Becoming a Carolina Firsts Advocate
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The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Ask me about...

CAROLINA FIRSTS

CAROLINA FIRSTS ADVOCATE  www.firstgeneration.unc.edu

THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL
Becoming an advocate for first-generation college students (FGCS) at Carolina

- Overview of FGCS
  - FGCS at Carolina
  - Common barriers to college completion
  - Factors linked to persistence and completion
  - Features of effective programs and supports

- A strengths-based approach to supporting Carolina Firsts

- Strategies and resources for supporting Carolina Firsts
Overview of FGCS
FGCS at Carolina

- 20% of undergraduates at UNC-Chapel Hill are first generation college students.

- We proudly call our first generation college students “Carolina Firsts.”

- Carolina Firsts contribute to the great cultural and intellectual life of our vibrant and diverse undergraduate community.

3,231 Carolina Firsts
FGCS at Carolina

• 55% of Covenant Scholars are Carolina Firsts

• 50% of Transfer Students are Carolina Firsts

Graduation Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4 Years</th>
<th>6 Years</th>
<th>Do Not Graduate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Undergraduates</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina Firsts</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>20%</td>
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-19%
FGCS are more likely than non-FGCS...

...to come from a low-income family.

...to be a student of color and non-traditional-age.

...to have a difficult adjustment to college.

...to see higher education as an opportunity for upward mobility.

...to come from under-resourced high schools with few or no AP courses.

...to be on academic probation at Carolina.

...to perceive campus environments and faculty as less supportive or less concerned about them than other students.

See www.studentsuccess.unc.edu for references
Lower academic performance and persistence rates

FGCS are less likely than non-FGCS to:

• interact with faculty
• spend sufficient time studying
• participate in extracurricular activities
• utilize on-campus student services

(Lohfink & Paulsen, 2003; Nunez & Cucarro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005)
Common Barriers to College Completion

- Insufficient academic preparation
- Limited college knowledge
- Cultural conflict
- Limited familial support
- Financial constraints
Developing an Authentic Academic Identity
Factors Linked to Persistence & Completion

• Academic rigor in high school
• Grant-based financial aid
• Positive and early parental involvement
• Early access to information
• Campus engagement
Features of Effective Programs & Supports

• Begin prior to college enrollment
• Continue throughout the duration of the college experience
• Multifaceted
• Develop student’s academic competence
• Encourage campus engagement
A Strengths-Based Approach to Supporting Carolina Firsts
Setting a foundation for our work

- Strengths-based Approach
  - Individual Assets
  - Environmental Assets

- Positive Youth Development
  - Resiliency
  - Thriving
Path to Positive College Outcomes

Build Resilience
(ability to adapt well to change, adversity, stress)

Thriving:
Increased capacity to appreciate and act on environment

Growth of attributes of flourishing, healthy students (5Cs):
  - Competence
  - Confidence
  - Character
  - Connection
  - Caring

Positive College Outcomes
  - Successful Transition;
  - Retention; Graduation

THE KEY

- The key to retention is student **thriving**.

- Thriving = an increased capacity to appreciate and act on one's environment
THE KEY

- Thriving results from the growth of attributes of flourishing, healthy students (5Cs): Competence, Confidence, Character, Connection, Caring

- These attributes are the result of interactions between individual and environmental assets.

- So what can we do? Work to develop individual and environmental assets.
Developing Strengths

Individual Assets

- Confidence in one’s ability to achieve;
- Desire to engage in valued activities;
- Mastery of learning tasks;
- Socially connected;
- Ability to regulate emotions;
- Sense of optimism;
- Attachment to and engagement in pro-social institution

Environmental Assets

- Physical and psychological safety;
- Support;
- Empowerment;
- Boundaries;
- Expectations;
- Constructive use of time;
- Opportunities to belong;
- Positive social norms;
- Opportunities for skill building;
- Cohesion of family, school, and community efforts
Strengths Common Among FGCS

- Independence
- Perseverance
- Creativity
- Flexibility
- Divergent Thinking
What more can we do? Listen to and share student stories.

The Power of Student Stories

- Unearthing and sharing the stories of students at Carolina, especially students who have overcome unique barriers to success, enhances our community’s awareness of the diverse needs of students at Carolina.

- Appreciating these stories and sharing them with students, faculty, and staff bolsters the resiliency of our entire community.

- An environment that creates the conditions for resiliency will result in the enhanced retention and success of all of our students.
What is resiliency?

“Like the tree whose branches bend and sway in a storm rather than crack under pressure, we have the power to remain flexible and strong amid life's challenges... to be resilient!

Resilience is defined as the process of bouncing back and fully recovering in the face of change and stressful situations. Being resilient doesn't mean a person won't experience difficulty or stress. However, resilient individuals respond to stress in ways that help them not only recover, but grow and thrive.”

from Transforming Lives through Resilience Education
Resiliency

**Individual Qualities that Facilitate Resiliency**
- Ability to form positive relationships
- Humor
- Inner Direction (internal locus of control)
- Perceptiveness
- Seeks Support
- Positive View of Personal Future
- Flexibility
- Love of Learning - Capacity for and connection to learning
- Self-motivation
- Academic Competence
- Feelings of Self-Worth
- Perseverance
- Creativity

**Resiliency Conditions**
- Caring and Support
- High Expectations for Success
- Opportunities for Meaningful Participation
- Positive Bonds
- Clear and Consistent Boundaries
- Opportunities to Develop Life Skills

Source: APA Resilience Guide
We can foster a context rich in environmental assets by:

- encouraging FGCS to develop supportive relationships with faculty and staff;

- encouraging FGCS to develop supportive relationships with peers;

- empowering FGCS by providing opportunities to take on useful roles in the college community;

- empowering FGCS by engaging them in activities to develop and clarify their personal, academic, and career goals;
We can foster a context rich in environmental assets by:

- communicating clear boundaries and expectations for positive, healthy behavior in the college environment;

- providing FGCS with meaningful and creative opportunities to belong and make a contribution to the college community;

- providing opportunities for building and reinforcing skills both inside and out of class;

- and, actively involving families and the broader community in the FGCS experience.
Strategies and Resources for Supporting Carolina Firsts
Resources
TO HELP YOU SUCCEED AT CAROLINA
Carolina Firsts Advocates:

- provide a safe space for students to ask questions without fear of judgment
- hold high expectations for first generation college students and affirm individual student’s potential for success through their words and behaviors
- consistently and visibly share their knowledge of campus resources
- work to normalize help-seeking behavior among undergraduates
- encourage students to ask questions and utilize faculty office hours
- encourage campus engagement among first generation college students
- display their Carolina Firsts Advocate decal visibly at the entrance of their office or work space
Carolina Firsts Advocates Are Committed

To providing an inclusive environment where students can:

1. share their stories
2. develop their academic competence and confidence
3. feel welcome, comfortable, and inspired to ask questions
More you can do:

- Help students define and achieve their personal and academic goals
- Personally invite individual students to your office hours
- Share your college story (successes and **challenges**)
- Encourage students to join the Carolina Firsts Student Organization
- Encourage students to participate in Meals with Heels
- Encourage participation in High-Impact Academic Opportunities
  - Seminar courses (including FY and Junior Transfer Seminars)
  - Undergraduate Research
  - Service Learning
  - Study Abroad
  - Living-Learning Communities
Micro-affirmations

“Student success is the product of thousands of small gestures extended on a daily basis by caring, supportive educators sprinkled throughout the institution who enact a talent development philosophy.”

- George Kuh
More you can do:

- Communicate **Micro-affirmations** on a daily basis
  
  “I’m glad you’re here.”
  
  “Thank you for your email.”
  
  “Come visit me in office hours.”
  
  “I know this is difficult news...”
  
  “Smart students utilize campus resources.”
Micro-affirmations: small acts/big impact

FIVE SUGGESTIONS for USING MICRO AFFIRMATIONS IN ACADEMIC ADVISING

by Candice Powell (Based strategies described by Rowe, 2008)

In your folder.
Thank you for becoming a Carolina Firsts Advocate