WHAT IS “FIRST-GENERATION” COLLEGE?

This report defines first-generation college students as those whose parents have not obtained a baccalaureate degree.

The Landscape

Students with college educated parents tend to have an advantage over their first-generation college peers in navigating the formal and informal aspects of the higher education environment due to their greater access to financial, informational, and social resources.

Degree Objectives

First-generation college students tend to have lower educational aspirations than non first-generation students. This may be due to lack of information about degrees and funding or availability of resources.

Student Values

First-generation college students are more likely to report that “being well-off financially” is an important goal and strong motivation for attending college. In contrast, their peers who have parents with college degrees are more likely to express a desire to develop a “meaningful philosophy of life” while in college.

Parental Encouragement

Contrary to the notion that parents of first-generation college students can be a deterrent to college access, over the last 15 years, these students are now more likely than their peers to report that they are in college because of parental encouragement (Saenz et al).
First To Go

Mission & Purpose

The First To Go Program provides a source of academic support for students who identify as "first-generation college." Its purpose is to:

- help new students transition to the university
- provide networking opportunities with LMU faculty, staff and alumni
- increase student awareness about research opportunities and graduate and professional school options
- increase the social capital of this population

The program pairs each student with a faculty mentor who was a first-generation student. Additionally, participants have a network of LMU staff and alumni, also former first-generation college students, who further support them and reinforce a community atmosphere on campus via informal meetings and meals. First to Go is unique in that it approaches first-generation college students as a population with considerable assets and resources. A collaborative effort between Academic and Student Affairs divisions, this program creates a more academically supportive environment for students. Ultimately, the services are designed to foster strategies for academic success at LMU and beyond.

FOUNDING STORY

The First To Go Program began in March 2010 due to a chance meeting between LaTonya Rease Miles, ARC Director, and Itzel Sanchez, then a first year student who expressed a desire for a campus-wide program that targets first-generation college students. Encouraged by Mary Plumb, Parent Program Coordinator, and Rae Linda Brown, Vice President of Undergraduate Education, Dr. Rease Miles drew upon LMU colleagues to form a corps of mentors. The Program began reaching out to students in Fall 2010.
Student Demographics

35 Participants as of May, 2011

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MENTORING PROGRAM

The First To Go mentors are LMU faculty and staff members who were the first in their families to earn a college degree. The mentor program aims to provide a stable support system to aid students in their transition to college life. Mentors encourage participants to voice their concerns and difficulties, may it be academic, financial, or social; but they also celebrate all of their mentee’s successes. Most importantly, mentors serve as advocates for their mentees.

At present, we have fifty five LMU Faculty and Staff mentors participating in the program. The faculty mentors come from a wide array of disciplines in the academe.

**Mentor Selection Process**

In Fall 2010, during the early stages of the program, mentor and mentee pairings were arranged based on information that students provided on their application form. They were consequently paired with a mentor who was deemed to be the best fit, according to their major and interests. It was made a point that students are paired with one faculty and one staff mentor.

During the Spring Semester of 2011, a more hands on approach was applied in the selection process. Upon expressing interest in First To Go, students are scheduled an interview with Dr. LaTonya Rease Miles, mentor and Director of the program. The interviews allow Dr. Rease Miles to get to know the students, find out about particular fields of interest and other personal concerns that they may have. Mentors that will be able to address the students’ needs will then be identified. In some cases, the students themselves already have a particular mentor in mind that they want to get to know more. First To Go will then officially pair them with these mentors.

The mentoring program is not limited to individual faculty and staff mentors. An alternative option is for a department or office to adopt students as its mentees. A particular example is the Office of Intercultural Affairs, which welcomed two students as their mentees. Director Dr. Derenda King, Vice President Dr. Abbie Robinson-Armstrong, and Research Analyst Kimberly Misa, all work together and pool their efforts to provide balanced and well-rounded guidance to their students.

**MENTORS**

Dr. Rebeca Acevedo | Associate Professor, Department of Modern Languages and Literature
Helen Alatorre | Associate Director, Student Leadership and Development
Dan Almeida | Career Counselor, Career Development Services
Raymundo (Ray) Andrade | Library Assistant, Cataloging, Outreach
Dr. Ronald Barrett | Chair/Professor, Department of Psychology
Jennifer Belichesky-Larson | First Year Experience/Faculty, Freshman English Program/Coordinator, COMPASS
Dr. David Berube | Assistant Professor, Department of Physics
Dr. Dexter Blackman | Assistant Professor, Department of History
Dr. Elena Bove | Senior Vice President for Student Affairs
Dr. Rae Linda Brown | Vice President of Undergraduate Education, Professor, Department of Music
Dr. Gail Buck | Director, Office of Black Student Services/Faculty, Communication Studies
Cynthia Carr | Assistant Director, Office for Research and Sponsored Projects
John Carvana | Executive Director, Career Development Services
Dr. Tina Choie | Chair and Professor, Department of Chemistry
Danelle Dyckhoff | Lecturer, Department of English
William Evans | Assistant Director for Residence Life, Student Housing Office
Lisa Plummer Farland | Executive Director of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving
Jonathan Gomez | Admission Counselor (Undergraduate Admissions)
Dr. Cecilia Gonzalez-Andrieu | Assistant Professor, Theological Studies
Irma Graciano | Academic Records Coordinator, Registrar’s Office
Lorriane Harrison-Reyes | Director of Residence Life, Student Housing
Dr. Robert Hurteau | Director, Center for Religion and Spirituality
Dr. Amir Hussain | Professor, Department of Theological Studies
Dr. Angela D. James | Associate Professor, African American Studies
Monica Jara | Admissions Counselor, Admissions Office

Mentor Mary Plumb and FTG participant, Marissa Bullock
What do the mentors provide?

The First To Go mentorship program encourages a warm, open, and friendly partnership between student and mentor. Through the course of mentor and mentee interactions, the mentors have continuously provided a stable network of support for students. This may range from directing students to the proper office that could address their needs, to mentors themselves stepping in and helping them out with their requests.

The mentors have also been very helpful in unmasking the hidden curriculum – constantly being on hand to explain the processes of the university. They make no assumptions about a student’s knowledge about procedures and practices in a university, but provide proactive guidance to their mentees. Ultimately, the goal is to encourage self-efficacy for the student.

One of the goals of the First To Go Program is to increase the social capital of first-generation college students. By this we mean that the program provides participants with valuable information, guidance and support via mentoring, information sessions and workshops. Students are encouraged to engage in a variety of academic programs and activities, including but not limited to research, internships, and study abroad opportunities.

What have we learned?

We have learned that for a mentor-mentee pairing to be successful, trust needs to be established between the two parties. Some partnerships work immediately and both become accustomed and comfortable with each other right away. However, some students may need more time to ease into the program before getting a faculty mentor and being able to confide in them.
First To Go Research Culture

Summer Undergraduate Research Program

For Summer 2011, First To Go students Marisa Cervantes, Valerie Nario and Kelly Velasquez, are participating in the Summer Undergraduate Research Program. While each student is focusing on the general topic of what it means to be a first-generation college student, each student is handling a particular research component taking them in different directions. Marisa and Valerie, with the help of their advisor Dr. LaTonya Rease Miles, are working on improving the experiences of first-generation college students at LMU while Kelly, with her advisor Paul Jimenez, is working on transfer student research.

Initially a research assistant for Dr. Rease Miles, Marisa Cervantes is currently working on the experiences of first-generation students. What started as an online survey has now stemmed into a more sophisticated qualitative study on first generation experiences conducted through surveys and focus group discussions. Her research is focused on creating and developing a one-unit LIBA course for first-generation freshmen which she will be co-facilitating in the Fall.

Valerie Nario is working on collecting and cataloguing primary literature sources on the experience of a first-generation college student. She is compiling these into an annotated bibliography which could be included in the LMU library database as a future reference. Kelly Velasquez, on the other hand, is conducting a literary review of transfer student success across different universities. She is looking into how other institutions accommodate the needs of the diverse population of transfer students. Guiding her through this research is Paul Jimenez, Associate University Registrar and head of Transfer Services and Orientation, as well as First To Go mentor.

LMU LATINO SUMMIT

The LMU Latino Summit, held on March 31, Cesar Chavez day, aimed to observe with pride the strong connection between LMU and the Latino community. Participants discussed and reached a consensus on how LMU will grow and respond to the challenges of the Latino population. First To Go students Marisa Cervantes, Xavier Loza Morales, Frank Romo, and Sandie Villanueva participated in the different focuses of the summit, while Yara Hidalgo served as a member of the Conference Organizing Committee, and co-facilitated a discussion on the first-generation college student experience.

ACE AND ACCESS

The Academic Community of Excellence (ACE) invites freshmen who possess strong academic records to apply for their program. For Academic Year 2010-2011, eight First To Go students, Mirian Albert, Sandra Bonales, Marissa Bullock, Marisa Cervantes, Valerie Nario, Terilyn Puckett, Luis Ventura and Sandie Villanueva, applied and all were accepted. Upperclassmen Erika Chavez, Frank Romo and Maria Ruiz are also in the program. ACCESS (A Community Committed to Excellence in Scientific Scholarship), on the other hand, is designed for freshmen in the Seaver College of Science and Engineering. Last year, students Gilberto Corona, Sandra Bonales and Luis Ventura were in the program. Sandra and Luis, along with Zakkouya Lewis, also served as Teaching Assistants for the program during Summer 2011.
Testimonials

“First To Go has been my favorite involvement on campus. My mentors are amazing and continue to be active in my undergraduate career even during the summer. Any question about LMU, course work, living situations and even personal affairs, my mentors have answered for me. Without First To Go, my LMU experience would not be the same.”

-Kelly Velasquez, Political Science major, transfer student

“My mentors, Jennifer Belichesky and Prof. Brad Stone, will always have open ears for me. I give them daily updates on my life, and they always give me positive feedback and great advice. For example, a conversation I had with Brad about grad school has furthered my conviction that grad school is something I really want to do. I am truly fortunate to have two amazing mentors who care about my academic success and future.”

-Sandie Villanueva, Political Science and Chicana/o Studies

“My First To Go experience last year showed me everything I wish I had when I was in college as a first-gen student: professors who shared my experience and understood how monumental going to college is for students who are the first in their families to go. Sandie is a wonderful student, and her determination inspires me to think of how to best support her ideas and goals.”

-Dr. Brad Stone, Sandie’s Mentor, Director, LMU University Honors Program and Associate Professor of Philosophy

Students’ Accomplishments

First To Go is very proud of its immensely intelligent and talented students. Some of the highlights of their Academic Year 2010-2011 accomplishments include:

- Student Service and Leadership Award - Sr. Peg Dolan, RSHM Award Recipient
  Presented to first year students who have effectively established themselves as emerging campus leaders. Recipients have assumed active and challenging roles that have developed their personal leadership skills; enriched the quality of campus life; promoted school spirit, and facilitated the creation of a dynamic and respectful community. Dolan Award recipients show great promise for a successful and consistent leadership career at LMU.

  - Tierney Finster

- Undergraduate Research Symposium
  - Oral Session
    - Frank Romo - Chicano Studies & Urban Studies
  - Poster Presentation
    - Natalia Gonzales - Psychology
    - Adan Duarte - Chicana/o Studies & Political Science

- Internships
  - Luis Ventura - Columbia University’s Summer Medical and Dental Education Program
  - Frank Romo - Chicago Park District’s Office

- Study Abroad
  - Anna Cho, France
  - Tierney Finster, Cambodia
  - Zakkoyya Lewis, Germany

Haley Axton and Raeesah Reese, both first-generation college students, are slated to present the Class of 2015 motto during the 2011 Academic Convocation. Each year, freshmen students are asked to submit mottos, which their fellow students then vote on.

This year, the winning motto for the incoming Class of 2015, submitted by Haley and Raeesah, is a quote by Henry David Thoreau: "Live the life you’ve imagined."
Building Community

Friendships and partnerships that are formed within First To Go extend outside of the program. Connections are made with fellow students in the program and these develop into closer interactions in Greek-letter organizations, service groups, and other extra-curricular activities. The camaraderie between students has built a strong sense of community that encourages and strengthens their pride in First To Go.
**What’s In Store for Us?**

Beginning Fall 2011, First To Go will launch its Learning Community and its accompanying classes exclusively for first-generation college students.

The First To Go Learning Community is a community designed to bring together select first-generation college students to allow them to discover, experience, and transition to LMU life together. Students are given the opportunity to take courses with their peers and with participation from faculty and staff that are also first-generation.

**Courses offered:**

**English 110 College Writing (Section 58)**
- Required course for LMU freshmen, taught by Dr. La'Tonya Rease Miles, ARC Director. Course theme is on work and community.

**LIBA 170 Course (Section 07)**
- A one unit class held weekly in which students will learn how to navigate LMU on a more personal level with peers, faculty and staff who are also first-generation. Co-facilitated by Marisa Cervantes and Yara Hidalgo, students in the First To Go program.

*There will also be a transfer student specific course taught in the spring semester.*

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**Upcoming Event**

Join us for this year’s **Welcome Reception for Students and Mentors!**

Wednesday, September 21

5:30 pm

LMU Bird Nest

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For more information on First To Go or if you would like to be one of our mentors, please contact:

Dr. La Tonya Rease Miles
Director, Academic Resource Center, 2nd floor, Daum Hall
(310) 338-2847
firsttogo@lmu.edu

Application forms for students can be found at the First To Go link:

[www.lmu.edu/arc](http://www.lmu.edu/arc)

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**Recommended Readings:**


