



TIPS FOR ADVISING FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS AT UNK

First-Generation Student Facts:

A first-generation student is one whose parents have not completed a four-year degree.

1. Approximately 4 in 10 undergraduate students enrolled at UNK are first-generation college students.
2. Nationally, first-generation students participate in organizations, undergraduate research, paid internships, and study abroad at lower percentages than continuing-generation students (<https://firstgen.naspa.org/files/dmfile/FactSheet-021.pdf>); thus, explanations and encouragement from faculty about engagement and experiential learning are essential.
3. UNK is a First-Gen Forward Institution, recognized and supported by the NASPA Center for First-Generation Student Success; this designation recognizes higher education institutions that demonstrate a commitment to improving student experiences and advancing outcomes for first-generation students.

Tips for Advising First-Generation Students:

- Understand first-generation college students may have obstacles when attending college:
 - Limited access to information about the college experience.
 - Lack of experience with college finances and budgeting.
 - Support from home and/or family may or may not be present.
 - Conflicts may exist between the home and college environment.
 - Susceptibility to doubts about academic abilities.
 - Perception that they are not “college material” and thus have decreased motivation to try.
 - Struggle to maintain balance between work, family, and school.
 - The feeling of isolation with limited support from parents and peers.

Reference: <https://first.wsu.edu/define-first-gen/>

- Acknowledge first-generation students may experience information scarcity, which is caused by lack of mentoring at home and at school. Students are less likely to seek help if they are not prepared to do so.

Reference: <https://www.carleton.edu/provost/advising/other-services/first-gen-challenges/>

- Ask the student if they have any responsibilities outside of school that will affect their course load.
- Be aware of times students need to work and/or have other commitments when selecting classes and meeting times.

Tips for Building Relationships with First-Generation Students as an Advisor:

- Proactively communicate with your students. Send them information about your availability, how to schedule meetings, and how to sign up for advising when it is time for students to be advised for the next term.
- Ask the student about themselves (hometown, interests, etc.), including their experiences with higher education and how their transition to college has been. This may lead them to disclose if they are first-generation students.
- Share some information about yourself and your role on campus. If you were a first-generation student, share this with them.
- Highlight career goals, academic goals, expectations, and future plans in your first advising meeting with the student. Inquire about why they chose their major and gauge their understanding of the degree plan.

Reference: <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/Empowering-First-Generation-Students-Through-Personal-Experience-and-Intrusive-Advising.aspx>

- Connect and share campus organizations with students to build family/community.

Reference: <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/Empowering-First-Generation-Students-Through-Personal-Experience-and-Intrusive-Advising.aspx>

- Empower students to see their value and understand they belong in a university setting. Positive affirmation is crucial.

Tips for Helping First-Generation Students Navigate College as an Advisor:

- Ask students if they have a certain number of credit hours they must take each semester for a scholarship, learning community, organization, and/or athletic requirements.
- Do not make assumptions that students know how academia works. Provide context that allows students to make informed decisions.
- Explain the definition of a credit hour and how it relates to outside-of-the-classroom preparation. This would be a good time to discuss the difference between a 12- & 15-hour credit load. It's also helpful to explain what credit hours are required each semester to maintain a 4-year graduation pace.
- Welcome questions and regularly ask the student what questions they have. Many students are afraid to interject for fear that they should "already know" the answers.
- Avoid acronyms, institutional jargon, or "short cuts" when describing the physical surrounding or buildings, requirements, or other university administrative processes. Phrases and words that are familiar to us may be particularly confusing for our first-gen students. UNK Glossary: <https://www.unk.edu/glossary.php>

Reference: <https://first.wsu.edu/define-first-gen/>

- Inform students about campus resources like the Learning Commons, office hours, TRIO, and Disability Services for Students (if applicable) to promote academic success.
- Connect students with financial literacy programs and make them aware they must be a full-time student for grant aid and most scholarship aid unless they have spoken with Financial Aid about accommodations.
- Explain potential career options related to the student's program of study.

Reference: <https://pennfirstplus.upenn.edu/for-faculty-and-staff/>

- Send regular communications about deadlines, procedures, and other essential information.
- Advise the student to seek a senior check two semesters before graduation.

REFERENCED WEBSITES:

Understanding the Challenges of First-Gen Students: <https://www.carleton.edu/provost/advising/other-services/first-gen-challenges/>

Define First-Generation Students: <https://first.wsu.edu/define-first-gen/>

Empowering First Generation Students Through Personal Experience and Intrusive Advising: <https://nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/Empowering-First-Generation-Students-Through-Personal-Experience-and-Intrusive-Advising.aspx>

Advising Resources – Penn First Plus: <https://pennfirstplus.upenn.edu/for-faculty-and-staff/>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Promoting At-Promise Student Success: <https://pass.pullias.usc.edu/>
<https://pass.pullias.usc.edu/practice/>

For more information about First Gen Lopers at UNK, visit: <https://www.unk.edu/firstgen/index.php>

Prepared by: Suzanne Exstrom, Academic and Career Advisor and Ashley Olivas, TRIO SSS Senior Advisor

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