

# Understanding & Supporting First Gen Students

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# Defining First Gen Students

- Students whose parents did not complete a postsecondary education
- It doesn't always mean "first in the family to go to college"
- Definition can vary by source
  - **U.S. Department of Education:** student whose parents did not complete a 4-year degree
  - **ISAC:** student whose parents did not obtain a postsecondary degree

# First Gen Student Population

- Across the states:
  - 1 in 3 undergraduate students are first generation (about 5 million students)
    - 31% are under the age of 23
    - 57% are over the age of 24
- In Illinois:
  - 184,000 first generation students enrolled in college
  - 4 out of 10 are enrolled in a community college

# First Gen Stories

If you are first generation, or know someone who is, consider the following:

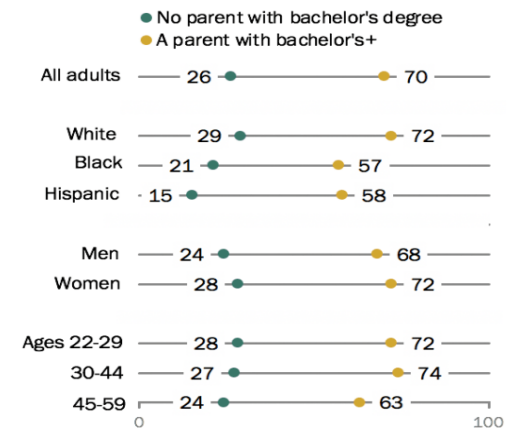
- How did it feel to navigate the college-going process?
- Did you know you were first gen?
- When or how did you find out you were first gen?
- How can we build an inclusive environment in our schools and community-based organizations to help support first gen students in their postsecondary and career plans?

# Racial Differences Among First Gen Students

- Parents Without a Postsecondary Degree
  - 29% of White students
  - 21% of Black students
  - 15% of Hispanic students
- At least One Parent with a Postsecondary Degree
  - 72% of White students
  - 57% of Black students
  - 58% of Hispanic students

## The educational gains associated with having a college-educated parent are widespread

*% of adults who have completed at least a bachelor's degree, among those with ...*



Note: Based on adults ages 22 to 59 with known parental education. White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2019 Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking.

"First-Generation College Graduates Lag Behind Their Peers on Key Economic Outcomes"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



# Challenges Facing First Generation Students



# Barriers to a Postsecondary Education

- First generation students experience numerous challenges
- Some of these may be unique to first gen students, others may be similar to those of other student populations
  - Parental support
  - Navigating the higher education process
  - Paying for college
  - Mental health
  - Sense of belonging
  - Other responsibilities

# Parental Support

- Parents may try to support students but are unfamiliar with the college-going process
- College may not be seen as a priority
- Financial implications may prevent parents from providing support
- Cultural barriers also arise (e.g., students leaving home)



# Navigating the Higher Ed Process

Lack of access to information about the college-going process

Less likely to enroll selective colleges – 31% apply to institutions with open/rolling admissions

Unaware of the different support options available at colleges and universities designed for first gen students

# Paying For College

- The cost of college is one of the primary barriers and concerns for first gen students
- Students are often unaware of financial aid available
- Parents may be reluctant (for various reasons) to share the information necessary to complete financial aid applications (e.g., tax documents, income information, etc.)
- More likely to accrue debt for their education

# What type of financial aid are first gen students receiving?

## **Public Universities**

- First gen: \$5,100 in need-based aid
- Non first gen: \$3,200 in need-based aid

## **Private Universities**

- First gen: \$8,900 in need-based aid
- Non first gen: \$8,800 in need-based aid

# Mental Health

First gen student experience many emotions before, during, and after their postsecondary experience

- Breakaway guilt – Feeling of guilt for separating from their family
  - Leaving family/loved ones “behind”
  - Having access to other opportunities
  - Not pulling their weight within the family (translating, driving, caretaker)
- Homesickness – potentially the first time away from home/family for an extended period of time
- Depression and/or Anxiety – Affect their daily functioning
  - Students in a new environment and may not have a support system
  - Can lead to social isolation
  - Impact grades → eligibility for aid

# Sense of Belonging

- May experience imposter syndrome
  - Feeling like they don't belong
  - Question/second-guess their abilities
  - Also leads to depression and anxiety
- First gen students may not know:
  - Anyone else on campus
  - How to build a community or network on campus
  - That resources and support services exist (or how to access them)

# Other Responsibilities

Familial

Hesitant to enroll or “go away” for school because they are the support system for younger siblings and/or parents

Financial

May work to help with individual and family finances

Academic

Balancing school commitments (internship, volunteer, etc.)

# Additional Barriers

## Housing and/or food insecure

- Students who are experiencing homelessness or were in DCFS care, are more likely to experience these than their peers

## Medical care

- Students may be unaware of if their university offers health insurance
- For students who are new to the area, are unaware of what health care systems they have access to

## Child and dependent care

- Students may not have adequate childcare – this may lead to missing class or withdrawal from class because they do not have support to attend school

# First Gen Stories

- As part of ISAC's efforts to support first gen students across the state, we are seeking to record and compile video testimonials from colleagues who were first gen students and are now first gen professionals
- If you want to schedule a time at the conference to share your story about your first generation college experience and/or what it was like to transition to the workforce as a first gen professional, or for any questions on this project, please reach out to Matt Montez, Outreach Planning and Partnership Manager, at [matthew.montez@illinois.gov](mailto:matthew.montez@illinois.gov)





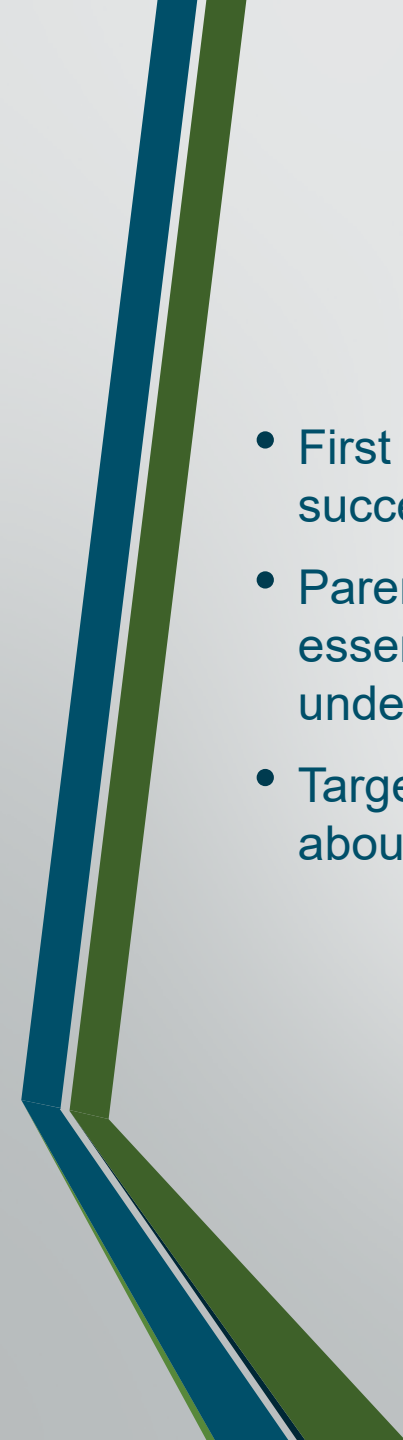
# Supporting First Gen Students Through Best Practices & Resources

# Best Practices

Break away from stereotypes  
(overachiever, resilient narrative)

When connecting students with resources/programs on and off campus, build partnerships with these organizations

Identify which institutional scholarships are specifically for first generation students



# How High Schools Are Helping

- First Gen student clubs - geared towards helping first gen students succeed to and through the college-going process
- Parent programming – including parents in the conversation is essential and parent-specific programming can help parents understand the process of applying and going to college
- Targeted supports – supporting students who may not be thinking about going to college

# How Universities Are Helping

- Here in Illinois, several schools across the state are designated as First Gen Forward Schools
- They are dedicated to making first gen students build a community, have supports as they transition and persist through school and more
- Some institutions have organizations for first generation students
- DePaul University
- Eastern Illinois University
- Governors State University
- National Lewis University
- North Central College
- Northern Illinois University
- School of the Art Institute of Chicago
- Southern Illinois University at Carbondale
- Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

# TRIO Programs

- TRIO Programs are available at 2-year and 4-year institutions
- TRIO Programs are open to first generation students, low-income, individuals with disabilities, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds
- The Upward Bound and Talent Search programs provide:
  - Support high school students through the college-going process
  - Support their transition from high school into postsecondary work

# How ISAC Is Helping

- First Gen Symposium – 1<sup>st</sup> one held in March at North Central College
- Student Portal
- Parent Outreach
- ISACorps
- First Gen Scholars Network
- First Up Podcast
- Summer FAFSA Support
  - Today, July 18 – Tinley Park Convention Center (7am – 7pm)
  - Thursday, July 24 – Benedictine University (7am – 7pm)
  - TBD – Northern Illinois University
  - [More events at: https://studentportal.isac.org/events](https://studentportal.isac.org/events)

# Student Portal

**ISAC Student Portal** COLLEGE PLANNING MADE EASY. [studentportal.isac.org](http://studentportal.isac.org)

**NOW PLAYING** ISAC COLLEGE MINUTE

“Do I have to provide my parents’ information on my financial aid application?”

**APPLY NOW**

**COLLEGE-GOING AND FINANCIAL AID VIDEOS**  
Get quick tips and answers to college-going and financial aid questions. Check out ISAC College Minute™ videos and more on ISAC’s YouTube page and at [www.isac.org/nowplaying](http://www.isac.org/nowplaying)

¿Cómo solicitar subvención de Illinois?

**ISAC Student Portal** COLLEGE PLANNING MADE EASY. [studentportal.isac.org](http://studentportal.isac.org)

**The ISAC Student Portal** has all the tools you need to help you with college planning, financial aid, student loans and money management, and even career exploration and job search—all free and just a click away!

**COLLEGE AND SCHOLARSHIP SEARCH**  
Check out resources and apps from ISAC’s partners to search college profiles, both nationally and specifically in Illinois, and to search a database of billions of dollars in scholarships.

**FINANCIAL AID**  
Need financial aid for college but not sure what’s out there and how to apply? Learn about financial aid with the **FinAid Game**, use our **MAP Estimator** to determine your eligibility for a MAP grant, and compare your financial aid offers with our easy-to-use, online **Financial Aid Comparison Worksheet**.

**ISACorps™**  
**IN-PERSON AND ONLINE HELP WITH COLLEGE PLANNING AND FINANCIAL AID**  
Find a free in-person workshop in your area, an online workshop, or contact your local ISACorps member for free one-on-one assistance with college planning, college and financial aid applications, and more.

**Plus...more tools and resources to assist you!**

**Claim Your Future** MONEY MANAGEMENT

**ILLINOIS workNet CENTER** CAREERS AND JOB SEARCH

# ISAC Parent Series

ISAC  
PARENT  
SERIES



Introduction to Resources for  
Parents of First Generation  
College Students

[Youtube @ISACVid](#)



# ISACorps

## ISACorps™

### ISAC field staff assist students with the college-going process

- Recent college graduates hired for a two-year commitment serve as near peer mentors to students, with a focus on first generation and/or low income students.
- Extensively trained in financial aid and other components of the college-going process, ISACorps members conduct financial aid presentations and application completion workshops, assist with college application workshops, provide one-on-one mentoring, and conduct a variety of other related services.
- ISACorps members are located throughout the state; bilingual staff available.

[isac.org/ISACorps](https://isac.org/ISACorps)



[Youtube @ISACVid](#)

# ISAC's First Generation Scholars Network

- Our network provides support and resources for first generation students
- Connection with a FGSN mentor
- Find a first gen program on campus
- Join events and programming tailored to first gen students

## Join the Network

Ready to join?

You can join using our online form

**JOIN NOW!**

Have questions? Email us at

**[ISAC.FirstGen@illinois.gov](mailto:ISAC.FirstGen@illinois.gov)**

<https://studentportal.isac.org/firstgen>

# First Up Podcast



<https://firstuppodcast.buzzsprout.com/>

# Resources Beyond Financial Aid

- College students are eligible for SNAP benefits
- List of food banks – includes colleges and universities offerings
- Housing Assistance – programs available here in Illinois for emergency and transitional housing



## [Student Resources Beyond Financial Aid](#)

If you are an Illinois college student looking for help beyond financial aid - including resources for food, housing, medical care, child and dependent care assistance and consideration because of special circumstances - check out this area. You'll also find a list of food pantries on or near Illinois college campuses.

<https://www.foodpantries.org/st/illinois>

An expanded list of Illinois food pantries.

<https://www.isac.org/students/during-college/documents/Student+Resources+Beyond+Financial+Aid.pdf>

# Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

- Provides support for low-income people and families to purchase food
- Two main considerations:
  - Income and expenses
  - The number of people who live in the household
- Illinois has additional requirements for individuals and families
- Students enrolled at least half-time in 2-year and 4-year institutions are eligible!

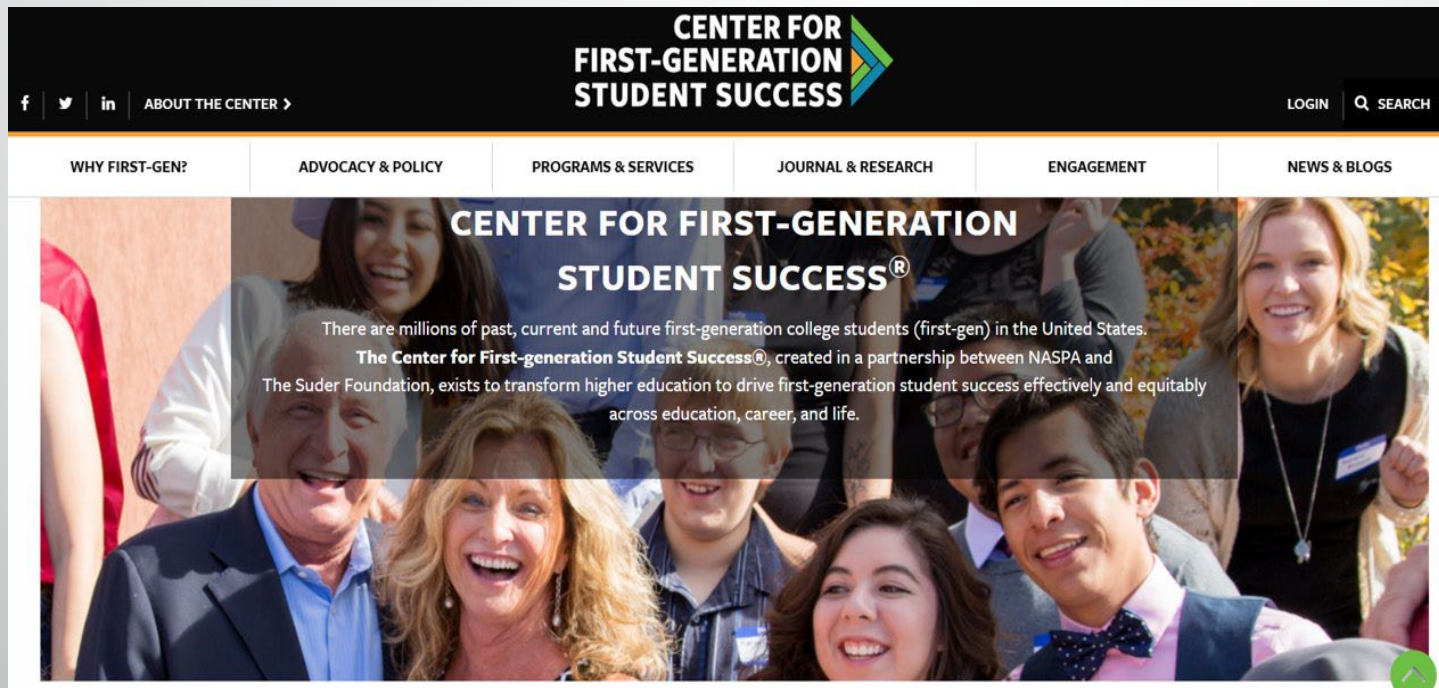
<https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=30357>

# SNAP Eligibility Requirements

- Be enrolled at least half-time at an institution of higher education
- Meet at least one exemption
  - Work at least 20 hours a week in paid employment
  - Participate in a state of federally financed work-study program
  - Participate in an on-the-job training program
  - Care for a child under the age of six
  - Are a single parent enrolled full-time in college and taking care of a child under 12
  - A program under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act
- Meet all other SNAP eligibility requirements
- Students living on campus are not eligible for SNAP because their meals can be covered through a mandatory or optional meal plan

<https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?Item=13275>

# NASPA Center for First Gen Success



# First Gen & Juice

Instagram



firstgenandjuice

Follow

Message



933 posts

2,024 followers

903 following

First Gen and Juice

Media

Celebrating first-generation students and graduates in popular culture and the media. You'll never look at your favorite show the same way again.

[linktr.ee/firstgenandjuice](https://linktr.ee/firstgenandjuice)



# How YOU Can Help

- Partner with community organizations
- Incorporate parent programming
- Collaborate with colleges on the transition/hand-off process
- Share your expertise – present at conferences, share your resources, tell other colleagues about the work you are doing
- Share your experience – first gen stories are a valuable resource to first gen students

# Reach Out – We Are Here to Help



FOR COLLEGE ACCESS PRACTITIONERS



I have a question...

We have answers

Get your questions answered  
by ISAC's Professional  
Development Team!

**847-250-2384**

847-250-2384



Thank you!

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