University Studies Assessment Research   University Studies Assessment

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Student Strategies for Success: Perspectives from FRINQ & SINQ Students at Portland State University

Portland State University. University Studies Program

STUDENT STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS: PERSPECTIVES FROM FRINQ & SINQ STUDENTS AT PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

A DATA SUMMARY OF STUDENT STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS DURING THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR.

The following is a summary of the responses received from the University Studies Fall 2021 Prior Learning Survey administered to both Freshman and Sophomore Inquiry Students at the beginning of the Fall 2021 Term.

The survey question asked of students was: "Please tell us something that was helpful to your success as a student last year. This may be a person or service or something you did for yourself."

A total of 776 Freshman Inquiry and 629 sophomore inquiry students provided responses to this question. A random sample of 200 comments were selected from each level and coded to identify common themes.

Responses offered by students contain real-life student strategies for success that could be a valuable resource to instructors and peer mentors.
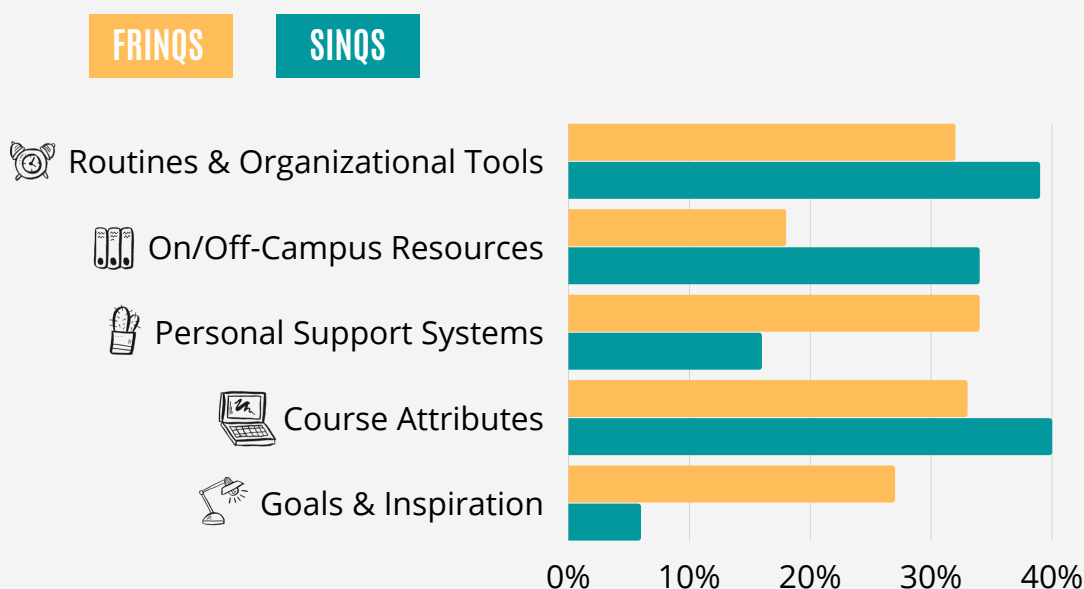
ROUTINES & ORGANIZATIONAL TOOLS

This category contains a rich array of comments about developing personal habits and productive study routines, strategies for staying on-track, and the specific organizational tools that have helped students to do so.

Organizational tools:
- Note taking and review, time management, keeping a planner, time blocking

- Keeping track of assignments: whiteboard, desk notes, Google Sheets, checklists

- Innovative ideas: have an accountability buddy, reorganize D2L/online material, use Canvas App, Google Calendar, and set phone alarms/alerts for due dates and assignments.

Staying on track:
- Stick to a schedule and keep up with work by setting a pace that works for your schedule.

- Mitigate stress and anxiety by not getting overwhelmed

- Develop consistency with planned check-ins with instructor or mentor

- Join discord/group chats to clarify course content with classmates

Personal habits and routine:
- Maintain a school, work, and life balance with positive routines

- When possible, use separate devices for school and day-to-day use, designate study areas inside or out of the home, and limit distractions

- Discuss topics outside of class, form study pods or study groups with peers, make studying pleasant not painful

"I made sure to give myself enough time to complete assignments and tried to treat online school as much as in person school."

"Something that was helpful to my success last year was having a community of peers to work with and blocking out specific times to do my homework."

"Having a schedule and a routine. Finding a safe spot to study and go to school on zoom."

ON/OFF CAMPUS RESOURCES

Students shared the support structures they employ both on and off campus which contribute to their success as students. While many FRINQ students named the advisors and programs that helped them make the transition from high school to college, SINQ comments emphasized academic, financial, and health resources.

- Fellow students, peers, and community
- Advising
- Mental Health Resources

- Academic Programs
- Mentoring
- Tutoring
- Library
- Writing Center

- Women's Resource Center, Queer Resource Center, Disability Resource Center
- PSU Pantry
- GANAS, PSU Challenge Program

PERSONAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Comments in this category dealt with prioritizing mental, emotional, and physical health. Students recognized the power of their relationships with family, friends, and empathetic people in their lives, as well as the importance of taking time for themselves to feel joy and unwind, and advocating for these needs to foster inner well-being.

Relationships:
- Family and friends
- Academic community: studying with peers, making connections and sharing ideas

Prioritizing Personal Health:
- Fun, enjoyment, relaxation
- Exercise: utilizing programs and equipment at the rec center

Advocating for your needs:
- Taking breaks
- Self forgiveness
- Openness and communication
- Managing workload

"Giving myself a lighter course load to not overload myself with work and stress."

"Talking to friends about my struggles because I knew they were also going through the same thing. Trying new things, learning a new language, or making a new recipe. Separating a time where I can just laugh or cry (and allowing myself to actually feel that emotion)."

"I think just being understanding that it's a hard time and being a little forgiving of problems that might happen was pretty important last year."

COURSE ATTRIBUTES

Both FRINQ and SINQ students highlighted various course attributes as factors affecting success in terms of instructor and mentor qualities, the method of instruction, and curriculum organization. Individual responses differ, but the students showed a strong awareness of their own learning preferences.

Instructor/Mentor
- Communicative
- Provides office hours
- Flexible deadlines
- Leniency
- Accommodation
- Supportive
- Patient

Course Methods
- Discussions
- Creative projects
- Organized lectures
- Small study teams
- Frequent reminders
- Frequent breaks
- Extra credit opportunities
- Canvas/D2L organization

Curriculum Organization
- Clarity and organization
- Full schedule available at all times
- Engaging topics
- Zoom recordings
- Multi-tiered classroom design
- Clear expectations
- Rubrics and/or examples for assignments

"Clear instructions, schedules, and due dates from professors on a weekly basis helped me."

"One of the main things that really helped was peer connection, I love doing partner questions where we get to know each other better. Also breaks, my attention span is not what it used to be and having breaks makes it that much harder, I appreciate this class does allow for that."

"Understanding of the mentors and the professors. These are really hard times especially for students specifically online and it is helpful for students to have empathetic educators."

GOALS & INSPIRATION

This final broad category includes a range of comments mentioning goals, perseverance, motivation, role models, along with reflection, self-evaluation, and imagined future selves.

Goals and Challenges
- Perseverance
- Sense of accomplishment
- Short and Long-term goals
- Reassessment of re-orientation of goals

Inspiration and role models
- Friends, family, and peers
- Teachers and administrators
- Cultivating personal interest, creativity, and engagement

Reflection and Self-evaluation
- Self-reflection
- Staying positive and focused
- Patience
- Making connections between academics and real life.

"I tried to maintain a positive outlook of the future which was my main source of motivation. I knew that all the pandemic-related problems would go away, but the hard part is to determine when that would happen."

"Trying to engage in class applying topics taught in class into my life."

"My father is a professor and he's always been a big inspiration to me. I think being patient with yourself and giving yourself enough time for your work is the biggest thing I did/continue to do for myself as a student."