



Who is First-Generation?

The term first-generation refers to students who are the first in their families to attend college. More specifically, it means that a student's parents have not earned a bachelor's degree. Students who have siblings in college but whose parents did not earn a bachelor's degree are considered first-generation.

Things to keep in mind while working with First-Gen students:

- Navigating campus can be a struggle
 - Colleges and universities have a distinct language. Think about the names of departments, policies, and acronyms (e.g. Registrar's Office, drop/add, Bursar). First-generation students often feel like they are the "only one" that doesn't know the language. Consider traveling to a country that you don't know the language and how uncomfortable you may feel at first. First-generation students can and do learn the language, just like you would the longer you stay in an unfamiliar environment, but there are still nuances that remain foreign. The language that you use also impacts their confidence in this new and unfamiliar territory.
- Resilience
 - First-generation students are very self-motivated; many of them have had to navigate the college application process, FAFSA, etc. alone, and thus take charge of their own lives and can handle things on their own. They are constantly working hard to ensure their own success. This can sometimes lead to a mentality of "I don't need anyone," when in actuality asking questions is a sign of strength, and not weakness. For that, they are strong people who have overcome challenges and who have the real-world skills to succeed in college. Their resilience, or grit, should be celebrated.
- Trailblazers
 - Being the first in the family to attend college is a big deal. Successful first-generation students are changing the course of their family's future. Siblings, cousins, older family members are often inspired by their success and drive. A distinctive quote from a previous FGSS partner states, "my parents hoped I would attend college. I now expect my children to attend college." We want to encourage first-generation students to see the power and strength in being first.

- Social Capital
 - Think of the people who helped you get where you are in life. Mentors, coaches, teachers, family members, church leaders, etc. Social capital is the concept that the people we're exposed to have an impact. Have you heard that you are the average of the 5 people you spend the most time with? Some first-generation students have had little access to people who have experienced college. However, the same is true that they often talk about that "one caring adult" who went to great lengths to provide guidance in their life and help them realize their potential. For those that are in college, building their personal and professional network is important. We want them to find and connect with that "one caring adult" (hopefully you, their life coach, and more) in college too.
- Imposter Syndrome
 - Research shows that first-generation students often feel like imposters, meaning that they don't really belong in college. Thoughts they may consider:
 - Someone must have made a mistake in Admissions, right?
 - All of my peers are smarter than me. They all have more distinguished parents who make a lot of money.
 - At some point, someone will realize that I don't belong and I'll be asked to leave, right?
- Intersectionality of Identity
 - First-generation students are multifaceted. Many are coming from low-income backgrounds. Many are students of color. The complexities of their identities often create an internal struggle as they navigate UF—they aren't just a first-generation student, they are a first-generation student of color at a predominantly white university. It is incredibly important to see them as a whole student—we cannot simply focus on one part of who they are.
- Survivor's Guilt
 - Many of our students come from low-income communities and experience guilt when they "get out" and come to college. As many transition to UF, they sometimes feel guilty for leaving siblings, families, or community members behind. This survivor guilt can make students feel bad for leaving, when so many others are struggling. Students sometimes feel that they don't deserve to be at UF when so many others they know cannot be here. This is often exasperated when preparing to graduate and go back home.

What should you do if you haven't heard from the student you are working with?

- First, reach out to see if there is anything you can do to support them
- If no response, reach out to Taylor and/or the First-Generation Student Success Office at 352-392-1265