlier can create barriers to student success. College culture brokers can use their knowledge and understanding of both cultures to educate faculty and staff about the issues facing first-generation students and to promote changes that fit the college culture and empower students to succeed.

As is evident when reviewing Table 1, the various roles of cultural brokers interact in different ways. Liaisons can be seen as those just beginning to act as cultural brokers. They have good information about both cultures, but have not yet invested the time required to build trust, the basis of meaningful relationships. Their ability to communicate that good information makes them valuable to both cultures. As they spend more time as cultural brokers, they can become

cultural guides, mediator/mentors, and change agents. The three roles overlap, and different situations call for different roles. Academic advisors who act as college culture brokers learn to adapt their roles to meet student and institutional needs.

Table 1

*The Roles of Cultural Brokers: Alignment with First-Generation Students' Needs*

Role	Characteristics	Student Need(s) Met
Liaison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of both cultures</li> <li>• Ability to communicate between cultures</li> </ul>	Information
Cultural Guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deep understanding of both cultures</li> <li>• Respected and trusted in both cultures</li> </ul>	Information and relationship
Mediator/Mentor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to establish and maintain trust through meaningful relationships</li> <li>• Willingness to invest time</li> <li>• Use of relationship to address difficult issues</li> </ul>	Relationship
Change Agent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to create inclusive and collaborative environments</li> <li>• Use of knowledge and understanding of both cultures to address institutional and college culture issues</li> <li>• Willingness to serve as student advocate</li> </ul>	Information and relationship

### **Applying the College Culture Broker Model**

The different roles cultural brokers adopt inform how they interact with both cultures.

College culture brokers primarily focus on introducing students to the college culture, ensuring they have access to good information, and developing meaningful relationships that empower students to succeed. In addition, they can help to change institutional processes and assumptions that create barriers to student success. The discussion that follows suggests practical steps academic advisors can take to act as college culture brokers.

**Cultural sensitivity and competence.** While an advisor's educational background and experience may include cultural studies and awareness, making time for self-reflection is essential for forming a foundation of cultural understanding. Self-reflection that leads to cultural sensitivity and competence requires reflection on one's own cultural identity. In particular, one should consider his or her experience as a first-generation or non-first-generation student and how participating in the college culture impacted personal development. One must also consider the cultural values, beliefs, and practices that informed one's approach to college, and now, to students and the issues they present. How has integration into the college culture impacted identity and values? What norms are taken for-granted? Advisors should reconsider the characteristics and issues typical to first-generation college students. Those who have successfully completed college themselves, adapted to the college culture, and now work in it may need to wrestle with negative assumptions about students who struggle to succeed. The references cited in the review of literature regarding first-generation college students provide more insight into the issues and can assist self-reflection.

Reviewing previous diversity or multicultural seminars and texts used in school is a practical starting point for developing cultural sensitivity and competence. Reflecting on misunderstandings based on one's own culture and those based on students' and colleagues' cultures can also yield insightful information. In order to continuously gain understanding, self-

reflection should be a regular practice, even one that is scheduled on a weekly basis. Journaling during these times can assist in processing and serve as a reference later.

**Good information.** When acting as college culture brokers, particularly in the roles of liaison and cultural guide, advisors must develop multiple avenues for communicating good information with students. The first meeting with a student offers the opportunity to inform them about campus resources. A well-developed campus resources list, which is updated regularly, is one way to communicate good information (see Appendix A). Other communication tools include Facebook and blogs (see Appendices B and C).

Regardless of the chosen medium, commitment to learning and communicating good information requires constant work on the advisor's part. Knowledge and deep understanding of the college culture require networking and meeting with other offices, reading all all-college emails, awareness of campus events, and connection with faculty, staff, and administrators whenever the opportunity to build relationships arises. In addition to better learning the college culture, advisors must continuously connect with students to learn what information is most helpful for their success. Advisors can directly ask students in meetings, "How can I best help you succeed in college?" In order to gain input from a greater number of students, student surveys provide an avenue for gaining a better understanding of the information students need to feel empowered to succeed in school. Most institutions conduct student surveys annually. Use of the results of these surveys is a good place to start. Advisors can also develop short, open-ended surveys that allow more regular student input (see Appendix D). While meetings and surveys help advisors gain knowledge about the information and issues important to students, meaningful relationships provide the best opportunities to understand student needs and to help students understand and navigate the college culture.

**Meaningful relationship.** Relationships are more than a vehicle for good information; they are necessary for working through difficult issues, for gaining understanding of self, others, and the college culture. The value of relationship and its impact on student success are so immense that academic advisors acting as college culture brokers must intentionally seek out opportunities to connect meaningfully with students. The issues faced by first-generation college students often require more than good information. They require trustworthy individuals who will listen, process, and offer insight as students work through the conflicts, opportunities, and barriers they experience as they navigate and integrate with the college culture.

No formula exists as to how advisors or cultural brokers should develop meaningful relationships. Patricia Hunter, Associate Dean of TRiO Projects at Lake Washington Institute of Technology, stated, “We let people tell their stories. We honor what they say” (personal communication, April 2, 2012). Her department is one where all advisors work to make students feel welcomed, to ensure that they know they belong at the college. Bloom, Huston, and He (2008), authors of *The Appreciative Advising Revolution*, provide a framework for developing relationships with students. The first two stages in their framework offer good suggestions for advisors seeking to establish a connection with a student, especially in a short amount of time (see Table 2). Following the use of those stages, work as a college culture broker requires commitment to follow-up and continue to be available as students need. Scheduling times to follow-up with students, either via phone, email, or personal meetings, can add intentionality to one’s relationships and demonstrate respect and responsibility to the students.

A particularly impactful way my colleagues and I have experienced relationship development with students is through celebration. We encourage students to celebrate their successes, from completing an assignment to making the dean’s list. We also celebrate with

them, and students often come to see us simply to share successes and enjoy their achievements with us. We are very intentional about communicating the importance of celebration and set examples by how we respond to student successes. Besides building relationship, celebration builds confidence, eases anxiety, and creates positive memories associated with schooling. We also share our own successes with students and by doing so invite them to celebrate with us. Reflected in our willingness to share with our students is a key principle of relationship development: one must be willing to appropriately share one's own story (Bloom, et al., 2008).

Table 2

*Overview of Key Appreciative Advising Features by Stage*

Appreciative Advising Stages	Key Features
Disarm	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Warm welcome</li> <li>2. Safe and comfortable environment</li> <li>3. Appropriate self-disclosure</li> <li>4. Appropriate nonverbal behavior</li> </ol>
Discover	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Effective open-ended questioning</li> <li>6. Attending behavior and active listening</li> <li>7. Strength-based story reconstruction</li> </ol>

*Note.* Table 2 includes two of the six stages of Appreciative Advising, a framework developed by Bloom, et al. (2008, p. 34).

As with delivering good information, the means for developing meaningful relationships should fit the students' needs, the advisors abilities and personality, and the college culture. However, advisors acting as college culture brokers may need to lead the way in developing relationships with students that further their success in college and that could mean influencing

the college culture of one's institution. Meaningful relationship and the good information provided through relationship are necessary for student success. Advisors can become advocates and change agents who ensure that those needs are met across the campus.

**Initiating change.** Acting as a change agent in higher education requires knowledge, credibility, and understanding of an institution's culture of change. Participation in relevant committees and as presenters during in-service/development days provides opportunities for making student voices heard and addressing (mis)perceptions. Ultimately, initiating change requires the same acts as serving students as college culture brokers: providing good information and developing meaningful relationships.

Faculty, staff, and administrators in higher education are well-educated and full participants in the college culture. When working to bring about change in how they approach first-generation college students, it is important to affirm what they already know and work from that foundation; this demonstrates respect for them. Sharing one's own experiences of self-reflection and success stories about work with students, while also demonstrating understanding of the college culture, allows for the development of respect for the advisor. As mentioned earlier, using the acceptable avenues to address issues, such as professional development days, committees, workshops, or all college emails, increases receptivity to information and helps build relationship. Meaningful relationship requires additional commitment, commitment that reflects a desire not only to see students succeed but also to see staff, faculty, and administrators succeed. Informal opportunities to connect with and serve other college employees provide opportunities for influence and also increase receptivity.

The role of change agent is a leadership role. Goleman (1998) wrote about the characteristics that make leaders successful. His work describes Emotional Intelligence. Two of

the leadership characteristics, self-awareness and self-regulation, line up with the practice of self-reflection, described earlier as a means to develop cultural sensitivity and competence. In other words, the college culture broker model encourages advisors to develop leadership characteristics that can help impact change.

Goleman (1998) also describes motivation, empathy, and social skill. Motivated leaders are those committed to excellence. In order to gain the respect of colleagues, as well as continue to advocate well for students, college culture brokers must be motivated individuals. Both empathy and social skill relate to the development of meaningful relationships. Empathetic leaders consider others' feelings, understand their backgrounds, and listen carefully before demanding action. When they do act, they do so with others' needs and goals in mind (Goleman, 1998). Goleman defines social skill as "friendliness with a purpose: moving people in the direction you desire" (p. 90). Those who lead well use good information and meaningful relationship together to reveal common ground, encourage collaboration, and initiate change, even in the face of great challenges.

### **Challenges in the Community and Technical College Context**

As mentioned briefly in the introduction to this paper, academic advisors and students, particularly those from underrepresented populations, face many challenges in addition to those related to communicating about and understanding the college culture. Due to the current global economic crisis, jobs are not as readily available as they once were. Jobs also require a level of education that many low-income and first generation students do not possess (at least not from an accredited institution of higher education in the United States). Lack of employment is a large contributor to the increasing number of nontraditional and underrepresented students enrolling in college, particularly community and technical colleges. As discussed previously, increased

enrollments strain the already slim advising resources available to students. Academic advisors become focused on moving students through the system as quickly as possible, while still working for high retention and graduation rates.

The focus on degree completion, employment, and efficient advising does not acknowledge the full potential of education. A profound insight, also from the medical arena and as equally applicable to education as cultural brokering, is that the ultimate goal is not education but is instead transformation (Kidder, 2009). Academic advisors and students do not work together simply to understand the college culture and ensure students' success. They work together so students can gain the most from their educational experience, an experience that has the potential to transform them and their lives. As Perkins (1982) asserts, personal development is not the end goal. Rather, people need a bigger vision that includes an understanding of how they can contribute to their communities. White (2006) argues that strong communities result from transformed individuals who in turn take action to transform society.

Academic advising, particularly at community and technical colleges, exists in a realm that is full of possibility and conflict. According to Smith and Vellani (1999), "By serving all of the people, including immigrants and other historically disenfranchised and underrepresented groups, community colleges provide the common education ground on which people from various backgrounds come together to acquire skills for work and citizenship" (p. 7). The mission of community and technical colleges is to provide open and equitable access to higher education (Beach, 2011; Smith & Vellani, 1999) as a means to ensure individual and societal development. In the literature, the focus is often placed on economic development. However, historically and currently, proponents of higher education emphasize the importance of access not only for economic development but for community and citizenship development as well

(Center for Literacy Studies, n.d.; Smith & Vellani, 1999). According to Martin Heilstedt, Vice President of Instruction at Renton Technical College, the community and technical college system serves to provide communities and the nation with an educated workforce. “Educated” refers not only to academic and technical skills but also to life skills. Heilstedt noted that Benjamin Franklin understood education’s role in the nation as fulfilling a purpose beyond economic development; it enables a people to think critically and democratically govern themselves (personal communication, November 23, 2011).

As a current employee of the community and technical college system in Washington State, I experience firsthand the challenges facing community and technical colleges. The primary challenge, as a result of deep budget cuts, is how decisions impact the mission of the colleges. A necessary emphasis has been placed on institutional effectiveness and a culture of evidence (Beach, 2011; Pennington, 2009; Rothkopf, 2009). The colleges need to provide proof that they create positive outcomes for students and society in order to receive funding from state, federal, and private sources. In most cases, positive outcomes are indicated by high retention, course completion, and program completion rates.

Related to these quantitative measures is the percentage of students who find jobs after they graduate. The focus is on employment and economic development. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has adopted the mantra “further faster” (Pennington, 2009). The community and technical college system, along with all institutions of higher education, must consider innovative ways to increase completion rates and decrease the amount of time students take to complete a program of study. The goal is to increase the number of qualified workers and laborers in the United States (D. Emory, personal communication, December 9, 2011). For

community and technical colleges and the advisors who serve there, this has far reaching implications about mission and student success.

According to Doug Emory, Dean of General Education at Lake Washington Institute of Technology, many of the decisions Washington State and other state governments are making in regard to community and technical colleges are motivated by budget and not mission (personal communication, December 9, 2011). Along with effective and fully staffed advising teams, Adult Basic Education (ABE) and developmental education serve as indicators of the health of open and equitable access to higher education. When community and technical colleges become focused solely on moving students through the system quickly, when education becomes nothing more than the development of academic or technical skills, advising, ABE, and developmental education face cutbacks. Some community colleges have even begun selective admissions processes, requiring proven academic achievement, such as high placement or standardized test scores and prior satisfactory grade point averages (D. Emory, personal communication, December 9, 2011). The goal is to ensure that students complete degrees in a short amount of time. According to Emory, however, the result of reducing or eliminating ABE and developmental education programs is the danger of denying open access: ensuring a permanent undereducated underclass in the United States. The same is true when academic advisors do not have the resources to help underrepresented students understand and adapt to the college culture.

Community and technical colleges are the primary entry point to higher education for traditionally underrepresented and underresourced student populations (Hagedorn, 2004). According to Smith and Vellani (1999), community and technical college students are predominantly nontraditional native students and immigrants, include a higher proportion of minorities, are returning veterans and those seeking to move from welfare to work, and are low-

income, first-generation, or both. Many of these students come underprepared to college and utilize open access and ABE and developmental education as a means to pursue their educational and personal goals. They are the students for whom the academic advising model described here is the most beneficial, those for whom it was designed.

As a result of threats to open access and of the developing culture of evidence, staff, faculty, and administrators who value education and student success as more than workforce readiness have begun to explore innovative ways to ensure completion rates and student development that impacts their communities. While the goals may be similar to “further faster” for less, the mission is broader. Community and technical colleges exist to provide open and equitable access to higher education and to produce an educated workforce, consisting of people who can think critically and meaningfully contribute to their communities and society as a whole. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation values access and quality (Pennington, 2009), but in practice, their concept of “further faster” threatens both of those values and the heart of the mission of community colleges. It threatens the success of underrepresented student populations.

Often, when challenges are addressed, a holistic understanding of development is not considered and potential is diminished. A culture of evidence is developing beyond quantitative measures, one based on reflective learning (White, 2006) and the voice and needs of community and technical college students. Using that evidence, now is the time to develop innovative attitudes and practices that address student needs and lead to holistic community development. Academic advisors, acting as college culture brokers, can serve as one such innovation and play a crucial role in the success of students and the development of communities. When budget cuts and the further faster approach lead to diminished staffing and fewer resources for effective advising, not only is the mission of community and technical colleges threatened but so are

student success and the transformation of communities. In light of the challenges facing higher education due to massive budget cuts, administrators must constantly evaluate the goals they hope to achieve and weigh the consequences of how they choose to achieve them. Equipping advisors to be college culture brokers will better create conditions for student success and is worth the investment of limited resources.

### **Conclusion**

Despite growing budgetary concerns and shifting educational goals, academic advisors must consider a new approach to working with first-generation college students. Serving as college culture brokers, they can provide students with good information and meaningful relationship. College culture brokers meet student needs through the roles of liaison, cultural guide, mediator/mentor, and change agent. The roles are interconnected, requiring knowledge and understanding of first-generation college students' backgrounds, as well as intentional examination of the college culture. Through trusting relationships, college culture brokers empower students to succeed in college. Relationship becomes the means to provide students with useful information about resources, study skills, and other issues that concern them. Relationship also offers opportunities to discuss more difficult topics like identity development and the fear of failure.

The implementation of the college culture broker model will vary by college and by individual advisor. A number of applications were suggested, including scheduled times of self-reflection about one's own cultural identity, especially as it relates to college success; the use of social media such as Facebook and blogs to communicate information; and relationship development through listening to students' stories, encouraging confidence, and empowering them to connect with other members of the college culture.

College culture brokers also have the opportunity to act as change agents on their campuses, and in the college culture in general. This document is itself an act of calling others to change. Change agent, or advocating for first-generation college students, is a challenging role. However, college culture brokers can be equipped to lead their colleagues through good information and meaningful relationship, just as they serve their students.

First-generation college students have communicated the need for good information and meaningful relationship. Just last week, a new student expressed immense gratitude for the information I provided to her and was even more thankful that someone was there to explain what to expect her first day of classes. She no longer felt alone or worried. Academic advisors serving as college culture brokers have the unique opportunity to meet both student needs and to empower first-generation students to succeed in college.

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## Appendix A

**LWIT On Campus Resources**

<http://www.lwtech.edu>

**Academic Resources****Academic Skills Center (ASC) & Drop-In Tutoring**

Technology Center – T217  
(425) 739-XXXX

Located inside the Library, the ASC supports students learning basic skills such as math or writing, as well as students studying English as a Second Language and students preparing to take the GED exam.

- Assist students in ABED advising and registration
- A Tutoring Center and a Writing Center are also located in the ASC.

**TRiO Learning Lab**

West Building – W204F

Craig (425) 739-XXXX

Sally (425) 739-XXXX

Lab Hours: Monday & Tuesday 1-4 p.m., Wednesday 10 a.m.-12 p.m. and 1-3 p.m., Friday 10 a.m.-12 p.m.

The TRiO Learning Lab provides students the opportunity to get extra help with course assignments. Students can stop by the Learning Lab in **W204F** during any of the times listed above, no appointment necessary. A TRiO advisor or peer tutor will be available to help you find the answers to your questions, to help you discover resources, and to provide assistance for understanding your course content.

**Study Groups**

If you need a place to meet with students from your class or with students from other sections of the same course you are taking, please contact Sally at. The Learning Lab in W204F would love to accommodate your group and provide facilitators and tutors to answer questions.

**Learning Commons/Library**

<http://lwtclearningcommons.com>

The Learning Commons, including the Library, allows students, faculty, and staff access to important information and resources.

**Computer Lab**

Technology Building – T413

Michelle (425) 739-XXXX

A FREE lab which contains many networked computers for public use. Students can get help with their assignments and finish their homework. Software for Accounting, Engineering Graphics, Keyboarding, Microsoft, Medical, Multi-Media and Programming are provided to all students.

**Enrollment Services**

West Building – W201

(425) 739-XXXX

The office of Enrollment Services provides information on admissions, registration, and graduation.

**Assessment Center**

West Building – W204

[@lwtech.edu](mailto:@lwtech.edu)

(425) 739-XXXX

A variety of quality testing and assessment services are offered to our students, faculty/staff, and the community.

**General Advising**

West Building – W207

(425) 739-XXXX

Drop-In Advising: 8 a.m.-3:30 pm. MTWTh; 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. F

Evening Advising in W201: 4:30-6 p.m. TW

An advisor can help you:

- 1) Understand your placement test results
- 2) Plan your education at LWIT
- 3) Determine transferability of classes from previous colleges (unofficial evaluation)
- 4) Help you register for your classes
- 5) Connect you with other support services on campus
- 6) Plan your transfer to a four-year college or university
- 7) Refer you to program advisors

**Disability Support Services (DSS)**

West Building – W207

Alma and Jamie (425) 739-XXXX

LWTC supports students with disabilities in their academic pursuits. Students with disabilities who need

accommodations or assistance are encouraged to contact the Disability Support Services office before they enroll.

### **TRiO Projects**

West Building – W207

Patricia, Director (425) 739-XXXX

SSSD advisor for students A-L (425) 739-XXXX

SSSD advisor for students M-Z (425) 739-XXXX

SSS advisor for students A-L (425) 739-XXXX

SSS advisor for students M-Z (425) 739-XXXX

TRiO Projects provide supportive services such as transfer assistance, career planning, tutoring, educational planning, mentoring, Financial Aid assistance, success workshops, and Learning Lab. Your TRiO advisor will assist you with registration and matching your learning style with your instructor's teaching style. TRiO also provides limited free printing, copying, and faxing.

### **Veteran Service Office**

West Building – W213B

Dylan

Office Hours: Vary by quarter and are posted at W213B

The Veteran Service Office at LWIT exists to:

Assist veteran students and their families who are beginning their college experience at LWIT.

Direct veteran students to LWIT Student Services.

Refer veteran students to Off-Campus partners who may assist with emergency needs, gas money, housing help, groceries, etc.

Inform veteran students about on campus resources.

### **Bookstore**

East Building Mall – E127

(425) 739-XXXX

A source for educational books, office and school supplies, sportswear, and gifts. Book buy-back is offered at the end of each quarter. Textbook rental is also available at <http://www.rent-a-text.com>.

## **Employment Resources**

### **Employment Resource Center (ERC)**

West Building – W207

(425) 739-XXXX

Visit the ERC for assistance in all aspects of your job search.

- Career Choice Workshops are offered the first and third Fridays of every month at 10 a.m.

- Reference materials related to career exploration, job search, resumes, cover letters, interviewing, and networking
- An extensive list of current job openings available in the ERC office and online job posting

### **Career Services Online (CSO)**

Look through job postings for LWIT students.

- Go to <http://www.lwutech.edu/erc>
- "Click Here to Register"
- Complete your profile
- Search jobs for your dream job!

If you have questions, stop by or contact the ERC.

## **Financial Aid Resources**

### **Financial Aid**

West Building – W209

(425) 739-XXXX

[@lwutech.edu](http://lwutech.edu)

The Financial Aid office provides eligible students with loans, grants, and scholarships. Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) assistance is also provided.

### **The WashBoard**

<http://www.thewashboard.org>

The WashBoard is a scholarship database for Washington students. Complete a profile and the database will match you to scholarships that you may be eligible for.

### **The Opportunity Grant**

West Building – W207

[@lwutech.edu](http://lwutech.edu)

Adria (425) 739-XXXX

The Opportunity Grant provides book and tuition assistance to eligible students. The Opportunity Grant will fund up to 45 credits in Business, Allied Health, and IBEST programs. Contact Adria to schedule an appointment.

### **Worker Retraining**

West Building - W207

Jayne (425) 739-XXXX

Tisha (425) 739-XXXX

Worker Retraining Orientation: Tuesday 8:30 a.m. & Friday 12 p.m. in W213C

CAT/TB Application and Paperwork Intake: Wednesday 8:30 a.m. & Friday 2 p.m. in W204F

Academic Planning: Monday 8:30 a.m., Tuesday & Wednesday 1 p.m. in W213C  
Worker Retraining provides tuition assistance for up to one quarter to students who have been laid off from work, are displaced homemakers, or were self-employed and are now unemployed.

## **Health and Family Resources**

### **Counseling Services**

West Building – W207

Neera (425) 739-XXXX

LWTC offers appointments with a professional counselor for free, short-term personal counseling. The counselor is a Licensed Mental Health professional who helps students through many problems that may arise, school related or personal. Students can meet with the counselor by appointment only.

### **Crisis Line**

(206) 461-3222

The Crisis clinic provides crisis intervention to all people who need help. Telephone services provide immediate, confidential assistance for people who are in emotional distress and in need of advice.

### **Dental Clinic**

East Building – E107

(425) 739-8130

The clinic serves the public, including uninsured and low-income patients. Work is performed by licensed dentists and hygienists and certified dental assistants, assisted by students in the dental hygiene and dental assisting programs.

### **Early Learning Center**

South Portable – S2

Pat (425) 739-XXXX

Convenient, quality care is available at the campus Early Learning Center for children from age 12 months through six years. Children receive an active, stimulating program that encourages learning through experience and accomplishment. Funding programs are accepted.

### **Fitness Center**

East Building – E116

The Fitness Center, located on the first floor of the East Building, is open for use by LWIT students, faculty, and staff. The facility includes cardiovascular equipment, weight training equipment, stability balls, medicine balls, stretching area, group exercise room, locker rooms, and towel service. Clients of the fitness center receive a fitness assessment and get a personal trainer (a student trainer from Fitness Specialist/Personal Trainer program) depending on availability. Clients can also join and not use the trainers. To join the Fitness Center you need to register for FTNS 100 (one credit class). Pick up an enrollment form from the Fitness Center and payment is made at the cashier windows.

## **Student Activities Resources**

### **Associated Student Government (ASG)**

East Building - E214

Sheila (425) 739-XXXX

8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday

Provides excellent leadership opportunities for students, as well as a forum for student issues and student activities. Involvement in ASG offers you the ability to:

- Learn and practice leadership skills
- Be involved in the campus community
- Contribute to the quality of life at the college
- Earn college credit for leadership development
- Join one of LWTC's many student clubs

### **Speak Up!**

<http://www.speakupatlwit.blogspot.com>

Information Tables throughout the quarter. See blog for schedule.

Speak Up! exists to help students connect with resources, learn more about study skills, and share their ideas and opinions with advisors and other students. You spoke up. We heard. Let's do something about it.

## Appendix B



*Figure B1.* Facebook fan page for TRiO at Lake Washington Institute of Technology. Fan pages protect student identities should they choose not to post on the page and only use it to review information. Information can be provided as students need to know it. Many students access Facebook multiple times per day and any updates or posts to the fan page wall will appear on their walls. Links to events, resources, etc. can be posted to the wall. Further capabilities include mini-surveys, sharing photos, and promoting student discussions.

## Appendix C



*Figure C1.* Blog developed for Speak Up!, a student club, based on student input. Blog posts provide the opportunity to address issues of interest to students in more detail. Students can receive blog posts via email by subscribing to the blog. Survey results and interactions with students inform the posts made on the Speak Up! blog. The blog's link is publicized to the entire student population using fliers and anytime a TRiO advisor presents. Because Speak Up! is a student club, students not only inform the content but also serve as the primary promoters of the resource. Future uses of the blog will include student contributors and posts by other faculty and staff.

## Appendix D

TRiO advisors use a survey to gain student input for the Speak Up! blog and other communications. The survey was initially given face-to-face with paper and pencil but for greater response is now disseminated to students using email and a link on the Speak Up! blog and Facebook fan page. The free web survey tool Survey Monkey is used to host the survey. Students are asked to respond to the following statements.

1. When I first started at LWIT, I wish I had known
2. I am still not sure about, or I wish I knew more about
3. My college experience would be better if

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the title 'Speak Up! Survey'. The address bar shows the URL 'www.surveymonkey.com/s/3NQCXFK'. The survey content is as follows:

**Speak Up!** [Exit this survey](#)

Hi! Thank you for taking the time to participate in the Speak Up! survey. Speak up! is a club sponsored by TRiO. Our purpose is to listen what you have to say about the issues you face as a student and help you find solutions and connect with others. The answers to the following questions will help us do a better job. Thanks again!

**1. Please respond to the following statement.**  
When I first started at LWIT, I wish I had known:

**2. Please respond to the following statement.**  
I am still not sure about - or - I still wish I knew more about:

**3. Please respond to the following statement.**  
My college experience would be better if:

**4. The following formats connect best with how I like to get information about resources on and off campus. (Please mark all that apply.)**

☐ Regular meetings  
☐ Information table near the cafeteria  
☐ Blog  
Other (please specify)

Thank you again for participating in our survey. Your input will shape the way students and Speak Up! work together.

Done

9:57 AM 3/28/2012

Figure D1. Survey Monkey survey for Speak Up! and other advisor-student communications.