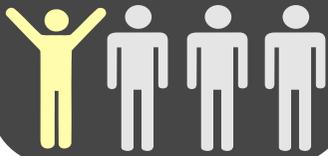


The University of Iowa's First-Generation Student Narrative

Why does being a first-generation college student matter?

About one in four UI undergraduates is a first-generation college student.



The entering academic profile of first-generation students is comparable to the profile of continuing generation students in terms of ACT and high school GPA...

Despite this, first-generation students as a group have lower rates of persistence and college completion.



What does "first-generation" mean?

At the University of Iowa, first-generation students are those students who do not have a parent(s) or legal guardian(s) who completed a four-year degree.

Compared to their continuing generation peers, first-generation students may face a unique set of challenges in college and often benefit from additional support- especially from faculty and staff who are aware of these challenges and dedicated to helping first-generation students succeed.

Many students are unaware they're first-generation or may not wish to divulge this identity to their peers.

First-Gen students often (but not always) lack:

College Knowledge

Financial Resources

Social & Cultural Capital

First-generation students are more likely to be confident in their financial literacy skills, demonstrate high amounts of resiliency and grit, bring numerous accomplishments and unique experiences to college, and are particularly skilled at navigating systems, especially when given tools needed to do so.

However, on average, first generation students also miss class more often, participate less in class, take fewer good notes, and spend less time reviewing and preparing for class.

In Their Own Words

Insightful personal reflections have emerged from scholarly work and interviews with some UI first-generation students.

Because first-generation students come from a variety of diverse backgrounds, they don't all share one single characteristic that defines their collegiate experience. However, the following reflections provide insight on some of their commonalities.

Family Impact is Complicated

Many students report coming from a tight-knit family that is very encouraging and supportive. Students are often highly motivated to make their families proud, live up to their expectations, and find ways to give back to their communities.

Family expectations can also create a lot of pressure. Family members don't have first-hand experience in areas where help is often needed (such as financial aid or balancing work and academics) and some families are unaware of their student's level of collegiate responsibilities or obligations.

Developing Study Skills

"Professors look at you funny when you ask questions or tell them you don't know how to study."

Help-Seeking Behaviors

"The stigma of asking for help is real!"

Career Aspirations

"You're the first ...
Go big or go home ...
Be a doctor, lawyer, etc."

Celebrate Being a 1stGen@Iowa!

Many students are proud of being a first-generation student and want to celebrate and support others who hold this identity on campus.

Ways to Make a Difference

A few strategies to support first-generation students are highlighted below. Visit <https://firstgen.uiowa.edu> for more.

- Language matters- demystify higher ed for your students. For example, don't say, "Come to my office hours." Instead, explain what these are or consider referring to them as "drop in hours."
- Refrain from using too many confusing acronyms or terms that are specific to your discipline or higher education in general without providing context and clarification.
- Share with students how you expect or want to be addressed and ask them about their preferences as well. If you were a first-generation student, share this with them too!
- Emphasize the importance of seeking help and give examples of help-seeking behavior; point out that students who ask for help are taking steps to be successful in college.
- Lean into your students. If something seems "off" or is worrisome, reach out to the student or connect them with campus resources. See <https://uc.uiowa.edu/student-success/report-student-concern>
- Model and share reading strategies from your field and demonstrate note-taking strategies that work best for your approach to teaching.
- Remind students to approach learning from a growth mindset- that they may not be able to do something...yet, and that with continued practice and academic skill-building, they can reach their goals.
- A sense of belonging and knowing that every person matters is imperative to all students' success. Create inclusive classrooms and learning spaces, embrace diversity in all forms, design and teach courses that foster talent in all of your students, and do not allow microaggressions or other forms of harassment to go unchallenged.