Transition and Retention:
Encouraging First Generation College Student Success

2011 NC NACADA Drive-In Conference
Introductions

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Overview

- Students whose parents did not attend college are at a disadvantage when it comes to postsecondary access.

- For those who overcome barriers to access and enroll in postsecondary education, first generation college students (FGCS) remain at a disadvantage with respect to staying enrolled and attaining a degree (Choy, 2001).

- Lower-income FGCS are disadvantaged not only by their parents’ lack of experience with and information about college, but also by other social and economic characteristics that constrain their educational opportunities (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005).
The College Student Role

- Research has found that for undergraduates the ability to understand course material is necessary, but, alone, it is not sufficient for success.

- University students must also master the “college student” role.

- FGCS have been found to have variations from non-FGCS in understanding the college student role. This can negatively influence their ability to meet expectations and succeed in postsecondary education (Collier, 2008).
Activity 1

How do you define first-generation college students (FGCS) on your campus?

What does it mean to be a FGCS?

What is the “college student role”? 
What is a FGCS?

At UNC-Chapel Hill, a FGCS is a student from a family in which neither parent has earned a four-year undergraduate degree.

Nearly 20% of undergraduates at UNC-Chapel Hill are first generation college students.
What can you do on your campus to encourage the success of FGCS?

- There are many ways in which academic advisors, faculty and staff can work with FGCS to help them understand the college student role as well as to academically and socially integrate into the campus community.
Model for FGCS Success

Define → Model → Support → Connect → Define
A first generation college student is not the same on every campus across the country.

Some institutions define first generation as a student who is **first in their family** to attend to college.

If you choose this definition, carefully consider questions like:

- What if an older sibling attended college?
- What does that mean for your definition?
- What if one parent earned an associate degree but the other parent never attended college?
It is important that within your institution, you define what it means to be a first generation student there.

Based on the needs and culture of your school, the definition you develop may be different than what it means to be a FGCS at another school.
It is important that within your institution, you define what it means to be a first generation student there. Based on the needs and culture of your school, the definition you develop may be different than what it means to be a FGCS at another school.
Once you have a definition, share it across campus. Also consider, how you refer to FGCS on your campus. Do you say “F-C-G-S” or “first-gen”?

Is there a name you can come up with that will define FGCS as a point of pride for your institution?

For example, at UNC-Chapel Hill, we proudly call our FGCS “Carolina Firsts.”
Providing role models is imperative to student success.

- Start by identifying FGCS role models in your community.

- Role models should include experienced students who have mastered the college student role. These students are academically and socially engaged and frequently utilize campus resources.
Academic advisors, faculty and staff who were FGCS are also important role models.

These individuals may serve as mentors to new FGCS.

Sharing the stories of these former FGCS can model success. Consider posting such stories on a website, in your school newspaper or as part of orientation programs and advising workshops.
Welcome

Nearly 20% of undergraduates at UNC-Chapel Hill are first generation college students. We proudly call our first generation college students "Carolina Firsts." View the videos below to learn about the stories of Carolina First students, faculty and staff.

Sophia Nicholson
• Connect FGCS to other FGCS as well as to faculty and staff who were FGCS.

• Introduce new FGCS to experienced, successful FGCS through peer advising and peer mentoring programs. This will help students master the college student role.

• Connect parents and families of FGCS to the campus and to each other.

• The more parents and families know about the expectations and demands of college, the more likely it is that their students will be successful.
Many FGCS are unaware or reluctant to utilize university resources.

Make sure FGCS are aware of the support services available to help them succeed and encourage FGCS to take advantage of resources.

When academic advisors make referrals to services on campus, they should communicate to students that taking advantage of such services is normal.
Furthermore, students should be commended for seeking help.

Asking for help should be viewed as a sign of strength.

Through their daily interactions with students, advisors can convey the message that *smart students take advantage of university resources.*
Celebrate the successes of FGCS on your campus. This should be done from admissions recruitment events all the way through to graduation and beyond to FGCS alumni.

Make the success of FGCS a point of pride for your institution.
University–wide Committee

CHARGE: The committee will encourage FGCS retention and graduation by recognizing, supporting and implementing collaborative initiatives designed to enhance students success including academic success, wellness and engagement.

- Academic Advising
- Admissions
- Office of Undergraduate Education
- Dean of Students
- Scholarships & Student Aid
- Student Academic Counseling
- Housing & Residential Education
- The Learning Center
- New Student & Carolina Parent Programs
- School of Education
- Diversity & Multicultural Affairs
- Counseling & Wellness Services
- Faculty
We proudly call our first generation college students "Carolina Firsts."

We are the FIRST public university and students who are FIRST in their family to attend college are a point of pride for our institution.

Celebrate FGCS

Carolina Firsts contribute to the great diversity, cultural and intellectual life of our vibrant undergraduate community.
Goals for Working with FGCS:

Encourage student success by:

1. Celebrating the successes of FGCS

2. Providing FGCS with role models within the university community

3. Ensuring that FGCS are aware of and utilize campus resources
Carolina Firsts Student Organization

- Admissions Events
- Monthly Meetings
- Social Events
- Representation on Faculty/Staff Committee
- Mentoring Program
- Advocates for FGCS
- Connect students with resources
Admissions Events

- Explore Carolina Panel Discussions
- Overnight Campus Experience
Graduation Recognition

- Creating a new tradition
- Celebrating with families
- Creating role models
- Pins on graduation garb
Parent’s Council

- PC Biannual Meeting
- Grants
- FGCS Representatives
- Letter to parents of FGCS encouraging Orientation attendance
- Participation in Admissions events
Communicate the needs of FGCS to academic advisors, faculty and staff

- Professional Development Lunch Series
- Website
- Advisor Staff Meetings
- Orientation
How can academic advisors encourage success for FGCS?

What do academic advisors need to enhance the success of FGCS?
## Improvements

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<tr>
<th>2004 Retention Study</th>
<th>2010 Retention Study</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Within 5 Years:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Within 5 Years:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>75% of FGCS graduated</td>
<td>79% of FGCS Graduated</td>
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<tr>
<td>87% of students from families with at least a 4 year-degree graduated</td>
<td>89% of students from families with at least a 4 year-degree graduated</td>
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Developing a program at your institution

- Research: Who are your FGCS?
- What are the characteristics of successful FGCS at your institution?
- What are the challenges your FGCS face?
- Celebrate FGCS
- Share the stories of FGCS (including students, faculty and staff!)
- Collaborate across units and departments
- Invite students to participate in your efforts
Discussion

• Innovative programs at other institutions

• Opportunity for sharing