

BOLSTERING COMMUNITY AMONG FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS AT CEDAR COLLEGE

OUR TEAM



LINDA BORDEN
DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS



KELSEY DONOHUE
DIRECTOR OF BRIDGE
PROGRAM



NICOLE GARCIA
DEAN OF ACADEMIC AND
SOCIAL PREPARATION



CORI SPLAIN
DIRECTOR OF
FINANCIAL AID



MELISSA ZAMBRANA
DIRECTOR OF FIRST-YEAR
SUCCESS INITIATIVES



We are Ed.M. Candidates at Harvard Graduate School of Education enrolled in the course *Student Affairs in Higher Education: Theory-Driven Practice to Help Students Thrive* under Professor Alexis Redding.



CEDAR COLLEGE

**CULTIVATING RESILIENCE,
ONE TRAILBLAZER AT A TIME**

Introduction to Cedar College



Four-Year, Private, Liberal Arts College



Urban Campus in Minneapolis, MN



2,400 Students
600 First-Year Students



20% of Students are First-
Generation or Low-Income

CEDAR COLLEGE

FIRST-GENERATION, LOW-INCOME COMMUNITY

There is intersectionality associated with the first-generation identity that adds dimensions to how a student navigates the postsecondary environment. 20% of Cedar College's student body identifies as first-generation or low-income, including underrepresented populations, immigrant families, or a variety of other identities that shape their worldview and college-going experiences. Cedar College's student supports empower students to see their lived experiences as strengths rather than deficits and bring their full-self to our community.



Robert is an undocumented first-year student from Illinois considering majoring in biochemistry or political science.



Caitlyn is a senior sociology major from rural community in Iowa who works part-time on campus and is looking to return home following graduation.



Clark is a commuter student from the local metro area who hopes to take over his parents business following graduation.



Vandinika is a first-generation American whose family is originally from India. She is studying remotely from New Delhi for the semester.

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STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The transition to college during the COVID-19 pandemic has been tenuous for many students. This makes student engagement even more crucial. Cedar College's Dean Garcia emphasizes student engagement to enhance belonging, support, learning, and development with the goal of improving student success and retention. The BRIDGE Program's varied and in-depth resources nurture both online and ongoing student engagement.

"Belonging isn't abstract; real things that happen in daily life create the feeling—the reality—of belonging to groups and to the community they make up. When like-minded people gather around shared topics or interests, they can become energized around those topics. Once a person belongs to an energized group, they have an incentive to remain and to stay on good terms with other members."



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

for First-Generation or Low-Income Student Engagement

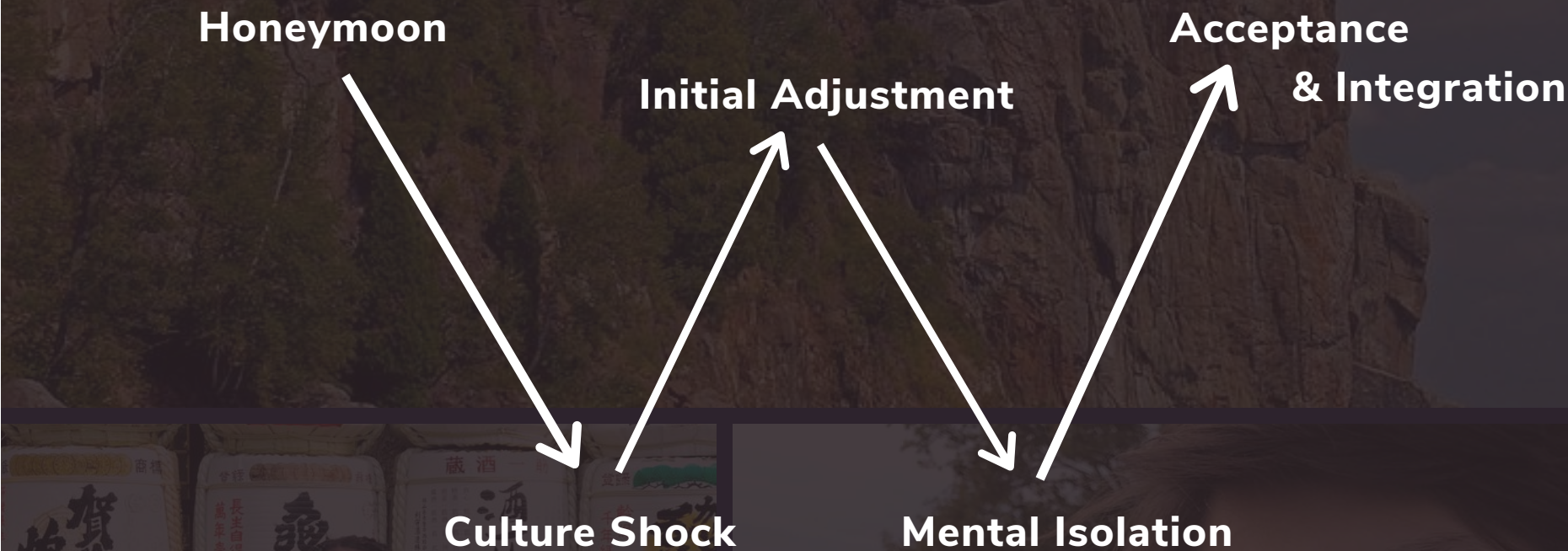
- Demystify the hidden curriculum — be explicit about campus culture and expectations
- Engage the entire first-generation community in programs that recognize the unique barriers first-generation and low-income students face
- Be intentional and proactive in fostering trusting relationships with students through personalized, high-touch engagement
- Signal to students that Cedar College is invested in the whole student
- Celebrate, incorporate, and reinforce individual strengths, identities, and perspectives by prioritizing the student voice
- Provide students with resources to continue to build strong academic and social-emotional skills in a virtual environment
- Enhance opportunities for online engagement through co-curricular programming (i.e. events, workshops, and networking)
- Help students determine which endeavors align with their core values and prioritize ones that will help them grow
- Be flexible and ready to tailor resources and support systems to meet student's individual and unique needs

CEDAR COLLEGE BRIDGE PROGRAM

BUILDING RESILIENCY IN DEEP GENUINE ENGAGEMENT

BRIDGE Program utilizes a holistic view of student identity development theoretical framework that equips and empowers students to thrive on mental, academic, and social levels.

W-Curve



"The W-Curve and the First Year of College," a synopsis of Zeller, W. J. and Mosier, R. (1993)

Collins Framework

Physical
Copresence

Ritualized
Common
Activities

Shared
Focus of
Attention

Exclusivity

Chambliss, D.F. & Takacs, C.G. (2014).

CEDAR COLLEGE BRIDGE PROGRAM

BRIDGE program is a year-long community enrichment program for all first-year students who identify as first-generation or low-income. This program aims to cultivate and support students in their transition to college by building a strong virtual community among first-generation peers, faculty, and young alumni.

The following slides outline the scaffolded engagement to support students specifically through the first semester.

Phase 1 SUMMER

Welcoming students to the Cedar College community and preparing them for the transition to college (Transition)

Phase 2 SEPTEMBER

Supporting students' sense of belonging as they navigate the first few weeks of the semester, identifying co-curricular opportunities (Assimilation)

Phase 3 OCTOBER

Providing wellness and self-care practices to cope with potential personal and academic stress while preparing for mid-terms (Wellness)

Phase 4 NOVEMBER

Uniting the community around a shared experience that showcases individual cultures and strengths (Belonging)

Phase 5 DECEMBER

Scaffolding relationship building across the broader first-generation campus community — faculty, staff, and alumni. (Community)

Equity-Driven Model

BRIDGE Program takes the following elements into consideration to prioritize inclusion and ensure equitable participation, regardless of students' location, access to resources, and familial support.

- Names / Pronouns Displayed
- Asynchronous programming archived on Canvas page
- Multiple platforms of engagement
- Low-bandwidth digital programs
- Optimization for all Time Zones
- Inclusive of all first-generation and low-income students



CEDAR COLLEGE BRIDGE PROGRAM

YEAR-LONG VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT FOR STUDENTS

Through sustained engagement and a cohort model, students create meaningful connections with each other, develop their leadership and expertise around campus resources and establish a collective of supportive peers and faculty.



DAY 1

Placed in BRIDGE Program from the moment they commit to Cedar College



COHORT MODEL

6 first-year students paired with 2 upper-level peer mentors



DATA-DRIVEN

StrengthsFinder and similar surveys used to develop cohorts strategically



MENTORS

Upper-level peer mentors create a family structure commonly found in Greek Life



CO-CURRICULAR

Cohort Canvas pages ensure that BRIDGE Group is fully embedded into their virtual school experience.



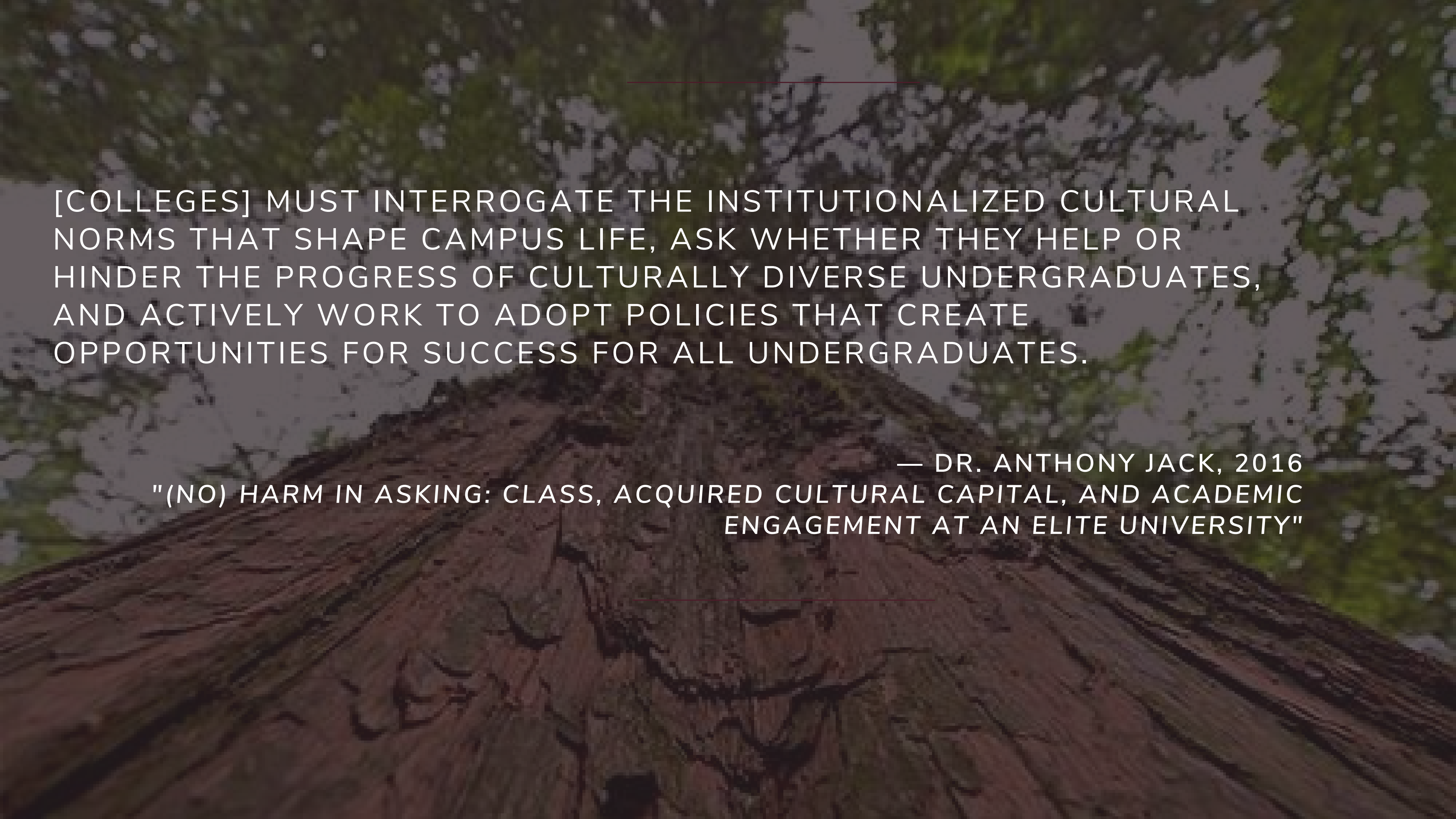
BRIDGE Program sets monthly themes over the course of the first year to support students' transition and assimilation to Cedar College. First-years join an alumni cohort upon completion of program.

CAMPUS MARKETING & SOCIAL MEDIA

All first-generation or low-income students are informed of their placement in the BRIDGE Program in their admissions packet. Social media is leveraged after acceptance of admissions offers to remind students to complete their placement survey and StrengthsFinder Assessment. Twitter is used to send reminders and a TikTok challenge is announced via Instagram to engage the students prior to the start of the program.

Once placed in their cohort group, social media is utilized to encourage engagement with their cohort on their Canvas page with weekly posts on Twitter and Instagram as well as regular TikTok challenges. Students are also placed in a Slack channel with all cohorts to allow further bonding and communication.



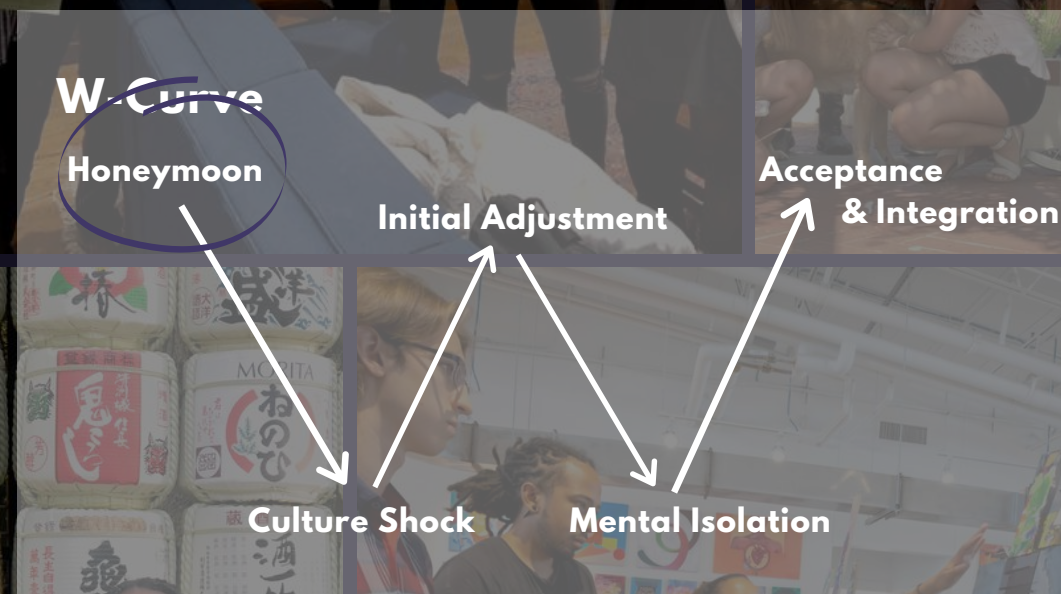


[COLLEGES] MUST INTERROGATE THE INSTITUTIONALIZED CULTURAL NORMS THAT SHAPE CAMPUS LIFE, ASK WHETHER THEY HELP OR HINDER THE PROGRESS OF CULTURALLY DIVERSE UNDERGRADUATES, AND ACTIVELY WORK TO ADOPT POLICIES THAT CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUCCESS FOR ALL UNDERGRADUATES.

— DR. ANTHONY JACK, 2016
"(NO) HARM IN ASKING: CLASS, ACQUIRED CULTURAL CAPITAL, AND ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT AT AN ELITE UNIVERSITY"

SUMMER

Phase 1: Preparing for the Transition to College



Additional Theory

Schlossberg's 4 Ss

- Self (Student)
- Situation (Transition)
- Strategies
- Supports

Killam, W. & Degges-White, S. (2017).

Learning Goal

Identify individual strengths and develop a sense of belonging, a better sense of self, and the strategies and supports to thrive and contribute to the community

Small Student Family Cohorts

First-year students are placed in small cohorts, known as Families, with 2 trained upper-level first-generation peer mentors who will help these students navigate Cedar College. By answering questions and sharing their own experiences transitioning to college, these peer mentors will help first-year students feel like they are not alone in regards to how they feel about and deal with the college transition.

StrengthsFinder Survey

As shown by Schlossberg, students bring their identities (self), strategies, and supports to each situation they face. By having students fill out the StrengthsFinder survey and discuss their results in small groups, they will have a clearer picture of their strengths (self). Peer mentors will work with students throughout the summer to interpret the StrengthsFinder results and identify student-specific needs and ways each student can positively contribute and strengthen the college environment. With this asset-based approach, students will be empowered to leverage their strengths and identify supports and strategies while navigating their transition.

Inclusion of Parents and Guardians

Since the parents and guardians of these students have not experienced college themselves, we have created resources to provide an understanding of the college transition and virtual experience their student will have at Cedar College. There will be monthly Parent/Guardian Group Workshops accessible by phone or computer to review general concerns, normalize typical college student behaviors, and learn ways to respond to student and family stress.

SEPTEMBER

Phase 2: Community Assimilation through Diversity & Global Learning

W-Curve

Honeymoon

Initial Adjustment

Acceptance & Integration

Culture Shock

Mental Isolation

Additional Theory

Kuh's High-Impact Educational Practices

Kuh, G. D. (2008).

Learning Goal

Develop appreciation for diversity, increase global knowledge, and enhance critical thinking skills

Scavenger Hunt

Kuh established a particular set of high-impact educational practices that enhance the learning of students as well as increase student engagement. Students will be asked to participate in a photo scavenger hunt to share their home community and its diversity with their cohort as the activity evokes the diversity & global learning high-impact practice. Students will be challenged to discover more about their community and think critically to determine where they may be able to take photos that work for each week's challenge. Photos will be shared on the Canvas page and students will be encouraged to engage in weekly discussions regarding the experiences they had in their home community during the challenge.

This high-impact practice will also assist students as they assimilate to the Cedar College community during a time when they may be experiencing culture shock. In addition to learning about their peers, a care package will be delivered to students in September which will include items for them to unbox together as a group monthly. The first item they unbox will be a Cedar College t-shirt to ensure all BRIDGE Program participants have an item that helps bolster a sense of inclusion and belonging.

OCTOBER

Phase 3: Mindfulness & Well-Being

W-Curve

Honeymoon

Initial Adjustment

Acceptance
& Integration

Culture Shock

Mental Isolation

Learning Goals

Develop stress management skills by experimenting with a variety of wellness tools and practices

Increased Focus on Wellness Initiatives

Mental, emotional, and physical health and well-being help to build a caring and resilient community culture. Wellness initiatives focus on acknowledging and managing the impact our unprecedented virtual environment presents. We embed our wellness focus throughout the BRIDGE experience to proactively address sustaining online motivation and build positive coping mechanisms.

Consistent Outreach

Trained peer mentors maintain ongoing individual check-ins to help students utilize resources, build both help-seeking and self-efficacy skills, and cope with stress throughout the semester, especially as academic demands ramp up during midterms. Any heightened concerns will be shared with campus counseling for assistance.

Midterm Mindfulness & Self-Care Package

Students will receive login access to multiple mindfulness apps, a podcast on improving sleep and nutrition habits, herbal teas to replace excess caffeine, and an access code for sessions with a study skills and time management advisor.

Weekly Wellness Workshops

Featured topics include Building Friendships Online; Forming Affinity Groups; Budgeting & Finances; Reframing Imposter Syndrome; Engaging with Faculty; Myths of Failure; Celebrating Our Intersectional Identities; Building Daily Mindful Reflection Practices; and Making Use of Free State-specific Mental Health Resources.

NOVEMBER

Phase 4: Creating a Sense of Belonging

W-Curve

Honeymoon

Initial Adjustment

Acceptance
& Integration

Culture Shock

Mental Isolation

Learning Goal

Develop empathy and understanding of peers' experiences and cultural history

The Great Cedar College Cook-Off

Every Sunday evening throughout November, members of the Cedar College BRIDGE community convene virtually to participate in a cooking challenge and 'family meal.' Each cohort is challenged to choose from a list of widely-accessible ingredients — like Ramen noodles or pasta — and develop an innovative and creative recipe that can be shared with their peers and recreated at home. Cohorts are encouraged to develop recipes that infuse culture, heritage, and symbolic ties to the Cedar College community.

As part of their November care package, students will receive a variety of spices, non-perishable cooking items, and kitchen tools, such as a Cedar College apron. At the end of the month, recipes will be compiled in a virtual BRIDGE community cookbook that is expanded on each year.

This program is designed as an asset-based framework with the intention of celebrating first-generation students' culture and their lived experiences.

DECEMBER

Phase 5: Strengthening Faculty Engagement

W-Curve

Honeymoon

Initial Adjustment

Acceptance
& Integration

Culture Shock

Mental Isolation

Additional Theory

Duke Model of Emotional Connectedness

Asher, S.R. & Weeks, M.S., (2014).

Learning Goal

Develop a deeper sense of belonging and community that extends beyond the peer-based cohort to faculty, staff, and alumni

Book Ceremony

Invoking the Collins framework, the final care package item is unveiled in community: a personally inscribed book. First-generation faculty explain the personal significance of each book selection, encourage pleasure reading (*self-care*) during the break, and invite students for 1:1 virtual coffee chats during spring term to chat about the book or whatever is on their mind. Taking a page from the Duke Model of Emotional Connectedness, meaningful interactions with faculty promote sense of belonging; however, we need to provide sufficient scaffolding and opportunity for these connections.

Symbol

A copy of each book lives in a dedicated section of the campus library and in the BRIDGE Canvas library.

BRIDGE PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

It is important for any student affairs program to be developed with an assessment model in mind. This allows the program to be evaluated during and after implementation and redesigned based on the needs of students as well as to ensure the desired outcomes are achieved.

The Cedar College BRIDGE Program's assessment will utilize a Logic Model which breaks the program down into the following components:

- **Inputs/Resources**
- **Activities**
- **Outputs**
- **Outcomes**
- **Impact**

Inputs

Resources needed for the program



What do we need to launch and maintain the Extended BRIDGE Program?

Key Components

- Upper-level students willing to facilitate small cohort groups
- Robust peer mentor training
- Buy-in from faculty, staff, and alumni as well as their enthusiastic participation
- Funding to provide the following:
 - stipends to upper-level students each semester
 - access to StrengthsFinder
 - connectivity and technology assistance
 - prizes for challenges
 - care package items and postage
 - subsidy for cooking challenge
 - gifted book from a faculty member

Activities

Aspects of implementation



What will we do?

Key Components

- "Family" cohorts with upper-level student support
- Ongoing and accessible academic, social-emotional supports
- Intra-family social events to bond with cohort in an intimate virtual settings
- Facilitation by upper-level students
- StrengthsFinder Assessment
- Care Package (ongoing)
- Scavenger Hunt
- Wellness Workshops (ongoing)
- Cooking Challenge
- Book Ceremony

Outputs

Observable products of the completed activities



What will we observe as a result of the activities?

Key Components

- Approximately twenty cohort groups will be engaged in activities each year
- Cohort groups will participate in programming for at least five months
- 100% retention from BRIDGE Program participants and upper-level peer mentors throughout the semester
- 85% of students participate in engagement activities on social media

Outcomes

Effects or impacts within various timeframes



What changes will we see in the short, medium, and long term?

Key Components

- **First-year students will:**

- expand their sense of self
- build community among classmates, upper-level peers, and faculty
- identify the hidden curriculum of Cedar College
- flourish from a sense of belonging at Cedar College despite being in a virtual environment
- develop empathy and understanding of peers' individuality and culture
- integrate self-care and wellness practices into daily life

- **BRIDGE parents/guardians will:**

- engage in the online community
- better understand their student's experience

Outcomes (con't)

Effects or impacts within various timeframes



What changes will we see in the short, medium, and long term?

Key Components

- **Upper-level peer mentors will:**
 - receive a stipend each semester
 - develop interpersonal skills
 - learn to facilitate community relationship building
 - reflect and synthesize their experiences
- **Faculty and staff will:**
 - model for their peers intentional and proactive practices that support first-generation student success
 - promote this program among their respective departments and teams to:
 - encourage participation
 - advocate for more inclusive practices

Impact

If benefits to participants are achieved, these changes will occur



What can we expect to occur if the program is successful?

Key Components

- The retention rate for first-year students will increase by at least 10% after year one of the program and then remain steady in subsequent years.
- Students' engagement as reported by Cedar College's National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results will be above the benchmark scores of student baccalaureate institutions on interactions with faculty members, enriching educational experiences, and supportive campus environment.
- The program will push Cedar College to be student ready for all students, and eliminate exclusive language and the hidden curriculum.



CONCLUSION

The Cedar College BRIDGE Program initiatives foster inclusive community connections online and provide holistic supports during students' formative transition to college.

- We believe that creating an environment of inclusion and belonging allows the College to support the evolving needs of students, prioritize the student voice, and build a culture where students of all identities can thrive and succeed.
- BRIDGE Program will remain online even when campus reopens because the virtual format makes it accessible to all first-year first-generation students.

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