

“The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.” - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Parents' choices have a direct effect on their children's future. According to the Center for American Progress, “Parent's level of educational attainment is the best predictor of economic mobility of their children.” (T. Hertz) When children see their parents, their mothers in particular, succeed in the pursuit of a post-secondary education they are more likely to achieve academic success themselves. There is a strong and proven link between parents' education level and the academic and economic mobility of their children.

Unfortunately, the hurdles that student-parents encounter along their academic journey are not few or unsubstantial; making the need for student-parent support services absolutely crucial.

One of the key tenets that we operate on is that no two student-parents share the exact same background or experience. In order to fully address our population's needs, we must understand that each person has a unique story.

What is the danger of a single story and how can that influence student parent support programs? How do you avoid this?

It's easy to create a single story – to forget that every student that walks through your door is an individual with a unique background and unique needs. If we fail to take the time to hear all of those stories we run the risk of seeing people as only one thing, and thereby limiting their ability and future to the one designated role that we've prescribed to them.

If we see our role at the FRC as supporting and empowering our students rather than telling them what to do, then we can let their needs guide the programs and services that we provide. The key in doing this is to let the student-parents tell us their stories. If they see the FRC as a safe place where they feel comfortable and capable they will begin to share their experiences and struggles so that we can gain a more holistic understanding of their specific needs.

What individual support do you provide?

We meet with our student-parents on an individual basis in order to evaluate what existing services and resources might be available. Often they are unaware of these services or simply unable to navigate the system on their own. Once we learn of their unique needs we are able to determine if they are best addressed one-on-one or if we can provide group guidance.

Based on the information we've gathered from our student-parents, we've held successful workshops for resumé writing, internship and job search, transfer

assistance, how to utilize community and campus resources and childcare search support. We continue to offer individual support for academic and career advisement, mock interviews, financial support and special needs referrals.

It is crucial to stress that the goal of the FRC is to empower our students so that they are able to move toward economic self-sufficiency. Our lens is holistic and we must be sure to understand that the individual that we meet also represents a family. When we help parents build their educational and economic foundations we are strengthening the future of the next generation.

“Sure, I have obstacles. There are things that I have to deal with that plenty of other women of color are dealing with...having to do it all on your own, not having a support system, or the father, or even having parents of your own to help you out. But as a parent, it's even more so. My child is at daycare from morning until nighttime. I don't even get to see my baby until after 8 or 9 during the week. All I think about when I'm in class is how's my baby doing and I wish I were with him. In spite of it all, I hope to stay in school, because for me, as a single Hispanic mom, the only way I'm going to make sure my baby has a better life than I did is to get a degree.” - Maria Rodriguez

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