

Ways to Make a Difference

An introduction to first-generation students at The University of Iowa and strategies to help them succeed

Resource for UI staff and faculty/instructors provided by the UI First-Generation Task Force
Visit: firstgen.uiowa.edu



What does "first-generation" mean?

At the University of Iowa, first-gen students are those students who do not have a parent or legal guardian who completed a 4-year degree.

Approximately 1 in 5 undergraduates at the University of Iowa identifies as first-gen

Many students are unaware they're first-gen students or may not wish to disclose this identity to their peers

The academic profiles of first-gen students is comparable to their peers in terms of average high school GPA and ACT scores. Despite this, first-gen students, on average, have lower rates of persistence and college completion.

Sometimes first-gen students may lack...

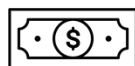


College Knowledge

Social & Cultural Capital



Financial Resources



Intersections in family and academics can be complex...

Many students report having a 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. However, family expectations can also create a lot of pressure, families have less first-hand experience navigating college, and some families are not aware of a student's level of collegiate responsibilities or obligations.

First-gen students bring assets to college...

First-gen students are more likely to be confident in their financial literacy skills, demonstrate high amounts of resiliency and grit, bring unique experiences and accomplishments to college, and are particularly skilled at navigating systems. On average, UI first-gen students also report higher frequencies of attending class regularly, taking notes, and doing readings before class. However, first-gen students may also have more family or work obligations that make it difficult to engage in these activities.



UI first-gen students have told us...

Some fear asking for help "The stigma of asking for help is real!"

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

They're often told by family "You're the first, go big or go home ... Be a doctor, lawyer, etc."

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

Ways to Make a Difference

Visit firstgen.uiowa.edu for additional strategies and resources to support first-gen students

- Lean into your students. If something seems "off" or is worrisome, reach out to the student or connect them with campus resources.
- 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. 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
- 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 behaviors; point out that students who ask for help are taking steps to be successful in college, which is good!