

### Laker Survival Guide: Author Reflection

A freshman's first year of college can take students through a rollercoaster of emotions. There's transitioning, declaring a major, finding your "niche," and gaining a new found independence to name a few. However, for a freshman that not only is a first year student but also a first generation student, there are an overwhelming amount of new obstacles and boundaries a student has to overcome. I resonate with these students dearly as I think back to my own freshman year. It was difficult because I felt so underrepresented. Not only was I a first-generation college student, I was also a nontraditional student. I faced more bridges due to my multiple identities: a commuter, working full-time, english as a second language, low-income, and a full-time honor student. Although I had chosen to attend Grand Valley State University (GVSU) because of my comfort level; due to participating in the GVSU TRIO Upward Bound program for three years while in highschool. I still found myself wanting to drop out of my first semester and it was not because of my academics, it was due to my lack of resources at the time.

Growing up I had always aspired to be a college student one day and earning a degree. However, education was not an opportunity that my parents were fortunate to have while growing up. My mother had merely a middle school education, while my father dropped out his freshman year of high school then years later failed and gave up on earning his GED. My parents were left with working blue collar jobs and little to no knowledge of what an education looked like. I faced many hardships as a child due to language barriers and limited tools yet that never stopped me from finishing middle school and graduating with honors in highschool. I thought my perseverance would continue to help me as I entered college four years ago but I was in for a

rude awakening when I realized college meant throwing everything I threw everything I knew into the trash and starting over again.

Although in high school I had the program TRIO guiding and supporting me, I thought I had the sufficient tools to venture college alone. I came in with the arrogant mind, thinking that I could do this all by myself. I was so prideful in graduating top ten in my class and being accepted to every college I applied to. I thought I was invincible and that college would be a breeze. However, my first semester quickly taught me that college is not like high school. I would come home almost every other day venting and crying to my parents that I did not belong or that I was falling behind. My parents felt awful because they were limited by their knowledge and did not have the resources to better help me. They would tell me the most encouraging words they could give me to help me find comfort and peace, but I still felt alone. I felt like everything I had built previously in highschool crumbled into pieces, I was no longer top ten or felt like I had a support system. I was alone. I walked into every class of mine to find I was the only Latina, or the only student of color. I felt like a zombie, walking around a campus that I had once dreamed of going to, only to feel like maybe I didn't even deserve to be there. Ultimately, I passed all my classes with C's and B's, but I could not get passed the sense of belonging.

It was during winter break that I wanted to make the heartbreaking choice of dropping out of college. I talked it through with my parents and high school friends, who all were supportive of my decision. So when I confronted my high school advisor to share with him the sad news, he asked me, "What are you involved in?" I looked at him and told him that frankly I was a part of two programs and one organization, all of which I never utilized. He then told me, "Why don't you try to become more involved? Attend a few meetings with your organization

and make advising meetings with the program directors and share with them how you feel. Academically, you're okay. You just need to feel like you belong there too. Give it another semester." So the following semester, I did just that. I became more involved with Latino Student Union, TRIO STEM, and Laker Familia.

It wasn't until I utilized my resources that I was able to feel like I belonged and even performed better academically. My advisors in Laker Familia and TRIO STEM helped me sign up for weekly tutoring and an ESL tutor in the writing center. In Laker Familia, I found more students who represented me and understood where I came from. Through Laker Familia events, I was able to find friends who also commuted and English was their second language too. While in TRIO STEM I was surrounded by first generation students, who faced similar challenges as me. This led me to discover so many great resources through attending workshops and connecting with other students. Finally, through Latino Student Union I found my niche. I found myself surrounded by students who knew exactly where I was coming from, I felt like I regained a community who supported me. It was through this student organization that I received information about GVSU and gained the tools to achieve more academically and personally.

My second semester of college changed my perspective and prevented me from wanting to dropout. Had I not had the guidance of my advisors and peers who led me to even greater resources, I am positive that I would have not made it to graduation. So when I was given the opportunity my junior year of being a TRIO Peer Mentor to incoming freshman, I was ecstatic to provide the guidance and tools I gained to prevent another student feeling the same I had my freshman year. I created a mini resource guide with all of the resources that made the largest impact for me, to hand to new students on day one. After much positive feedback from my

mentee's, peers, and supervisors, I was inspired to create a larger resource guide to help students survive their freshman year all the way to their graduation.

Although GVSU does offer a lot of resources, it can still be challenging for students like me, to actually go out and utilize them before we hit rock bottom. My original resource guide grouped everything together into an easy to read and follow flyer. It was less intimidating and more appealing to students who needed more resources other than academics being emphasized. I realized that students were more encouraged to utilize resources when they were presented all together and the details were straight to the point. Despite GVSU already offering their extensive Laker Guide, which offers a long list of resources and information every laker should know. It still feels a little intimidating and lacks awareness on resources for students who share similar identities to mine. Therefore, I knew I wanted to create a more simplified version that attracted more students like me, to fully utilize the resources offered on campus.

Creating my "Laker Survival Guide," has truly been a rewarding experience. I learned a lot about student affairs by sitting down with directors from various offices or departments and gaining a greater understanding about which resources underrepresented students lacked. The common theme of belonging and holistic advising were two things that I found throughout speaking to people all around campus. I noticed that the programs I was involved in helped create a haven, where not only was I represented but felt safe and secure. It also makes an incredible difference in a student's college journey to work with an advisor who just gets it; when it comes to underrepresented student challenges.

Additionally, through my senior project I learned more about what it takes to physically print and compose a book. It's frankly a lot of work and organization of your content. I had

various times where I felt overjoyed because GVSU had so much to offer, but then felt overwhelmed for the same reason. I ultimately decided to use a survey to figure out what resources were underrepresented students were lacking knowledge of. Although my survey was not used for any statistical data, it gave me a more clear understanding of what resources to highlight. I noticed a majority of students knew about the tutoring center but very little knew about the drop-in centers. The survey also helped me gain a better perspective of the various underrepresented students on campus, for example: students who were parents, students who served in the military, students whom english was their second language, to name a few.

The greatest challenges I overcame in creating my “Laker Survival Guide,” was determining the resources that were going to be emphasized and finding a platform to print my guide. GVSU offers so much support to all of their students, it almost feels overwhelming and intimidating the amount of resources available. However, it was difficult at first to determine what resources do underrepresented not recognize? I realized I was bias in only incorporating the many resources I had “discovered” through my time, when perhaps there were even more that I was still unaware of. Also, I realized there were a lot of underrepresented groups I did not identify with that also had their own resources that students could utilize. This is where creating a survey helped. It tremendously in organizing my content and gave me the opportunity to learn the process of going through an IRBS approval. Ultimately, they determined my survey did not require approval since none of my findings were going to be published.

The most time consuming obstacle was finding a platform. After finding all of my information and organizing my content, the real challenge became finding a place to present it. I went through many programs such as GVSU BLUEprint, Adobe Indesign, Canva, Microsoft

Publisher, and Microsoft Word. I kept getting stuck in a deadend. GVSU BLUEprint did not offer a template for books however they did offer a blueprint for brochures, powerpoints, and flyers. Adobe Indesign was very clean software but too time consuming and inaccessible. Canva was easy to navigate but formatting was always a hassle when saved as a PDF or printed. When attempting to use Microsoft programs, I was limited in pages and tools. After weeks of transferring and restarting my content, I found the program “Apple Pages” to be the most accessible and easy to use.

Overall, I hope my guide reaches the hands of many GVSU students and helps them excel academically and personally in their college journey. I created my “Laker Survival Guide,” with the intention of simplifying an understanding of resources for underrepresented students. I hope this guide helps answer similar questions I had without the intimidation of not knowing where to look first.

### Annotated Bibliography

Carter, Prudence L. May 2018, "Education's Limitations and Its Radical Possibilities." *Contexts*, Vol. 17, no. 2, pp. 22–27, doi:10.1177/1536504218776956.

In this article it explained a sociological perspective of how socioeconomic and racial inequality come into play in preventing first generation students from succeeding and graduating from a university.

McCoy, Dorian L. 2014, "A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding First-Generation College Students of Color Transitions to One "Extreme" Predominantly White Institution." *College Student Affairs Journal*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 155-169. *ProQuest*,

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.gvsu.edu/docview/1611000661?accountid=39473>.

This article provided an exploratory research method and I liked how some of the participants voices were included in the research article along with the findings.

Odedina, Folakemi & R. Reams, R & Kaninjing, Ernie & Nguyen, J & Mochona, Bereket & E. Lyon, D & Askins, N & Behar-Horenstein, Linda. (2018). Increasing the Representation of Minority Students in the Biomedical Workforce: the ReTOOL Program. *Journal of Cancer Education*. 1-7. 10.1007/s13187-018-1344-6.

This article provides an explanation of a program called "ReTOOL," I think it provides good methods of how to better support students that are underrepresented and first-generation.

Sarah E.O. Schwartz, Stella S. Kanchewa, Jean E. Rhodes, Evan Cutler, Jessica L. Cunningham. 2016, "“I didn't know you could just ask”: Empowering underrepresented college-bound students to recruit academic and career mentors". *Children and Youth Services Review*, Volume 64, Pages 51-59, ISSN 0190-7409. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.03.001>.

This article provided an explanation as to why underrepresented students struggle so much during their early college years. It found that many students were too afraid to simply ask for help. By not reaching out to utilize their universities resources there was a clear academic decline compared to peers who did ask for help.

Tan, Joseph S., Hurd, Noelle., and Albright, Jaime., Feb. 2019, "Attachment, Appraisal Support, and the Transition to College Among Underrepresented Students." *Emerging Adulthood*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 52–58, doi:10.1177/2167696817745454.

This article explained how underrepresented college students succeed in the classroom by having supportive peers, advisors, and caregivers. The article found that having a secure attachment leads to fewer depressive symptoms.

Tate, Kevin A., Fouad, Nadya., Marks, Laura., Young, Gary., Guzman, Eddie., and Williams, Eric. Aug. 2015, "Underrepresented First-Generation, Low-Income College Students' Pursuit of a Graduate Education: Investigating the Influence of Self-Efficacy, Coping Efficacy, and Family Influence." *Journal of Career Assessment*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 427–441, doi:10.1177/1069072714547498.

Informative article about purpose of why I am creating my booklet. I especially like the statistical data collected because it came from the TRIO McNair program, a program that GVSU's campus also offers.

Tran, Van C. May, 2016. "Social Mobility among Second-Generation Latinos." *Contexts*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 28–33, doi:10.1177/1536504216648148.

Contexts is a peer-reviewed journal from the American Sociological Association where scholars write succinct, engaging articles aimed towards a non-academic audience. In this article it provided a different perspective of socioeconomic limitations that are placed among second-generation latinos compared to their peers in college.

Winograd, Greta, and Jonathan P. Rust. Fall 2014, "Stigma, Awareness of Support Services, and Academic Help-Seeking Among Historically Underrepresented First-Year College Students." *Learning Assistance Review (TLAR)*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 17–41. *EBSCOhost*, [ezproxy.gvsu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ehh&AN=99397597&site=ehost-live&scope=site](http://ezproxy.gvsu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ehh&AN=99397597&site=ehost-live&scope=site).

I thought this was a great article that shared a lot of the implications and barriers that underrepresented students face along with how college support services help bridge students towards a more successful path.

Yee, April. Nov. 2012, "Degree by Default." *Contexts*, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 46–50, doi:10.1177/1536504212466331.

This was an interesting article that really went in-depth with some students not necessary being academically successful because they lacked knowledge of life after highschool. The article talked about how many first-generation students just have the expectation of going to college right after highschool without any true guidance.