



Working with Low Income Students

Definition/description: Students from low-income families typically need substantial financial assistance to be able to attend college. Low-income students are defined as those whose family income was below 125% of the federally established poverty level for their family size.

National Research Says:

- Approximately 50% of students from high income families will have a four-year college degree by age 25; only 10% of students from low-income families will have a college degree by the same age.
- Besides money, the largest hurdle that low-income students face is an overall lack of resources.
- Low-income students are unlikely to have personal or professional mentors to guide them through the challenges of higher education.
- Low-income students are also less likely to have family support in choosing the right college, completing financial aid forms, or even regular visits once they get to school.
- Campus studies suggest that as many as 59% of students experience food insecurity at some point in their college careers.
- 40% of college students work 30 or more hours a week.

Research Often Forgets to Mention:

- Many low-income students may feel high pressure to succeed in college. This pressure can stem from the student knowing they have to do well to get a high paying job and help support their family; the pressure to be the first in the family to graduate from college can also be an added stressor.
- Low-income students often face social isolation on campus due to having to work extra jobs, or not being able to afford off-campus activities.

Supporting Low-Income Students:

- Promote campus and community resources that support low-income students (e.g. Jack's Cupboard, TRIO SSS, Brookings Food Bank, etc.)
- Attempt to have textbooks available for students in the library; take into consideration that some students are unable to purchase textbooks until their financial aid refund arrives
- Encourage students to seek paid internships
- Build relationships to help students feel seen

Things to Avoid:

- Unnecessary or unused required classroom materials
- Assuming socioeconomic class of any student
- Ignoring that students may have outside jobs or other responsibilities
- Being inflexible to situations that may arise

The more you know:

- <https://blog.ed.gov>
- <https://www.sdstate.edu/office-financial-aid>