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

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.”

2. **New Economic Reality**
   - Shrinking state support for public four-year universities
   - Performance Funding Model measures include recruitment, retention & graduation rates

3. **3/4 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

Missouri State Profile

**First-Generation Student Characteristics**

1. Public, comprehensive university offering undergrad and grad programs with the home campus located in Springfield, MO
2. State-wide mission in public affairs designed to develop fully educated citizens with a focus on ethical leadership, cultural competence, and community engagement
3. Second largest university in MO – 26,000+ students system-wide
4. 1/3 of undergrads are First-Generation students
5. 1/3 of undergrads are Pell eligible (vs. 50% of all 1st Gen students)

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Level</th>
<th>Below-Ave Test Scores</th>
<th>Above-Ave Test Scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richest</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Middle</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom Middle</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poorest</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

University Profile

Founded in 1905, Missouri State is a:

1. **Public, comprehensive university** offering undergrad and grad programs with the home campus located in Springfield, MO
2. State-wide mission in public affairs designed to develop fully educated citizens with a focus on ethical leadership, cultural competence, and community engagement
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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 Clif 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

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

2. First-Gen Demographics -- differ in 3 significant ways:
2017 Data Analysis (similar to 2015 & 2016 data)

2017 Data
New First Generation New Non-First Generation First Generation
ACT Average 24.27 25.25 25.25
High School GPA 3.66 3.60 3.60
Class Rank - top 50% 84.3% 83.2% 83.2%

Fall 2017 First-Time New in College (3184 students)
Non First-Gen Difference First-Gen
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%

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

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

2017 Data Analysis (similar to 2015 & 2016 data)

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

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

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

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

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 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

First-Generation Student Pilot Results

GEP 101 First Year Foundations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retention for special sections</th>
<th>Fall 14-15</th>
<th>Fall 15-16</th>
<th>Fall 16-17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-Generation Sections</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Specific Sections</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other Standard Sections</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention Gap - First-Gen Students</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

#2: Proactive Advising

Advising for Retention and Student Success
Proactive Advising involves:
Advising for Student Success

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 Strategies:
1. Connect early (& regularly) – explain advisor’s role – be available
2. Employ various communication channels (text, email, 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

Proactive Advising Approach

IN VOLVES 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.

Fall to Spring Retention Data Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparative Retention Rates</th>
<th>Fall 2016</th>
<th>Fall 2017</th>
<th>Fall 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missouri State</td>
<td>85.5%</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri State - First Gen</td>
<td>67.6%</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Arts &amp; Letters</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA 3.0 - First-Gen students</td>
<td>85.3%</td>
<td>97.0%</td>
<td>97.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA 3.5 - First-Gen sections</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAL Proactive Advising</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>85.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAL Proactive Advising - First-Gen Students</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>85.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 enables me to see the whole student, and I can help students develop skills and improve motivation.”

• “This proactive advising approach has worked well with many of my students. It has allowed me to tailor my outreach to their individual needs and learn about their progress.”

• “Proactive advising has allowed me to identify students who might benefit from additional support. It has helped me to connect them with resources and develop a plan for success.”

• “The proactive advising approach has encouraged me to think proactively about my students and to anticipate potential challenges. It has helped me to anticipate and address issues before they become problems.”

• “This proactive advising approach has enabled me to connect with students on a personal level. It has helped me to build strong relationships, which has been beneficial for both students and me.”

• “Proactive advising has allowed me to better understand the needs of my advisees and to provide more targeted support. It has helped me to identify areas for improvement and to develop more effective strategies.”

• “This proactive advising approach has allowed me to connect with students on a more personal level. It has helped me to anticipate challenges and to develop strategies to overcome them.”

• “Proactive advising has encouraged me to think more strategically about my students and their academic success. It has helped me to identify potential problems early and to develop effective strategies to address them.”

• “This proactive advising approach has allowed me to connect with students on a more personal level. It has helped me to anticipate challenges and to develop strategies to overcome them.”

• “Proactive advising has encouraged me to think more strategically about my students and their academic success. It has helped me to identify potential problems early and to develop effective strategies to address them.”
Proactive Advisor Insights

QUALITATIVE IMPACT: FACULTY CHANGES

• My belief that a proactive advisor role had 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 are particularly cause embarrassment that does not always include interacting with their advisor. With this knowledge, I have realized how important it is for me to help break down these 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, I go beyond just scheduling and program planning. Proactive advising gives a name to what I hoped I was doing anyway, and as a result, it could be seen as a way to improve the experience. 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 are particularly cause embarrassment that does not always include interacting with their advisor. With this knowledge, I have realized how important it is for me to help break down these perceptions and introduce them to the reality that is their true college experience.

• 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 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 they need.

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 the 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

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
7. Gather & assess retention/success data, then report results

First-Gen Lessons Learned

QUALITATIVE IMPACT: FACULTY CHANGES

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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

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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Missouri State contacts for additional information:
rdarabi@missouristate.edu
markbiggs@missouristate.edu
traceyglaessgen@missouristate.edu
kellywood@missouristate.edu

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**Appendix #1:**

**STRATEGY FOR FIRST-GEN STUDENT SUCCESS PLANS**

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**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