

Hello, My name is Amy Bryant, and I'm here with my colleague Kate Blinn. We're here to talk about Building Competencies, Connections & Persistence with First Generation Students. We first want to thank you for persisting to this last session of the conference before the closing keynote.

# Earlham College

- Fall 2017 Enrollment - 1126
- 23% international students - over 60 countries represented
- 26% US domestic minority - 47 US states represented
- Approximately 15 to 20% of each new first-year class are first-generation students – parent(s) did not complete a bachelor's degree

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We are from Earlham College. Earlham is a National Liberal Arts College, which means we grant 4-year bachelor's degrees. We have reputation for teaching, diversity, and global engagement. Every Earlham Student is given the opportunity for a fully funded off-campus research experience or internship.

## First-Generation Students

“...they are significantly less likely to go to college and, once on campus, less likely to **persist** to graduation. ... this reality is due to poor academic preparation, lower educational aspirations, less encouragement and support from family, less knowledge about the college application process, fewer resources to pay for college, and **difficulties adjusting to the academic, social, and cultural norms of the academy.**”

Orbe, 2008, *Theorizing Multidimensional Identity Negotiation: Reflections on the Lived Experiences of First-Generation College Students*

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First Generation students are a population that has been identified as facing additional and complex challenges, including persisting to graduation, and adjusting to the academic, social, and cultural norms of campus life. Six years ago our VP of Assessment and Accreditation noticed that our local story reflected this national trend.

## Earlham First-Gen Students

*“My dad thinks I went to camp.”*

*“I got a job lined up for after graduation and it pays more than my mom makes. But I don’t feel so positive about it. It made me feel like a completely different person.”*

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While talking with our own first generation students we heard heartbreaking stories about their experiences of feeling disconnected from their families, and feeling as though their families were unable to relate to the students’ struggles.



# Building Competencies with First-Generation Students

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So when our campus leadership put out a plea to the entire community and solicited ideas for ways to improve first generation student success, persistence especially, our library decided to see what we could do to help.

# LIFT

## Library Immersion Fellows Team



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Based on that, we created the LIFT program. We envisioned this as a way to address gaps in IL competencies but address also some of the other concerns noted such as campus engagement and and students' comfort accessing support services.

# LIFT Program Goals

## **Library focused goals**

- To demonstrate the value of the library to student success
- To align the library with institutional mission
- To contribute to the overall student persistence rate

## **Student focused goal**

- To enhance first-generation student success

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How does the LIFT program benefit the Library?

Also has a student focused goal to enhance student success. How do we define student success?

# Information Literacy Success

## LIFT Learning Goals

- Read, evaluate and interpret media coverage of trending issues and current events.
- Identify library resources and services to help them analyze trending issues and current events.
- Practice and engage with ideas of ethical behavior while finding, using and sharing information.

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We developed 3 information literacy based learning goals around reading, identifying resources, and engaging ethically with information.

# College Success

## LIFT Learning Goals

- Practice and engage with technology tools for college use.
- Communicate effectively in an oral presentation.
- Give and receive appropriate and useful peer feedback.
- Complete writing assignments that synthesize main ideas, reflect critical thinking and demonstrate thoughtful reflection

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We partnered that with 4 learning goals that were focused on their success as college students - engaging with technology, communicating effectively in oral presentation, giving & receiving peer feedback, and completing writing assignments that synthesize main ideas, reflect critical thinking and demonstrate thoughtful reflection.

## Fall

- Small peer cohort and a “personal librarian” meet weekly for 8 weeks (1 credit)
- Free iPad
- Cohorts of 3-10 students, 4-5 sections
- Approx. 10% of every new class (increasing)
- Instructors include Librarians, Writing Center Director, McNair Program Director
- Program began in Fall 2013

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So how does this program work? In the Fall semester, all first-gen students are invited to participate in a small peer cohort with a librarian or other academic support professional. We meet weekly for 8 weeks, they receive a free iPad. Approximately 10% of the first year class participates.

# Fall Assignments

## Meta-themes

- Critical lens on technology
- First-generation discourse

## Assignments focus on

- IL Competencies
- Digital Competencies
- Building Relationships & Trust

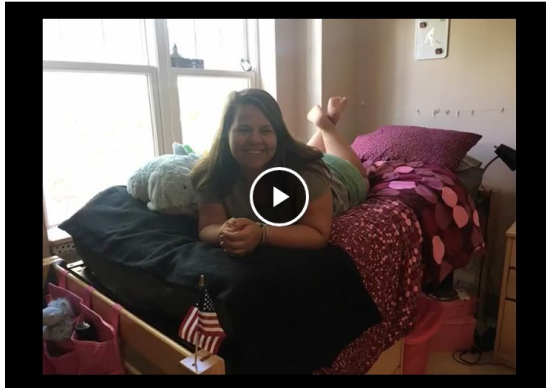
## Final Group Dinner

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There are meta-themes which span across the 8 week program. Common assignments are shared across all the sections, though the details are decided on by the individual instructor.

Culminating Final dinner - with all students and LIFT instructors together. Special evening event, in which students are invited to talk about the impact of the LIFT program for them and they often share very heartfelt reflections. By listening to their personal stories we hear the power of the program.

## Digital Storytelling



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We also gather personal stories through the LIFT assignments. For example, students were asked to create a digital story about a time when they “were first” or their first time doing something. This student created a story about being a first-generation student.

The image features a dark red, semi-transparent overlay on an aerial photograph of a campus. The text is centered in a white, serif font. At the bottom of the red area, there is a horizontal bar with the college's name in white.

Building Connections  
with  
First-Generation Students

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Kate

# Spring

- **Spring Semester On-Campus**
  - Exclusive speaker panels
  - Campus Store stipend
  - Optional alumni mentors
  - Center for Career and Community Engagement staff, Center for Global Engagement staff, Alumni Affairs staff
- **May Term Off-Campus**
  - Librarian/faculty pair and 10-15 LIFT students

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Describe programs. The May term off-campus program is transformative in itself (as you'll hear), and it also prepares students for the other off-campus programs Amy described.

The Fall and Spring programs available for everyone came from redirected endowed funds and operating budget, the off-campus program is funded by a Donor

**LIFT May 2017: Montreal**



## Montreal Learning Outcomes

- **To pay close attention to aspects of “place”**
- To explore issues surrounding creative choices that represent place
- To consider what it means to be a tourist and what it means to live in a neighborhood
- To reflect on differences between Montreal, Quebec, Canada AND places you have lived
- **To pursue a topic of interest to you in the Montreal/Quebec/Canada context**
- To be more fully aware of your “place” in the world

# Multimodal Assignments

- Take 5 photos to describe the visual qualities of “neighborhood” -- what neighborhoods “mean” and “are.” You’re aiming to express the essence of “neighborhood” visually.
- 400-word reflection. Using vivid language, describe a place in Montreal in terms of sound and smell.



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Think back about “my dad thought I was going to camp” - first-gen students (and their parents) are trying to understand a college experience that includes what sounds like a free vacation. It takes work to understand that as an academic and transformative learning experience.

When we were interviewing and choosing students, one of our questions was whether or not students had any previous travel experiences and we tended to choose those students for whom travel was going to push them outside their comfort zone. Some of our students had never left Indiana, one had never flown on a plane.

## Hawaii Learning Outcomes

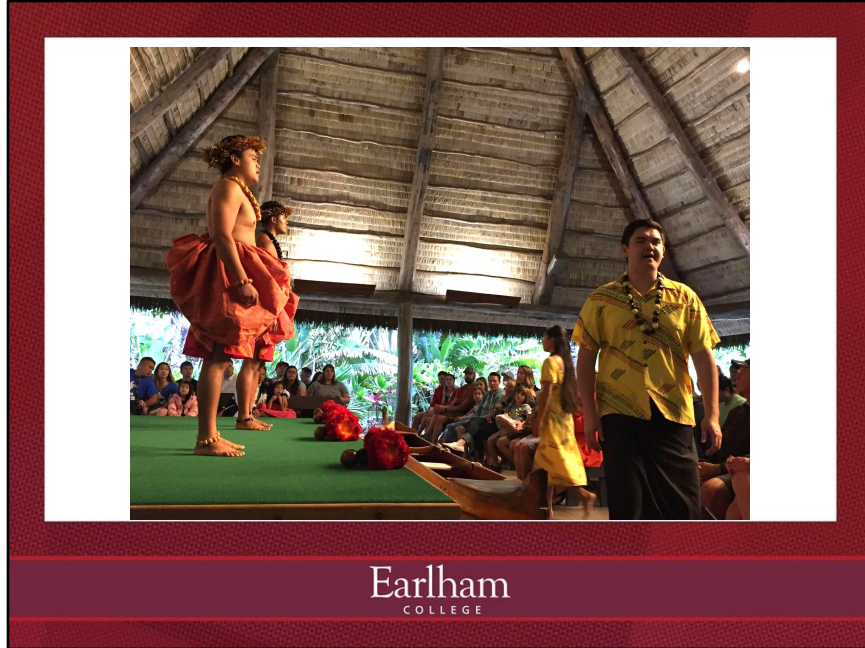
The goal of this program is to *immerse* students in the cultural melting pot that is Hawaii. Students will get a brief introduction to the *history, culture, language, and food* of Hawaii, paying close attention to the many forms of diversity present. Among other things, students will learn about the first Polynesian settlers and the Kingdom of Hawaii, followed by the arrival of European settlers, plantation workers, and the war. We will educate students on the *strong relationship between the Hawaiian people and the land* and explore the natural beauty of Hawaii through snorkeling, hiking, and a variety of other activities.



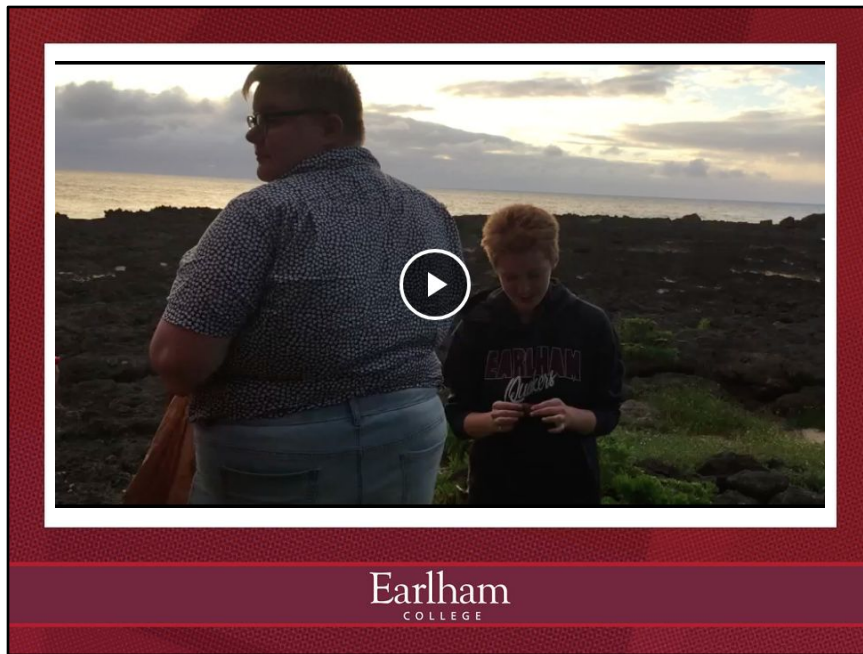
Spring semester we met with the students for 10 weeks, they each had to research one of the places on our itinerary and they also created a Google site and did oral presentations on a topic of their choice about Hawaii. Students researched the sovereignty movement, immigration, language patterns, dance and music, etc. Here we had visited the Bishop Museum and each student had to choose an object from the museum that related to their research and then we shared about each object and debriefed our experience of the museum, relative to other educational and tourist-oriented sites we'd been to.



It took the students time to really live in to the idea that a funded trip to Hawaii really wasn't a vacation. This beach stop seemed like a good place to look for shells, but we also had a conversation about the different kinds of sand on different beaches of the same island and we looked at these pieces of plastic from trash in the ocean. Several of our students were interested in environmental issues and how the people of Hawaii related to the land.



During our spring orientation, we invited a Hawaiian Earlham student to be our TA, and she taught the students a chant in Hawaiian. It's meant to be used to ask for permission to enter and to learn from the place you're entering. When they were practicing at Earlham, I don't think they could have imagined what it would really feel like to stand at the foot of the stairs in front of Iolani Palace and chant and then to have an older and experienced docent sing a reply chant welcoming us in. It would have been inappropriate to take a picture of them/us chanting - this picture is from the Polynesian Cultural Center, in the Hawaiian section, and the students were very excited to hear these young men chanting the same thing that they had learned



One last example of how the students applied in the field the things that they had learned on campus - just a quick video.

**Think/Pair/Share:**

**Could you do something like  
LIFT? How might it look at  
your institution?**

**What seems adaptable?**

**What would be challenging?**

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# Building Persistence with First-Generation Students

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So we started the program to try to improve the persistence, so what does the data tell us about whether or not our program has been successful?

## Persistence Data

### Third-Semester Persistence: 4-Year Averages

#### Earlham students overall

- 83.9% overall campus average (n = 1,131)

#### Students who are not first-generation

- 85.6% continuing generation (n = 918)

#### First-generation students

- 71.2% non-LIFT first generation (n = 118)
- 77.9% LIFT first generation (n = 95)

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Data tells us that of Earlham's first-gen students, those who participated in LIFT (over 4 years) persist at Earlham at a higher rate than those who didn't participate in LIFT

# High-Impact Persistence Data

LIFT May 2017 Montreal Cohort Persistence

92.9% (n = 14)

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AND data also shows us that for those high-impact experiences, based on the Montreal program, the persistence rate is even higher. We are excited but cautious in interpreting this data because it is such a small sample set so far.

## Self-Assessment Data

End-of-program self-assessment:

**Ask yourself, “What do I know when I am in this place that I can know nowhere else?”**

Robert Macfarlane, *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot*,  
New York: Penguin, 2012

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We also have student self-assessment data. At the end of each of the off-campus programs, students were asked to reflect on the following prompt:

## Student Voices

*“What I know here that I do not know back home is that **I can be independent outside my country.**”*

*“In Montreal, I know that I can find my way back home on my own.”*



Student reflections showed that they were building confidence in themselves...

*“For me, people really made all the difference in this program. All my favorite moments could be generalized by saying that **my learning experience was always enriched when I listened to other people’s opinions** about the sites that our program visited.”*



...making connections with the other students

*“The things I feel I learned that were specific to Hawaii were **all the hands-on experiential learning** that we did.*

*One of the things that I think was really specific to Hawaii was learning about the ecosystem. While I may have been able to look at videos and pictures online of Hawaiian fish, **it’s completely different to snorkel and see them in front of your face.**”*



... and making connections with the places they travel.

The LIFT instructors, campus partners and campus administration all see the success of the LIFT program and our students. Our admissions team wants to continue to recruit first generation students. So they have created a marketing campaign with a website and videos highlighting the program.

You have seen some authentic statements from our students, now let’s watch the marketing video.



Now let's watch this video created by our marketing department.  
[Play video](#)

**Think/Pair/Share:**

**Discuss the complicated nature of representing and sharing “feel good” stories about a library program for “at risk” students in a way that isn’t cliché and doesn’t exploit them.**

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Just to add a note - three students were asked to make marketing videos and one refused based on the script that she was given.

This is important struggle for us. We need your advice.

# Thank You!

Building Competencies, Connections,  
& Persistence with First-Generation Students



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