

Ask & Connect in Practice:

Angel, a First-Generation Dual Enrollment Student

Activity 4a: 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 conducted by the dual enrollment equity pathways (DEEP) work at CCRC.

Student Experience

Angel is a first-generation Filipina American high school junior who hopes to go into a marine biology program at a four-year university after she graduates high school. Angel and her family lived in Los Angeles, California until last year, when her father moved the family to find better employment opportunities. Although her parents were excited about the prospects of living in a new town, Angel was privately apprehensive about moving away from her friends and extended family. Her parents are encouraging of her dreams and want to support her, especially in going to college. Her high school counselor encouraged her to enroll in dual enrollment courses as a good way to get a head start on college. Angel and her counselor selected two courses to take; the counselor had been told by a dual enrollment (DE) advisor at their partnering community college that the two courses would likely fill general education (GE) requirements. Angel decided to start DE courses in person at the local community college. Angel is still taking some courses at the high school, and although the commute to the community college is about 40 minutes, Angel is determined to succeed.

Despite making good grades, however, Angel is quiet and reserved in the majority of her classes at the community college. The instructor has tried to encourage her to participate, but Angel doesn't seem to be able to get comfortable enough to share during class or one-on-one office hours. Angel's high school study body is majority Latinx, Black, and Southeast Asian. She is making friends at her new high school; however, the community college is a primarily White institution (PWI), and all of her instructors and most of her classmates are White. Angel finds the college experience to be lonely and a bit confusing. It is difficult for her to connect with her classmates, who are often older than her and from a different background. She feels discouraged and disappointed in herself for not being able to adjust to her DE classes.

After a year in which she earned good grades in her dual enrollment courses, Angel



decides not to enroll in the DE courses the following term. She tells her high school counselor that she didn't feel comfortable at the community college and missed her high school friends. Angel felt she was missing out on the high school experience by commuting so long and is instead thinking about going directly into a four-year college. She says she is scared about rushing into college and is afraid she needs more time to adjust and explore her goals and interests. The high school counselor advises that if she stays in the DE program through her senior year, she might only have a few credits left to complete the equivalent of her general education at a four-year institution. Unfortunately, Angel is firm in her decision to stay at the high school and withdraw from the DE program.

College Perspective

The college saw Angel as a great student; having mentioned her intention to go into a marine biology program to a faculty member, she had been marked as a potential enrollee in a STEM associate program. The community college has partnered with the two local universities to make the credits students earn at the community college fully transferable to a STEM bachelor's program and is frustrated, as this path seems to be well suited to students like Angel. One faculty member, who thought they made a great connection with Angel as a student, is particularly disappointed when Angel decides to stop taking dual credit courses. They are not sure what they could have done better to make Angel stay and are not sure why she decided to stop out of the program. They noticed she was often quiet in class but figured that she was just shy. The college is frustrated because the completion rates for the DE student program are low, and the college has been trying to reach their DEI goals by working with the high school to attract more underserved students. Now they are starting to reconsider their approach.

Discussion Questions

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

Activity 4b: Turning Individual Engagement into Universal Support

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

Upon registering for DE courses with her high school counselor, Angel is connected with a DE counselor at the community college to talk about her goals and connect to resources at the college. Finding out that Angel is a first-generation college student and wants to study marine biology, the advisor connects her with a first-generation peer-mentor group and suggests she plan to transfer to a four-year university with a matching degree in that field. Angel is connected to a faculty member at the local four-year university and discusses career pathways in her field of interest. Angel is also connected to a first-generation peer mentor, who builds a connection with Angel on a personal level.

Angel confides to her mentor that she feels out of place and is missing out on the high school experience. Her mentor listens to her experience with empathy and offers to set up a meeting with herself, Angel, and her advisor to brainstorm some alternatives for Angel to make her more comfortable. Her advisor informs her about the option to take DE courses at her high school, either online or with a high school instructor. After hearing Angel's input, the advisor reaches out to Angel's high school to discuss options. Angel decides to continue in her program and take one DE course at her high school.

After checking in with Angel's advisor and hearing her feedback, the head of advising decides to conduct a focus group with DE students and students of color on campus. From this, the college decides to institutionalize more support for long-distance commuters and commits to hiring more faculty and staff of color. Angel finds a community of fellow DE students by taking courses at her high school and decides to continue with her program through her senior year. After she graduates high school, she stays at the college to earn a STEM associate degree. After graduating, Angel starts working at a new DE student center as a mentor while finishing her in-person lab classes and feels empowered by her ability to give back to students like her. She graduates with a STEM associate degree in a year and successfully transfers to a four-year program to begin coursework on a marine biology degree.

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?
2. Thinking about your college, in what ways might you be able to integrate Ask-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-Connect practices and that they're having a positive impact on new students?