

## 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 Working with First-Generation Students:

- Use an asset-based perspective in working with first-gen students; they bring diverse experiences, strengths, and perspectives to our campus community.
- Acknowledge their strengths. They are trailblazers at UNK using talents and skills such as their aspirations, resilience, and dedication to their family and future.
- Understand that first-gen students can face different barriers and pressures than other college students. Proactive support and outreach can be essential to helping these students overcome challenges such as:
  - Imposter Syndrome: They may feel like outsiders who do not belong in college.
  - Difficulty Prioritizing: They may need help understanding what is important or a priority in the higher education environment.
  - Family Pressures: They may have responsibilities at home like caring for siblings, managing health care situations, or translating. Family members may or may not be supportive of students attending college.
  - Cultural Expectations: Students may feel pressure about their ability to follow cultural norms when they are attending college; collegiate priorities/norms do not always align with cultural expectations.
  - Financial Barriers: They may work more hours, maybe full-time or overnight, to pay for college. Some students assist their families with finances using their loan checks/refunds.
  - Pressure to be Involved: Students may want to be active on campus, but may also experience limitations on their ability to do so; others may need help learning how to get involved because life before college didn't allow them to be involved in activities.
  - Other Barriers: They may have obstacles in their academic experience that impact their ability to engage or participate, like not having a car or driver's license, no access to loans, or commuting to campus.
  - Pressure to Succeed: They may feel additional pressure to achieve academically, graduate, and reach financial stability.
- Be flexible as these students learn the rules and expectations of higher education. Recognize that students experience campus policies, procedures, and systems differently depending on their circumstances (transfer student, commuting student, student is an English language learner, etc.)
- Validate what each student is doing well in class, on campus, and in the community.
- Recognize that even as first-gen students experience successes in college, mistakes or failures can weigh heavily on them; make time to help them talk through challenges, face issues, and encourage them that they belong in college.

## Tips for Building Relationships with First-Generation Students:

- Make your office/department welcoming and safe for students to be their authentic selves; communicate that students are welcome in your space and invite them to share about themselves so they know you care about them as people.
- Share about yourself – your name, title, if you are first-gen, role on campus, preferred method of

communication. Since students do not always know the difference between faculty and staff, make clear in your interaction how you can help them through your role.

- Learn students' names, pronunciations, and pronouns to show you value them; if possible, memorize their faces and names so that they are "known" when you interact with them.
- Give students your full attention when interacting; work to use their names and show that their questions or concerns are important as you support their needs.
- Treat any disclosures with respect and confidentiality (unless mandated to report) to build trusting relationships with students; refer the students to CARE team if you feel you may need additional or specialized support. Reference: [https://www.unk.edu/student\\_affairs/care-team.php](https://www.unk.edu/student_affairs/care-team.php)
- If relevant to your position/department, use social media and marketing to connect with students and demonstrate how your efforts are student-centered.

## **Tips for Helping First-Generation Students Navigate College:**

- If possible, reach out to make a first connection; these students are often nervous about asking for help.
- When a student comes to you for assistance, ask exploratory questions to get to the full picture of the student's request/needs, and then patiently give them the details needed, being mindful that students may need explanations about processes, policies, forms, locations or other campus terminology.
  - Avoid using institutional jargon or acronyms that can be confusing to students.
  - Use this glossary as a tool to help students who are learning higher education terms: <https://www.unk.edu/glossary.php>
- Ensure the student understands the next steps before ending an interaction, or before handing them off to another person or department.
  - If they seem uncertain or show hesitant non-verbals about the next steps, check for understanding by having them repeat back to you the steps you have identified. Write it down or have them make notes.
  - Assist students with making connections to specific faculty/staff through phone calls, emails, or walking students to the next location needed. You can help them eliminate barriers or obstacles through your own campus relationships and connections.
  - Make a note in your calendar to follow-up with a student if needed. Following-up with a student shows you value them as UNK students.
- Familiarize yourself with resources at UNK available for First-Generation Students to make referrals.
- Know that they will have questions about navigating college over several years, not just when they are new to UNK.
- Maintain your department website with appropriate contact information, deadlines, descriptions, staff directory, etc. Use language that is simple for students to understand and to seek assistance.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

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

Student Experience Project: <https://studentexperienceproject.org/>

NASPA Center for First-Generation Student Success: An Annotated Bibliography of First Generation College Student Research From 2008-2019: [https://firstgen.naspa.org/files/dmfile/NASPA\\_AnnotatedBibliography\\_landscape\\_Final\\_11.pdf](https://firstgen.naspa.org/files/dmfile/NASPA_AnnotatedBibliography_landscape_Final_11.pdf)

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

Prepared by: Olivia Whittaker, Assistant Registrar Academic Support Services and Jennifer Harvey, Director, Thompson Scholars Learning Community

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