

First-Gen Strengths and Successes

A workshop by Dr. Aubrey Schiavone



University of Denver Writing Program

Workshop Agenda

- Introductions and get-to-know-each-other
- Reflection on your own personal strengths and successes
- Presentation findings from qualitative research
- Applying findings to your own experiences
- Questions and discussion



Introductions: Let's Get to Know Each Other

- Unmute and tell us a bit about yourself
 - Name
 - Role at DU
 - Department or program of study
 - How you got involved in this first-gen mentorship program
 - Something you're looking forward to in the coming months, this spring, or summer



Let's Reflect

Take a few minutes to write a short paragraph or bulleted list or notes to yourself:

- Name a success you've had and are proud of from the last year
- Describe a strength you have or are working to cultivate



First-Gen Strengths

- Rhetorical listening
- Inclusive speaking
- Open-mindedness

- Workplace experiences
- Financial management



How Do I Know?: Qualitative Methods

- Surveys
- Observations
- Three Interviews
 - Life history: family, high school, college choice
 - First-year writing class
 - Home, work, extracurricular contexts



Says Who?: Population and Participants

Race Ethnicity

- Black or African American (7)
- Jewish (1)
- Mexican (1)
- White or Caucasian (5)
- Haitian (1)
- Bengali (1)
- Middle Eastern/Arab/Yemeni (1)

3 First-Generation American Students

9 Bilingual or Multilingual Students

Gender

- Women (8)
- Men (7)

Sexuality

- 3 students disclosed LGBTQIA+ identities

Religious Affiliation

- Catholic (2)
- Jewish and Christian (1)
- Muslim (1)



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Rhetorical Listening: Class Discussions

Tina: “some people think of things in different ways than you were thinking.”

Tom: “Like I love hearing other perspectives and fresh ideas and how other people are thinking of things, and it’s very shocking to see when it’s like very different from mine. It just proves like not all people think alike.”

Jason: “I began to talk less about the book and more about people’s views about the book because that's what became interesting to me. Like how everybody doesn’t perceive something like you would do. Some of the books that we read had lots of symbolism in it and [the professor] would just give some lines in the book and then each one of us gives an interpretation of what that symbol means in the book.”



Rhetorical Listening: Ivy

“The professor stressed a lot that you know, no opinion is really right. I think when I started hearing everyone else's ideas, the first thing that made me more comfortable was seeing people seeing things how I saw it as well, so we had similarities. Then after that, seeing new things of how I could've saw it or could have inferred it somehow differently or whatever. That made me more comfortable like, ‘Oh okay. They have an interesting way of looking at it.’ Then what made me more comfortable was like, if I found something that I found really unique or interesting or whatever, seeing other people going like, ‘Oh okay. I didn't think about that.’”



Rhetorical Listening: Sarah

“Something [the Vice Provost] said about, no matter what anyone tells you, LU is yours too. That hit me. Like, yeah, it is. I never really claimed ownership, I just felt like I was really fortunate to be here not that like I had any impact on like LU being better. Like, I always saw it as a one-way thing that LU was always helping me, I never thought of it the other way. After he was telling us about that I felt like I belonged more, that I wasn’t just stopping by, like stopping by because they thought...stopping by because they felt bad for me because I didn’t have money so then they’d pay for me to be here. I felt more like included.”



Let's Reflect: Rhetorical Listening

- Have you ever used listening to help you enter into a new situation or context?
- Can you describe a time you listened in order to get to know someone, especially someone who was different from you?



Inclusive Speaking: Sarah

“I like learning people’s names even if I don’t remember them all the time. There’s so many people on campus, but since there’s so many people it’s easy to get overlooked. And sometimes if you feel like no one’s looking out for you, then you don’t make too much of a difference. So, I kind of want to make the connections and reach out to make people feel welcome.”



Inclusive Speaking: Tina

“It can be harder for people who are bilingual who have a different accent.”

Tina says, when she encounters bilingual students or students with a different accent at her job, she is “just very open to helping them out, and most of the time when they order like a specific drink or something like that, I’ll repeat it out loud so that if I said it wrong they can correct me. Yeah that’s just how I, instead of them repeating it to me a lot of different times.”



Inclusive Speaking: Tom

“Some people speak in a different dialect of Arabic so I have a hard time understanding them when they speak to me, and I just say can you speak English. ‘Cause usually they’re speaking like Egyptian dialect, and I tell them oh wait, I speak the Yemeni dialect, so there’s kind of like a barrier even if it’s the same language, like some of the words and the pronunciation differs. Which is one of the reasons I’m taking Arabic. [...] I want to learn the formal way to speak. I think it’ll be a huge plus, whichever field I go into, if I’m a teacher or a doctor, whatever field, to be able to communicate with students or patients, formally, as opposed... ‘cause not everyone knows my informal dialect but the dialects here are very popular worldwide, so there’s a better chance that I can be able to communicate with them.”



Let's Reflect: Inclusive Speaking

- Do you like to talk to new people or do you tend to listen or to let others come speak to you first? Why do you think that is?
- Can you describe a time you spoke up and gave your input even though it may have been difficult to do so?



Open-Mindedness: Tom

“[The Muslim Student Association] teaches you to be open-minded too because it’s not only different dialects. ‘Cause you know how Islam has like different sects, like it can be Sunni or Shiite. I’m Sunni and some of them are like the different, not a different religion but a different denomination I’d say. So yeah like their habits or their rituals like how you pray, kind of differ. So, I remember like one time we were doing prayers over there and after we pray we have certain rituals and it was something completely different. I was shocked to see what they were doing, but I didn’t want to be rude and get up and leave so I just stood there like taking it in.”



Open-Mindedness: Tom

“I guess it’s just, it’s the way I was raised, I guess. Like, my neighbors, some of my neighbors are Christian, and we’ve never had any issues with them. My mom used to always, like during Eid my mom would always make bread for our neighbors even if they weren’t Muslim, and she’d go like give it to them. So, I guess that’s where I learned to accept everybody.”



Open-Mindedness: Armin

“There’s another kid in one of my classes that like, we were discussing like apartments, and he’s like eighteen, so like I was tryna give him like a little bit of advice [...] And he was just discussing like what amenities each place he was thinking about had and things like that. I’m like okay. And it came to a point where I was like well what’s your budget. You know, like what are you, what are you planning on spending each month. And like, he had never even considered a budget, you know. And to me that’s how I picked a home, is like you know I can’t go above like eight hundred say, so like what is available at eight hundred and where is it. But to him it was like the amenities were the first thing. And that’s, and that I think is a class distinction. Like he was only thinking about like his wants, and I was only thinking about my needs, and also my wants, but like that was the focus is like, okay, I need to spend eight or less because I’m gonna need that other money. And like eight’s a lot, and so like for him to spend like fifteen, as long as he’s getting everything he wanted like that was, that was fine.”



Open-Mindedness: Armin

“I said okay well who’s, who’s paying for this, your folks? ‘Cause I mean for an eighteen year old to have that kind of money didn’t make any other sense. And he was just like, yeah my folks are paying for it. He might not have said that, implied. And then I was like oh man that’s nice dude. I wish I had that. He was like, your parents don’t help you pay for stuff? And I was like no they don’t. And you know he’s young too so he doesn’t realize especially...And so he’s just like why not. And I was like, they can’t. You know like, it’s not a possibility.”



Let's Reflect: Open-Mindedness

- How would you describe or define open-mindedness?
- Do you think that you yourself tend to be open-minded? Why or why not?
- Can you describe a time when you were open-minded to a new idea, situation, person, or group of people?



Workplace Experience

38 Workplaces, 32 Genres of Workplace Writing

Workplaces

- Office work
- Lab research
- Waitressing
- Retail
- Course Assistant
- Busboy
- Farmhand

Genres of Writing

- Application Essays
- Drawer Counts
- Emails
- Spreadsheets
- Thank-You Letters
- Grant Proposals
- Performance Reports



Workplace Experience: Ben

Workplace: Performing Arts Camp Non-Profit

Digital Media: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat



Workplace Experience: Ben

“Instagram was very much so short, caption-y, hashtag-y, emoji

Twitter usually involved photos and links to things. And just like four big words and then maybe a hashtag

Snapchat of course video”

Workplace Experience: Ben

“Facebook was usually like the longer posts that you would like write a headline then you would have to like write a little description, maybe attach a photo, and attach a link, so it kind of just had to like click here for more information but put like the most important thing.

So you kind of had to strategize you know what did you want to capture within this small little ten second window that people would scroll up and down.”

Workplace Experience: Ben

“Writing to get [new] participants in the foundation, also to get people who were already in [the foundation] excited, like pump-ups type of stuff. We also did like a lot of daily quizzes, trivia type things [...] or we would do the person who could get the most selfies.”

“It taught me to point out the important things. And maybe not, I wasn’t able to you know describe them as much on social media, but it definitely taught me to put in the writing the things that will catch someone’s eye.”

Workplace Experience: Sarah

Workplace: on campus job at the Language Resource Center

Digital Media: PowerPoint Presentations, Blog Posts



Workplace Experience: Sarah

“There was one time I had to make a PowerPoint of Spanish words, because I have some Spanish experience, for a middle school that's visiting, so that was fun [...] It was bringing me back to my middle school phase, because it's like, ‘Okay. If I'm a middle schooler, sitting in a library for a PowerPoint, what do I want to see?’ I included some pictures of Frozen stuff, and I tried to make it fun.”

Workplace Experience: Sarah

“We have a blog for that, and over the summer I wrote two passages for it. That was fun. [...] I blogged about the spelling bee, actually, and how knowing a language of origin can tell you a lot about how to spell a word. [...] That was fun. I added GIFs. It was a fun blog.”

Workplace Experience: Chris

Workplace: Course Assistant for a Writing Course on campus

Digital Media: PowerPoint



Workplace Experience: Chris

“When I start class I always, I usually have a PowerPoint. I'll start out, ‘Hey guys, let's get started. Today we will be talking about ...’ ‘This week ...’ straight off of the PowerPoint what we are going to be doing. [...] I just read right off of it. But I don't try to be boring with it.”

Let's Reflect: Workplace Experience

- Do you or did you have a job (or multiple jobs) while you were in college?
- Can you describe something valuable you have learned at a job or in a workplace?



Financial Management: Jason

“The stress that I see my Dad go through, trying to make it from paycheck to paycheck. I don't want to go through that stress. I know what I want to do that makes me happy, which will be helping people, will help me. I won't be working class. Also I want to take care of my Dad when I get older.”



Financial Management: Jack

Of his peers in the bridge program, Jack says, “These people are more accustomed to having to work hard to do things instead of having everything handed to them. Not trying to say that everyone here gets everything handed to them on a silver platter, ’cause that’s an overgeneralization. But, the ones who are in bridge are typically the ones who know how to work, and they come from backgrounds where they’ve faced challenges.”



Financial Management: Luna

“[My teachers] kind of told me to write about my experiences with my parents getting divorced, and my dad leaving, and my mom not having any money. They said that it was very important that you write about this because you kept straight A's while doing this, and it's emotionally traumatizing and what not. It wasn't really that emotionally traumatizing, so I wrote about it. They advised me to talk about my background more, which was kind of cathartic to write about actually. I kind of had some closure with everything that happened with my dad leaving and us losing our house and everything like that.”



Let's Reflect: Financial Management

- Do you now or have you ever faced any financial challenges or hardships? If yes, can you describe one of those financial challenges or hardships?
- What have you done or what strategies have you used to help address, minimize, or overcome financial challenges?



Let's Discuss

- What's been useful to you so far from the first-gen stories presented here?
- What connections, comparisons, or contrasts did you make to your own experiences?
- What questions or comments do you have about first-gen strengths and successes?



Thank you so much 😊

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