

# Achieving Academic Success: Supporting Immigrant Students

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## About Dallas College

Dallas College is a public community college with seven campuses in Dallas County, Texas. It serves more than 70,000 students annually in degree-granting, continuing education, and adult education programs.

### Our seven campuses across Dallas

- Brookhaven (Farmers Branch)
- Cedar Valley (Lancaster, DeSoto)
- Eastfield (Mesquite, Garland, Forney)
- El Centro (Downtown Dallas)
- Mountain View (South Dallas)
- North Lake (Irving)
- Richland (North Dallas)



Campuses across the DFW area.

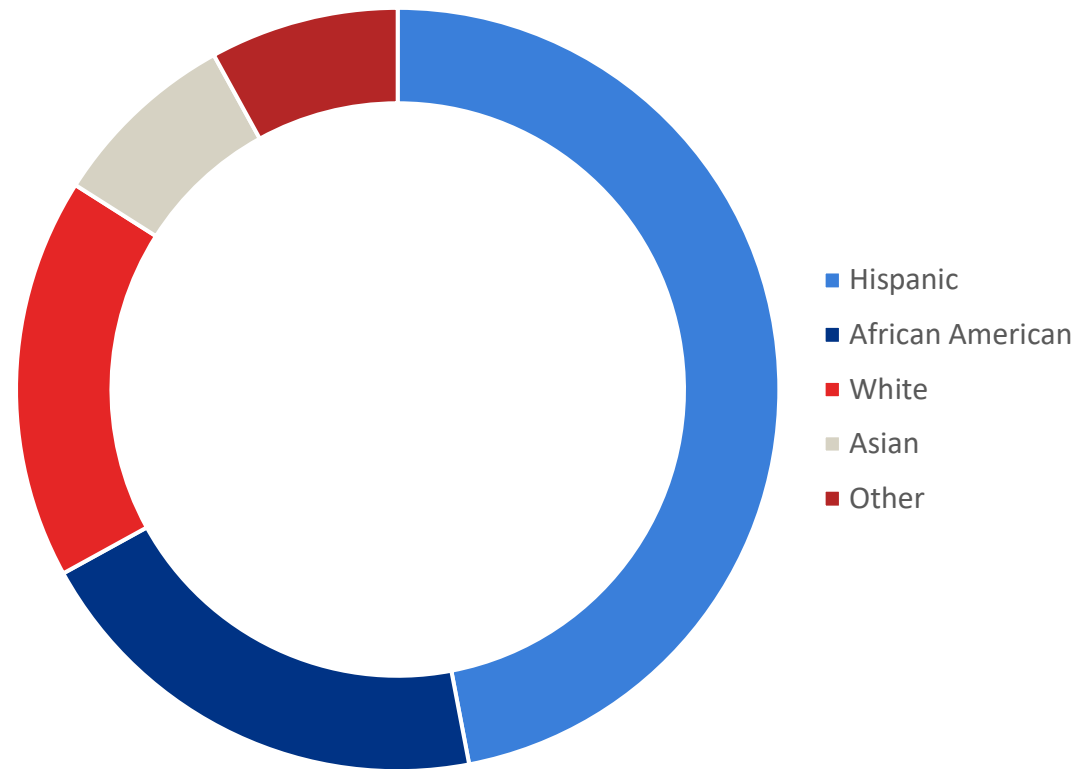
## Dallas College Demographics

Over eighty percent of our students identify as minorities:

- 47% Hispanic (light blue)
- 20% African American (dark blue)
- 17% White (red)
- 8% Asian (maroon)
- 8 % Other (gray)

### Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI)

- Higher Education Equal Opportunity Act (2008): total undergraduate Hispanic enrollment is 25% or higher.
- The number of HSIs has increased 93% in the last 10 years.
- There are 352 emerging HSIs across the United States (15-24.9% undergraduate full-time enrollment).



Representation of students who identify as minorities.

# Objectives

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- Understand characteristics of an immigrant student and the language used to address their issues.
- Five ways to help immigrant students achieve success while taking your class.

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**Characteristics of an  
immigrant student and the  
language used to  
address their issues**

# Characteristics of an immigrant student

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- English is probably not their first language.
- Think in their native language but constantly translating to English.
- Silent language barriers. May not actively seek help with language or personal issues. May not know how to reach out. This is especially true if the student is a first-born child.
- Want the education but are unsure of how the American educational system works. Getting their core classes. The danger zone for most immigrants students is year one and year two.
- Visibility factors. Want to blend in or disappear within the larger group.
- Disadvantaged in academic areas (length of time in country, supporting a family, working multiple jobs, etc.).
- Divided energies. Students are everything to their parents (lawyer, doctor, parent, translator, etc.).

# Cultural capital

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Ease and familiarity with the dominant culture around you by comparing behavior with the dominant culture:

- **Eye contact** — in other cultures, young adult/child direct eye contact with an adult is considered disrespectful.
- **Acceptance** — In most cultures, asking a question is only done when you do not know the answer. In American schools, teachers routinely ask questions they already know the answer to.
  - When someone asks you a question, how long do you wait to respond? Some cultures interrupt the end of the question, others have a brief wait (<3secs), others think then speak.
  - Do you believe that you are a unique and independent person? That is a very American way of thinking.

# Perceived Negative

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- Student comes to class and doesn't actively participate and may fall asleep.
- Student talking to a person sitting next to them while you are lecturing.
- Student seems apathetic during class
- Student did not complete the assignment.

# Unseen Positive

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- Student has determination and grit. May have worked a full-time job overnight.
- Student may be seeking clarity or translating for the student who did not understand.
- Student is processing information or moving through language barriers to keep up
- Student may not have access to technology (WiFi).



Students can be underprepared in two ways

# Academic Process

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Steps are in place for academic unpreparedness:

- Developmental courses (writing and math)
- Tutoring
- Mentoring
- International student support program

# Institutional Process

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Colleges need something to help with institutional unpreparedness:

- Colleges speak a language no one else speaks
- The average college website is not friendly to immigrants or 1<sup>st</sup> gen
  - Dallas college admissions website written on a 10th grade reading level
  - Most business/news websites are on a 5th-8th grade level

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**Five ways to help  
immigrant students  
achieve success  
while taking your  
class**

# Engage with an open mind

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- Don't make assumptions
  - Use student-icebreakers the first two classes, or longer, to get to know your students
    - Two Truths and a Lie
    - Name Stories
    - Uncommon Commonalities
- Build trust/empathy
  - Beginning of the semester announcements
  - Provide contact information
  - Send regular updates
  - Work with students to find out answers
  - Arrive to class early, stay late, use office hours (student hours)



# Create a safe/brave space

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- Use inclusive language
  - Undocumented v illegal
  - Latino(a) v Mexican
  - Avoid college jargon whenever possible (replace office hours with student hours on your syllabus)
- Intentionally set aside time for conversations in your class
  - Start light and move up slowly
  - Humanize yourself
- Put yourself in someone else's shoes



# Create spaces for storytelling and creative expression

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- Encourage students to build their own meaning and sense of identity that is different from the negative stigma and stereotype about undocumented immigrants by:
  - Student choice reading lists.
  - Diverse required readings
  - Assignments that let them use/tell their personal experiences
  - Bring artifacts that are important to you and encourage them to do the same
  - Any posters or artwork should be diverse (this applies to all the buildings on the campus)
  - Model strategic vulnerability



# Advocate for them

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- Help them when it comes to scholarships and financial support
- Learn about relevant institutional policies and legislation
- Talk about financial responsibilities
  - Make them aware of scholarships and grants, internships, paying jobs
  - Remind them of the FAFSA open date (October 1)
  - Remind them of TAFSA deadline (June 30, 2022)
  - Write letters of recommendation when asked or approach students you feel could benefit from one but may not know to ask



# Build connections

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- Connect students to faculty, community leaders, and other role models
- Attend/schedule cultural, diverse events
- Build a network you can connect your students to
- Connect them to campus organizations
- Post school, city, and community calendars
- Build relationships and collaborate with other educators who are from a wide variety of backgrounds and life experiences



# Conclusion

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“Students should have rich, relevant, and authentic experiences at school, across the board. If every educator in every school pursued excellence instead of allowing excuses about what students can and cannot do, we would meet the needs of all students. Our goal has to be to create schools where excellence is the standard.”

—Sanee Bell (*Be Excellent on Purpose*)



# Q & A

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