

Ask & Connect In Practice:

Teline, A Single Mom With ADHD

Activity 3a: Identifying Opportunities for Engaging Individual Students

Instructions: Please read the first two vignettes below. The first vignette describes an experience from the student's perspective, and the second describes the same experience from the college's perspective. Afterward, discuss the prompts and take inventory of your questions, ideas, and concerns. The student vignette is based on the experience of an actual student and was adapted from qualitative research described by Xueli Wang in her book *On My Own*.¹


Student Experience

Teline, a single parent with ADHD, enrolls in a lab tech certificate program but is unused to checking email regularly and misses emails from her department and college about the deadline for FAFSA. After enrolling in classes and attending the first week, she is told she will be dropped from her courses on her student assignment portal due to unpaid fees. She had met with an advisor upon first registering for courses and been advised that she would likely get tuition covered through FAFSA but had never been specifically advised on the deadline and how to fill out the form. The FAFSA Q&A Workshops the school hosted were during a time when she was responsible for childcare and was unable to divide her time between childcare and the virtual workshop at home. The deadline for FAFSA has passed, and now she is faced with delaying enrollment for another semester or paying the late fee. Financial aid office hours conflict with her working hours, and even though her new professor is friendly and understanding, he isn't able to help with the issue.

Teline decides to take out a student loan to cover her tuition on top of her living expenses when she is enrolled in courses. She is committed to going to school and feels excited about her coursework. She passes her first semester and meets the deadline for FAFSA for the following semester.

This semester, however, Teline is enrolled in a chemistry course with a lab component. The lab section of the course is more difficult and ADHD makes it more difficult for her to focus than ever before. The noise of the lab and the activity of several groups working at once makes it extremely difficult for her to concentrate. Her concentration problems do not improve, and she begins to dread going to the lab. Teline decides to speak with her instructor to see if there's any way she could have some support for the laboratory work. When she brings up the issue to her instructor,

¹ Wang, X. (2021). *On my own: The challenge and promise of building equitable STEM transfer pathways*. Harvard Education Press.



the instructor tells her that he has noticed that her grades are lower in the lab section of the course, but she is doing well in the other parts, so he tells her not to worry. The laboratory section is the easiest portion of the course, and he doesn't think it will continue to be an issue for her. Teline's difficulty concentrating in the lab starts to impact her confidence in the other parts of the course, and she ends up failing the course at the end of the term. She has always been interested in laboratory work but is now having doubts about being the right fit for the program. She decides to switch tracks to an early childhood certificate program.

College Perspective

The college had sent several emails to Teline about the deadline for FAFSA. During their advising appointment, Teline's advisor emphasized to her how important it would be to regularly check her college email. She told Teline to come back whenever she had questions. Teline's advisor feels like she did everything to ensure Teline's academic success but is unsure why and frustrated that Teline still missed the FAFSA deadline. Having been an advisor for many years and seeing similar situations occur over and over again, Teline's advisor is reaffirmed in her belief that some students need to learn to handle their own affairs better to succeed in college. She hopes that this experience makes Teline start to take college more seriously.

A semester later, upon finding out that Teline has failed a course and changed certificate programs, Teline's advisor starts to get concerned about Teline's progress. Her advisor reaches out to Teline's laboratory professor to get his perspective on Teline. According to her professor, Teline seemed to be doing fine in class and was engaged in the material. Then, seemingly for no reason, Teline's grades began to decline. The professor mentions to the advisor the conversation he had with Teline about struggling in the laboratory section and his belief that the lab was the easiest part of the course. To him, it seemed as if Teline just didn't want to put effort into the course after the second half of the semester, which was frustrating as an instructor. They are both skeptical of Teline's ability to succeed in a laboratory tech program now, so when Teline decides to switch to an early childhood certificate track, both of them are encouraged that it may be better for her, even though the wage outcomes for the new track aren't as good as those of the laboratory tech program.

Discussion Questions

1. What missed opportunities or areas of disconnect did you observe in the vignettes?
2. Thinking about your own college, why do many students struggle to navigate and/or not use various student support services?

Activity 3b: Turning Individual Engagement Into Universal Support



CCRCWORKSHOPS

Instructions: Please read the “Alternative Experience” vignette to imagine how the principles of Ask-Connect could have been used to better support the student. Afterward, discuss the prompts and take inventory of your questions, ideas, and concerns.

Alternative Experience

One month before the FAFSA deadline, academic advisors, the financial aid office, and faculty team up to advertise presentations both online and virtually about how to fill out the FAFSA and access other financial aid resources. The presenters take time to answer questions and give their contact information and office hours (at different times in the day/evening), offering to meet face to face or virtually with students to go over their financial aid application or exchange emails or texts about it. The instructor of the course gives reminders about the FAFSA deadline in class and gives the contact information of the presenters again. Discussing financial aid with an advisor is the first assignment for course credit (in a FYE course or any enrolled course) for all new students and enrollees that have taken a year break or more from classes. Finally, the advisors assigned to support the workshop attendees follow up with the students who have not yet filled it out a week before the deadline. Now connecting with an evening advisor over the phone, Teline is able to answer all their questions about FAFSA in advance at times that work for her and fill it out on time. Other presentations take place throughout the semester, including on resources provided at the Office for Access and Service for Individuals with Disabilities (OASID), which makes explicit that the OASID provides accommodation for many different types of students, including those with ADHD and mental health issues.

The next semester, in her laboratory class, when Teline is having difficulty in chemistry, her instructor listens to Teline's concerns with empathy and gives her a warm handoff to the OASID. Later, her professor follows up with Teline about how that appointment went and how Teline is feeling about the course material. Working with both Teline and the OASID, the group figures out a support plan that will allow her to take in the lessons of the laboratory work in a calmer environment with a little extra time. Her instructor and the office of accommodations follow up with Teline later in the semester to see how she is doing in the course, and they adjust the plan based on feedback from the student and the instructor. Teline passes the class with an A and leaves with a rich understanding of the course material and a feeling of being supported by the college community. In the next course Teline takes, the OASID works with her new professor and Teline from the beginning to see where she can get support.

Discussion Questions

1. How could Ask-Connect practices be used to create a different experience for the student? What questions would you ask the student?

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2. Thinking about your college, in what ways might you be able to integrate Ask and Connect practices to provide a coordinated support network, rather than sending students to a variety of isolated/stand-alone services?
3. How would you know students are accessing the new Ask and Connect practices and that they're having a positive impact on new students?