FIRST-GENERATION LEARNINGS FROM THE FRONT LINES

First-generation students make up a third of all college students, but only 27% will attain their degrees within four years. Below are practical insights and recommendations four-year institutions can implement to improve first-generation student success and completion.

**COMMON CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED**

- Lack of alignment on what programs need to achieve
- Inconsistent, disjointed, and reactive student support
- Lack of consistent student data and insight
- Resource constraints

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**Approaches to Address Common Challenges**

**APPOINT A PRIMARY ADVOCATE**

Identifying an advocate with visibility and influence to convene stakeholders and advance concerns to leadership is a key early step. This person is critical in convening colleagues to advance institutional support and commitment.

**TRACK PRE-MATRICULATION THROUGH POST-COMPLETION STUDENT DATA**

Many institutions lack consistent processes to collect, analyze, and share data which can foster reporting deficits, confound institutional comparisons, and lead to programs and services that lack informed basis.

| My institution is identifying first-generation students in the admissions process | 9% | 80% | 12% |
| My institution is tracking success data about first-generation students | 17% | 61% | 22% |
| My institution uses data to inform decisions about institutional offerings for first-generation students | 27% | 41% | 33% |
| My institution identifies first-generation students in the student information system/student record for use by faculty/staff | 48% | 28% | 24% |

Figures add to 101% due to rounding.
**PROACTIVELY SET THE INSTITUTION AND PROGRAM VISION AND OBJECTIVES**

To avoid launching first-generation programs with tight timelines, limited support, and minimal planning, institutions must first align on how success is defined (beyond a singular focus on retention) and the resources required.

**UNDERSTAND THE REACH AND GAPS OF EXISTING RESOURCES**

Housing programs within different offices makes it challenging for students to navigate. Surfacing existing resources enables practitioners to glean a better understanding of service gaps, and prioritizing data-tracking enables them to put evidence-based practices to use.

**CONSIDER FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES AND INCREASE ROI**

To overcome financial and human resource constraints, institutions can reduce the cost of advising through alternative programs (e.g. peer and alumni mentoring), source additional funding (e.g. first-generation donors), share costs through partnerships, and leverage technology. This enables them to put evidence-based practices to use.

**BUILD AND SUSTAIN AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY**

Bringing together faculty, staff, students, university leaders, families, first-generation alumni, community members, and stakeholders creates a community that can be leveraged to advocate for first-generation students and connect them to resources.

Visit firstgen.naspa.org to download our Landscape Analysis of First-generation Programs and Services at Four-Year Institutions.

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1 Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018; Skomsvold, 2015