

Improving First-Generation Student Success with Instructional and Advising Pathways

37th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience

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Session Overview

- Why first-generation student success matters
- Missouri State profile & first-generation student characteristics
- Two programs to increase first-gen student success
 - Instructional approach – GEP 101: First-Year Foundations course
 - Advising approach – Proactive advisor training
- Lessons learned
 - Developing your own action plan
- Q & A

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2018 First Year Experience Conference 2

Why First-Gen Success Matters at Missouri State

- 1. Student Success** – As a **top priority**, student success “is at the center of the long-range plan (2016-21) and is the primary reason for the programs, initiatives and goals develop within this plan.”
 - **Shrinking state support** for public four-year universities
 - **Performance Funding Model** measures include recruitment, retention & graduation rates
- 2. New Economic Reality** –
 - FGS experience on average **10% lower retention/graduation rates** than NFGS
- 3. 1/3rd of all undergrads** at Missouri State are First-Gen students
 - FGS experience on average **10% lower retention/graduation rates** than NFGS
- 4. Social Justice** – college degree remains critical to achieving economic security and social mobility in America

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National Social Justice Issue: Chance of Success for Low Income Students

Common Perception: College is a meritocracy.

Reality: 10% of low income students earn a BA by age 25 vs. 50% of high-income students

College Graduation Rates by Income and Test Scores:		
Income Level	Below-Ave Test scores	Above-Ave Test Scores
Richest	30%	70%
Upper Middle	19%	50%
Bottom Middle	9%	39%
Poorest	6%	26%

Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America's Public Universities. Princeton University Press, 2011.

Narrowing the graduation gap is less about achievement and more about providing all students with the resources they need to succeed.

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Only 20% First Gen students earn a bachelors by age 25.
2017 US Dept. of Education's Institute of Education Sciences.

Missouri State Profile

FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS



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University Profile

Founded in 1905, Missouri State is a:

- **Public, comprehensive university** offering undergrad and grad programs with the home campus located in Springfield, MO.
- **State-wide mission in public affairs** designed to develop fully educated citizens with a focus on ethical leadership, cultural competence, and community engagement.
- **Second largest university in MO – 26,000+ students system-wide**
 - 1/3rd of undergrads are First-Generation students
 - 1/3rd of undergrads are Pell eligible (vs. 50% of all 1st Gen students)

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First Gen at Missouri State

Missouri State defines first-generation students (FGS) as: *neither parent earned a four-year degree.*

In 2014, President Cliff Smart expressed concern for first-generation student success at Missouri State. We began reporting and sharing first-generation data.

F'2017 Enrollment Picture: Springfield campus
21,351 students

17,906 Undergraduate + 3,445 Graduate students
3184 First-time-new-in-college students (IPEDS 2017)
34.2% (1088) First-Gen
31.5% (1004) Pell eligible
14.7% (467) Underrepresented students
98.2% (3128) Full-time



2017 Data Analysis (similar to 2015 & 2016 data)

1. **Academic Preparation: Similar** for First-Gen & Non First-Gen Students enrolling at Missouri State: *(situation differs from national norms)*

2017 Data	Non First-Generation	Difference	First-Generation
ACT Average	24.27	0.98	23.29
High School GPA	3.66	0.06	3.60
Class Rank – top 50%	84.3%	1.1%	83.2%

2. **First-Gen Demographics** – differ in 3 significant ways:

Fall 2017 First-Time New in College (3184 students)	Non First-Generation (2,096 students)	Difference	First-Generation (1,088 students = 34.2%)
Pell Eligible	21.5%	29.9%	51.4%
Ethnicity – Underrepresented	12.1%	6.5%	19.6%
Live Off Campus	13.2%	5.9%	19.1%



Student Success Data – 3-year comparison

3. **Retention – Fall to Fall, First-Time New Students** (Springfield campus)

Retention Fall to Fall (IPEDS Cohorts)	University	Non First-Gen Students	First-Gen Students	% Difference FGS v. NFGS
2016-2017 (3191)	76.84%	82.40%	68.94%	-13.46%
2015-2016 (3243)	78.63%	82.77%	72.16%	-10.61%
2014-2015 (2993)	77.55%	81.07%	72.10%	-8.97%

4. **Six-Year Graduation Rates** – First-Time & New Transfer, Full-time Fall Cohort

6-Year Grad Rates	University	Non First-Gen Students	First-Gen Students	% Difference FGS v. NFGS
2011 Cohort (F2011-S17)	56.95%	62.42%	50.75%	-11.67%
2010 Cohort (F2010-S16)	56.67%	59.89%	49.96%	-9.93%
2009 Cohort (F2009-S15)	55.35%	60.36%	48.20%	-12.16%



What We've Learned...

Missouri State's first-generation students **arrive academically prepared**, but experience **significantly lower retention and graduation rates**.

Conclusion: Our first-gen students **need other resources to succeed at similar rates**.

- **Information** – social capital related to college experience
- **Proactive Contact** – via advisors, RA's, student peers
- **Increased Engagement** – on campus and in community
- **Additional Resources** – financial and social



Two Sustainable Programs to Address First-Gen Success



#1: Institutional Approach

GEP 101: FIRST-YEAR FOUNDATIONS





GEP 101: First-Year Foundations

- GEP 101 is a required first year seminar course that all first-time new in college students take in the fall.
 - 2 credit hours
 - 3 course goals (academic skill building, university mission, campus connections)
- A new focus on first generation student needs at Missouri State in 2014 resulted in a course redesign for some sections of GEP 101.



GEP 101: First-Year Foundations

SUPPORTING FIRST GENs THROUGH DEDICATED COLLEGE SECTIONS

- **Goal:** Improve overall retention rate and experience of first generation college students.
- **Fall 2014 through Fall 2017:** First-time, new in college First-Gen students enrolled in designated "first-gen by college" or "college specific" GEP 101 sections.
 - Sections organized by college of major (plus 2 undecided first-gen sections)
 - Students self-selected into these sections during freshmen orientation
- Students surveyed 2-3 times during fall semester about experience and intentions to stay at Missouri State



First-Generation Student Pilot Results

GEP 101 FIRST YEAR FOUNDATIONS

Retention by type of GEP 101 Section	F'13 to F'14 (no special sections)	FALL 14-15 1 st year Pilot	FALL 15-16 2 nd year Pilot	Fall 16-17 3 rd year Pilot
First-Generation Sections	64.6% (across all sections)	72% (224 enrolled)	80.6% (176 enrolled)	74.6% (319 enrolled)
College Specific Sections	No Sections	No Sections	78.4% (144 enrolled)	77.7% (220 enrolled)
All Other Standard GEP101 Sections	71.2% (2566 enrolled)	77% (2275 enrolled)	76.5% (2594 enrolled)	74.6% (2318 enrolled)
Retention Gap -- First-Gen Students	-6.6%	-5%	+4%	0%



GEP 101 Initiative: Conclusions

- The results are compelling -- designated sections of GEP 101 with trained faculty make a difference in student retention to the 2nd and 3rd years.
 - We will continue this program and increase the number of designated sections.
- **Goal:** Focus all students on transitioning to college, helping them succeed in their first semester (e.g. college jargon, talking with family/friends about ups and downs, financial literacy) and being a caring resource for information.



GEP 101 Initiative: Conclusions

- We continue to develop more ways to support first-generation students and for the university to be leaders in this area.
 - Fall 2017 Missouri State hosted a conference on best practices in first-generation student programming and advising.
- Attending to financial aid is important.
 - Scholarship workshops
 - First-generation student fund



#2: Proactive Advising

ADVISING FOR RETENTION AND STUDENT SUCCESS





Approach Matters

Proactive Advising involves:

Advising for Student Success

vs.

Advising for Course Selection & Registration Release

Assumptions: 1) First-gen students are a rich resource, not a liability.*

- 2) Students with lower success rates will benefit from:
 - proactive interaction
 - additional information
 - informed advisors committed to their academic success

Goals: increase retention and graduation rates, & close success gaps between first-gen and non first-gen, and underrepresented students.



Proactive Advising Approach

INVOLVES GIVING STUDENTS WHAT THEY NEED BEFORE THEY KNOW THEY NEED IT

- **Focus** is on **intentional/proactive contact** with advisees to address issues & problems early and recommend appropriate interventions.
 - **Contact initiated by advisor** rather than student – especially at critical periods.
- **Building relationships** akin to **professional mentors**.
 - Approach shown to improve retention/graduation rates
 - Preferred by many students, esp. high achieving or at-risk students
- **Active concern, not handholding**.
 - Involves a willingness to provide info & connect students to campus services to improve skills and increase academic motivation.



Proactive Advising Strategies:

1. **Connect early (& regularly)** – explain advisor's role – be available
2. **Employ various communication channels** (text, emails, twitter, Facebook, phone)
3. **Proactively monitor advisee progress – develop early warning indicators** (ACT & BSSE survey info, mid-term & final grades, registration status, etc.)
4. **Identify available campus resources** (know who to refer students to for help)
5. **Get trained** in other relevant academic/non-academic areas – financial aid, scholarship process, FAFSA prep, career services, counseling, community resources, etc.
6. **Connect with advisees in and outside office** – be caring, be honest, be positive, and maintain clear professional boundaries



COAL Proactive Advising

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

- **117 new first-time students selected** (35% all new COAL students)
 - 100 First-Gen = 85.5% of the group
 - 26 Underrepresented = 22.2% of the group (AA/Hispanic/Am.Indian)
- **8 Faculty advisors recruited** – some new, some experienced
- **Three 2-hour workshops delivered** during the first month of semester around three themes:
 - Rationale for and benefits of a proactive advising approach
 - Proactive advising strategies and methods
 - Introduction to key campus resources and personnel



Fall to Spring Retention Data Comparison

IPEDS First-Time New in College Students (full + part time students on Springfield campus)

Comparative Retention Rates	F15 to S16	F16 to S17	F17 to S18
Missouri State	90.0% (3,242 students)	89.2% (3,184 students)	88.8% (3,259 students)
Missouri State - First-Gen	85.4% (1,132 students)	85.0% (1,132 students)	87.1% (1,104 students)
College of Arts & Letters	90.1% (394 students)	90.1% (363 students)	91.5% (339 students)
COAL - First-Gen students	85.5% (124 students)	87.5% (112 students)	89.7% (117 students)
GEP 101	88.7% (270 students)	88.4% (267 students)	89.1% (257 students)
GEP 101 - First-Gen Sections	92.0% (175 students)	85.7% (319 students)	88.9% (305 students)
COAL Proactive Advising Cohort (1-Gen + underrepresented students)	N/A	N/A	88.3% (104/117 students)
COAL Proactive Advising - First-Gen Students	N/A	N/A	91.0% (89/100 students)

Original Retention, Retention & Persistence Report OLAProbe - IPEDS cohorts



Proactive Advisor Insights

QUALITATIVE IMPACT: IN PERCEPTION AND APPROACH

At the outset, most of the 8 proactive advisors expressed concerns about the initiative. By the end, they universally agreed that the new approach brought many benefits for themselves as well as for their advisees:

- "The proactive approach is allowing me to connect with students in a deeper and more meaningful way than traditional advising methods. It may take a little more of my time, but if that extra attention and care can help a first generation student get acclimated to college & get excited about their experience in higher ed, it is worth every second given to it."
- "The proactive advising approach worked really well with who I am as an educator already; it allows me to know my students on a more personal level. I have found this makes me a much better teacher. The proactive advising approach...has made these students incredibly comfortable seeking me out for a range of issues over the last semester. I know how important having that point of contact is for them, especially since they're not in major classes to start."
- "Proactive advising has allowed me to advise the whole person instead of just completing a degree program. This includes recommending campus resources for mental and physical health, tutoring, etc. It is rewarding to have independent first-generation students who really want to be here and are used to doing things for themselves rather than many other students with "helicopter parents" who have done everything for them."



Proactive Advisor Insights

QUALITATIVE IMPACT: FACULTY CHANGES

- My experience as a proactive advisor has been completely positive... I have learned, as an advisor, how to better “read” students and interpret their insecurities of being successful students. One of the biggest lessons I’ve learned about these students is that they enter college with a perception of what college should be. A mix of their own thoughts, popular movies and TV, and peers help create an expectation that does not always include interacting with their advisor. With that knowledge, I now understand how important it is for me to help break down those perceptions and introduce them to the reality that is their true college experience.
- I have always tried to take the first step in reaching out to all my advisees, and when meeting with them to go beyond just scheduling and program planning. Proactive advising gave a name to what I hoped I was doing anyway, and provided some solid research and rationale to support advising in this way. It also showed me other areas of students’ lives to be aware of and provided great strategies for approaching students in a way that is not threatening to them but allows them to open up and share more about what they need.
- The proactive advising experiment has really given me a reminder of where a person is at 18, to remember how not just academic life is new but everything else about being an adult. At first I thought this kind of advising might be too much, but now I wish we had the time and resources to provide this amount of guidance and one-on-one contact to every freshman and transfer student. The relationships I’ve formed with these brand new students are deeper and far broader than those I’ve had with my regular advisees who skitter in and out twice a year – I feel like I know who they are better and have a better sense of what’s they’re going through, holistically, rather than just checking off requirements on a worksheet.



First-Gen Lessons Learned



Big Takeaways

- **Accurate data help greatly**
 - Provide the need for and impetus to get initiatives started on campus
 - Determine impact of initiatives
 - Indicate changes needed to make initiatives work better over time
- **Hard to connect with first-gen students – especially initially**
 - Students often don’t identify themselves as first-generation (or even know what this term means)
 - Don’t know what to ask or where to go for answers that will help them persist and succeed
 - Don’t understand academic advisor’s role



Big Takeaways

- **Importance of all-inclusive language and approach**
 - Information, strategies, and knowledge that ALL students need to know.
 - Awareness on behalf of University (faculty, advisors, staff) to make the “unknown known” for all students.
- **No Quick Fixes**
 - It takes a variety of programs and persistent effort to increase first-gen student success
 - Important to include all relevant players, including families, to get students to participate



Building Your Own Action Plan

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CREATING OR REVISING A STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE

1. **Gather data** to demonstrate need – *good data is essential*
2. **Determine allies** and potential impediments
3. **Secure buy-in** by President, Provost, Deans, Chairs & others
4. **Identify students**
5. **Recruit faculty**
6. **Develop & deliver training**
5. **Gather & assess retention/success data**, then report results



Continuing the Conversation

MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY E-JOURNAL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

• EJournal - Special Issue on First-Generation College Students

• <http://www.ejournalofpublicaffairs.org/call-submissions-special-issue-first-generation-college-students/>

Submissions should focus on research, projects, and approaches that celebrate and support the experiences, skills, and values that first-generation college students bring with them to campus.





Remember to submit your evaluation on Guidebook!

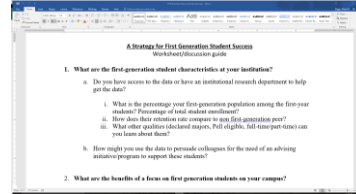
<https://guidebook.com/g/fye18/>

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Appendix #1: STRATEGY FOR FIRST-GEN STUDENT SUCCESS PLANS



(Activate PDF by clicking on file below)



Appendix #2: Ideal Times for Proactive Advising

ACADEMIC AND EMOTIONAL CALENDARS

Knowing when & why to reach out to your advisees:

1. **1st week** – reach out to all advisees via email/text to **introduce yourself**, explain your advising role, establish dialog, set up first appointment
2. **3rd-4th week of semester** – **emotional check in**, discuss academic resources to prep for midterms, establish advising expectations
3. **7th-9th week of semester** – midterm, FAFSA, & Scholarship application discussions. Also discuss spring registration process.
4. **13th-14th week of semester** – **registration** & emotional check-in. Discuss prep for finals & plans for next semester, discuss how to have constructive family conversations over holiday