



Engaging Families of First Generation Students in the College Experience

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Overview

- Institutional and departmental background
- Our perspective and philosophy on assisting first-generation college students (FGCS) and their families
- Steps taken to assist FGCS and their families

Institutional Background

MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

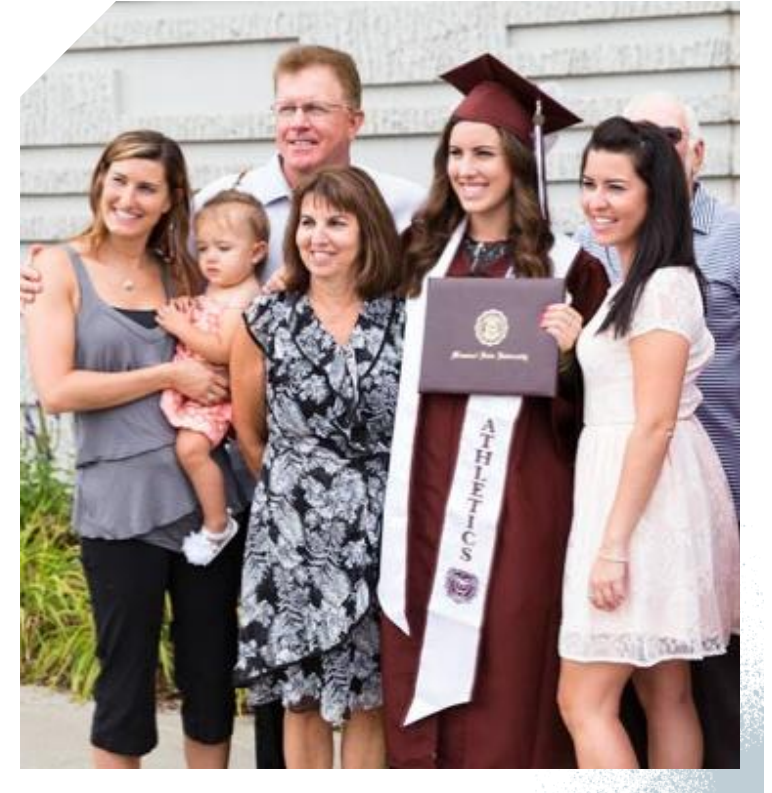
- Public, 4-year institution offering undergraduate and graduate programs
- Mission in public affairs
- More than 20,000 undergraduate students
 - 18% are from underrepresented categories
- Approx. 35% of student body is FGCS



Departmental Background

NEW STUDENT AND FAMILY PROGRAMS

- Provides orientation and transition programs for new students and their family members
- Serves thousands through programs like:
 - SOAR
 - Ursa Experience
 - Parent & Family Programs



Perspective

- Conversations about FGCS support began in early 2015
 - Cemented by inclusion in the President's 2015-16 Major Goals
- NSFP has a key role in accomplishing this goal
 - Our question: *How can we better prepare FGCS for success, and how can we leverage families to support them?*



FGCS Familial Support

“A study published in the *Journal of College Student Retention in 2012* found that FGCS receive far less emotional, informational, and financial support from their parents than continuing-generation student.

That’s not to say the parents are uncaring or don’t want their children to succeed. In many cases, the parents want to be involved, [Curtis] Washburn said, but they are not sure what level of involvement is appropriate and what advice to provide.

In other cases, he said, parents may not understand the value of college, even encouraging students to drop out so they can more immediately help support the family” (New, 2014).



Philosophy

UNIVERSAL DESIGN

- “The design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.” (NDA, 2014)
- Adapted for our purposes of orienting students and family members to university life



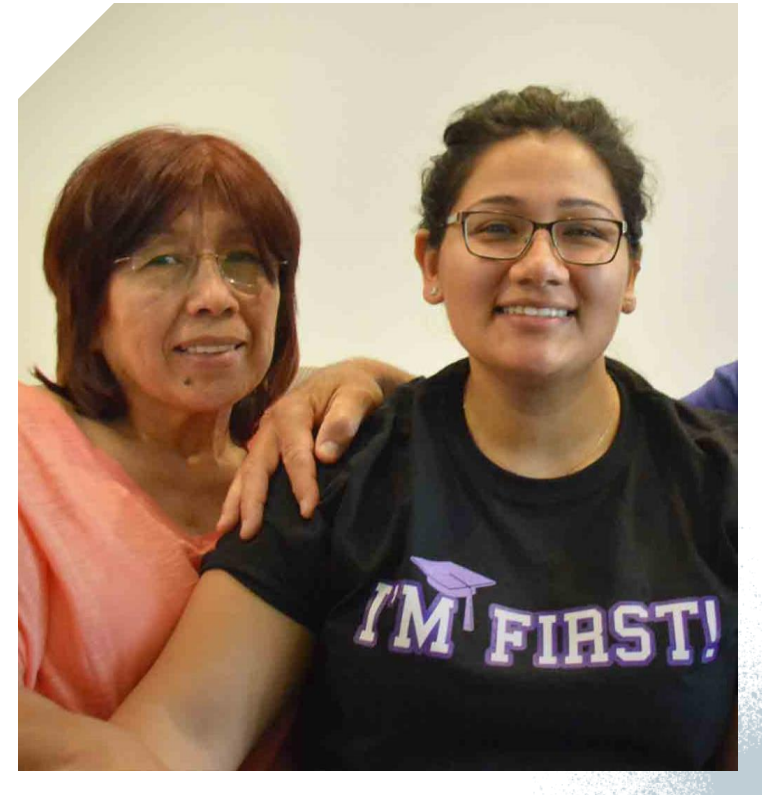
Why Support FGCS' Families?

- Family members have no personal experience on which to draw
- FGCS rely on family support
 - 46% reported wanting to please their family as a “very important” motivation for pursuing a degree (Eagan et al, 2017)



Types of First-Generation Family Members

- The Hand Holder
- The Unavailable Parent
- The Happy Medium





Strategies for Engaging FGCS Families

- Begin early in the admissions process
 - Welcome families to the institution
 - Explain orientation programs and why family attendance is important
 - Offer clear, direct instructions on steps students should take to prepare for college



Strategies for Engaging FGCS Families

- Introduce the University to your families
 - Showcase departments, particularly interesting or lesser-known ones
 - Spotlight first-gen students
 - Assume all families have no knowledge of higher education
 - Clearly define campus lingo and limit university jargon



Strategies for Engaging FGCS Families

- Reassure family members that...
 - Not knowing the answers is okay—resources are here to assist them.
 - Attending college is a learning and transition process for them and their student.
 - Higher education will not replace values student was raised with.



Strategies for Engaging FGCS Families

- Practical advice for family members
 - Encourage your student to reach out to faculty and staff for help.
 - Don't panic if your student does not call every day or come home every weekend.
 - Help your student set and focus on priorities (and minimize distractions).
 - Familial encouragement is a large influence on student success. Cheer them on!



NSFP's Engagement of FGCS Families

HOW DO WE KEEP FAMILIES INVOLVED?

MSU I'M FIRST

Partner with this student organization to share spotlights and encourage membership

BEAR NOTES

Include a first-generation column in this monthly e-newsletter

WEBSITE

Regularly review and update website to include resources

ASSESSMENT

Survey FGCS and their families to determine engagement, needs, etc.

COLLABORATION

Create programming for families in partnership with other departments

PUBLICATIONS

Regularly review and revise to ensure they are “first-gen friendly”



Works cited

Eagan, M. K., Stolzenberg, E. B., Zimmerman, H. B., Aragon, M. C., Whang Sayson, H., & Rios-Aguilar, C. (2017). *The American freshman: National norms fall 2016*. Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

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