



Opening Session

Welcome Network Leaders & Champions!



Stephanie Bannister, Ph.D.

she/her/hers

President, FirstGen Forward



Integrating Place Consciousness



Land does not require that you confirm it exists or that it has been stolen, rather that you reciprocate the care that it has given to you.



- Joseph M. Pierce

In March 2023, we conducted the inaugural Leader Academy with the generous support of the **Strada Education Foundation**.

With the support from several current funding partners, we can continue to create this transformational experience for Network Leader institutions.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to first-generation student success.





Martina A. Martin, Ed.D.

she/her/hers

**Vice President,
FirstGen Forward Network**



COHORT SEVEN

**FirstGen
FORWARD**
Network Leader

East Stroudsburg University

Michigan Technological University

Northern Illinois University

University of North Texas at Dallas

Suffolk University

University of San Diego



Thank You



**For sponsoring the
2026 Network Champion
Convening**



CLASS OF 2026

Creighton University

Metropolitan State University of Denver

Purdue University Northwest

Richard Bland College

The University of Texas at Arlington

The University of Texas Permian Basin

University of Missouri-Kansas City

University of South Carolina

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University

Washington State University



Laura Turner

she/her/hers

**Vice President and Head of
Community Impact**

TIAA



Qua'Aisa Williams, Ph.D.

she/her/hers

**Associate Vice President,
Learning & Impact**



Logistics

Restrooms

- XXX

Wi-Fi

- **Network:**
JWMarriott-Conference
- **Password:** 2026SSHE

Lost & Found

- Registration desk

Scholarly Writing Room

- JW Marriott 405 Boardroom

Lactation Space

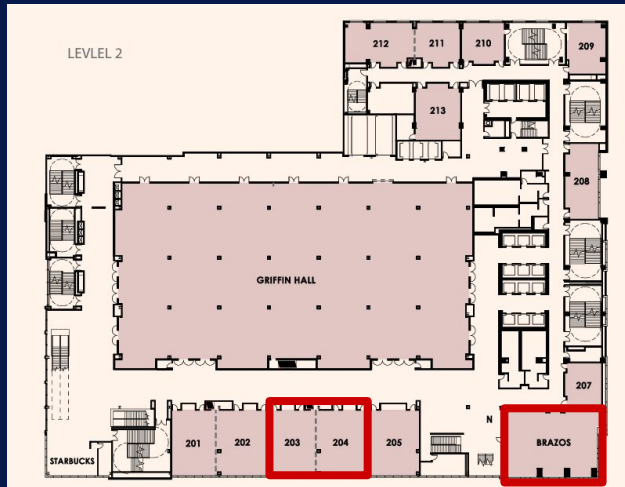
- JW Marriott 505

Open Recovery/Low Sensory Space

- JW Marriott 504

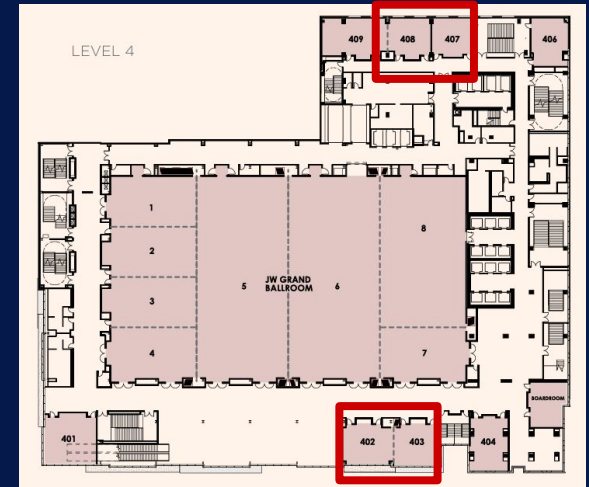
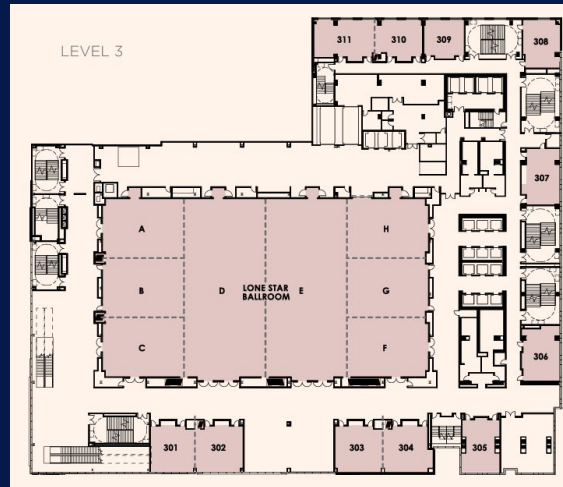
JW Marriott Wayfinding

LA Breakout



Main Room

Meals



LA Breakout

Companion Workbooks



2026 FirstGen Forward Leader Academy



2026 FirstGen Forward Network Champion Convening

Workbook Highlights



In addition to session materials, the workbooks includes:

- Notes pages for capturing insights during sessions
- A “parking lot” section—a space to jot down ideas, questions, or takeaways

A rectangular template for a notes page. It has a white background with a thin orange border. At the top, there are four colored tabs: orange, teal, yellow, and white. The word "Notes" is written in teal at the top left. Below it are seven horizontal lines for writing.A rectangular template for an extra space parking lot. It has a white background with a thin dark blue border. At the top, there are four colored tabs: orange, teal, yellow, and blue. The text "Extra Space Parking Lot" is written in teal at the top left.

Schedule at a Glance - Leader Academy



TUESDAY, JUNE 9

3:00 - 5:00 PM	Check-in at Registration Desk <i>Griffin East Foyer</i>
5:00 - 6:30 PM	Welcome Social <i>JW Marriott Rooftop</i>

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10

7:30 - 8:50 AM	Registration <i>Griffin East Foyer</i> Breakfast <i>Brazos</i>
9:00 - 10:00 AM	Opening Session <i>203-204 - JW Marriott</i>
10:10 - 11:00 AM	Network Success Panel <i>203-204 - JW Marriott</i>
11:10 - 12:00 PM	Leading Together: Strengthening Team Dynamics and Collaborative Partnerships for First-generation Success <i>402-403 - JW Marriott</i>
12:10 - 1:15 PM	Lunch & Networking <i>Brazos</i>
1:25 - 2:15 PM	Expert Guidance Group Meetings & Continuous Improvement Work Time <i>Attendee: Primary Contacts</i> <i>408-409 - JW Marriott</i>
	Postsecondary Data Partnership: File Submission Open Hours <i>Attendee: Data Submitters</i> <i>402-403 - JW Marriott</i>

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10 (CONTINUED)

2:20 - 3:20 PM	Cohort Seven Insights Tool Report Presentation <i>408-409 - JW Marriott</i>
3:20 - 3:45 PM	Snack Break + Networking <i>Brazos</i>
3:45 - 4:30 PM	Institutional Work Time <i>408-409 - JW Marriott</i>

THURSDAY, JUNE 11

7:30 - 8:50 AM	Breakfast <i>Brazos</i>
9:00 - 9:40 AM	Network Knowledge: Transformation Grant Highlights <i>203-204 - JW Marriott</i>
9:45 - 10:35 AM	Network Knowledge: Higher Education Trends <i>203-204 - JW Marriott</i>
10:45 - 11:35 AM	Institution Work Time <i>203-204 - JW Marriott</i>
11:40 - Noon	Closing <i>203-204 - JW Marriott</i>

Schedule at a Glance - Champion Convening



TUESDAY, JUNE 9

3:00 - 5:00 PM	Check-in at Registration Desk <i>Griffin East Foyer</i>
5:00 - 6:30 PM	Welcome Social <i>JW Marriott Rooftop</i>

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10

7:30 - 8:50 AM	Check-in at the Registration Desk <i>Griffin East Foyer - JW Marriott</i> Breakfast <i>Brazos - JW Marriott</i>
9:00 - 10:00 AM	Opening Session <i>203-204 - JW Marriott</i>
10:10 - 11:00 AM	NetworkSuccess Panel <i>203-204 - JW Marriott</i>
11:10 - 12:10 PM	Leveraging Bipartisan Support for First-Gen Student Success <i>203-204 - JW Marriott</i>
12:10 - 1:10 PM	Lunch & Networking <i>Brazos - JW Marriott</i>
1:20 - 2:20 PM	Moving Forward in the Age of AI: Leveraging Intelligent Tools to Advance First-gen Student Success <i>203-204 - JW Marriott</i>
2:30 - 3:15 PM	Data. Narratives, Storytelling...Oh my! Part 1 <i>203-204 - JW Marriott</i>
3:15 - 3:45 PM	Snack Break & Networking <i>Brazos - JW Marriott</i>
3:45 - 5:00 PM	Data. Narratives, Storytelling...Oh my! Part 2 <i>203-204 - JW Marriott</i>

Schedule

THURSDAY, JUNE 11

7:30 - 8:50 AM	Breakfast <i>Brazos - JW Marriott</i>
9:00 - 9:40 AM	Network Knowledge: Transformation Grant Highlights <i>203-204 - JW Marriott</i>
9:45 - 10:35 AM	Network Knowledge: Higher Education Trends <i>203-204 - JW Marriott</i>
10:45 - 11:35 AM	Institutional Work Time <i>203-204 - JW Marriott</i>
11:40 - Noon	Closing and Evaluations <i>203-204 - JW Marriott</i>

NASPA Events App

Scan the QR code and
download the NASPA Event App
today!

You can also search NASPA
Events in your mobile app store.





Deana Waintraub Stafford

she/her/hers

**Executive Vice President, Innovation &
Effectiveness**



Fireside Chat



Stephanie Bannister, Ph.D.

President, FirstGen Forward



Jeff Kahlden, M.S.

**Director of Grant Management Services,
Dallas College
Board Chair, Council for Opportunity in
Education**



Kate Lehman, Ph.D.

**Executive Director, National Resource
Center for the First-Year Experience and
Students in Transition**

At-a-Glance Schedule Highlights

10:10 AM – 11:00 AM CT

Network Success Panel
All Leader Academy & Champion Convening Attendees
JW Marriott 203-204

11:10 AM – 12:00 PM CT

**Leading Together: Strengthening Team Dynamics and Collaborative
Partnerships for First-Generation Success**
All Leader Academy Attendees
JW Marriott 402-403

11:10 PM – 12:10 PM CT

Leveraging Bipartisan Support for First-Gen Student Success
All Champion Convening Attendees
JW Marriott 203-204

Network Success Panel

**ALL Leader Academy & Champion
Convening Attendees**



Wendy Beesley, M.P.A

she/her/hers

**Assistant Vice President,
Network Strategies
FirstGen Forward**

Panelists



LaNae Budden, Ed.D.
Director, First-Gen Center

**University of South
Carolina**
Public research university



Melanie Jones, M.Ed.
Senior Director,
Student Success Programs

Kent State University
Public research university



Romando Nash, J.D.
Vice Provost for Student
Affairs

**Washington State
University**
Public research university



Ben Thoreson, M.S.Ed.
Director of Student Success

Richard Bland College
2-year public
liberal arts college

At-a-Glance Schedule Highlights

11:10 AM – 12:00 PM CT

**Leading Together: Strengthening Team Dynamics and Collaborative Partnerships
for First-Generation Success**

All Leader Academy Attendees

JW Marriott 402-403

11:10 PM – 12:10 PM CT

Leveraging Bipartisan Support for First-Gen Student Success

All Champion Convening Attendees

JW Marriott 203-204

Leading Together: Strengthening Team Dynamics and Collaborative Partnerships for First-Generation Success

**ALL Leader Academy & Champion
Convening Attendees**

Presenters



Catherine Johnson, M.Ed
she/her/hers

Associate Director
Data Expert Guidance and Analytics
FirstGen Forward



Jennifer Luken Sutton, Ph.D
she/her/hers

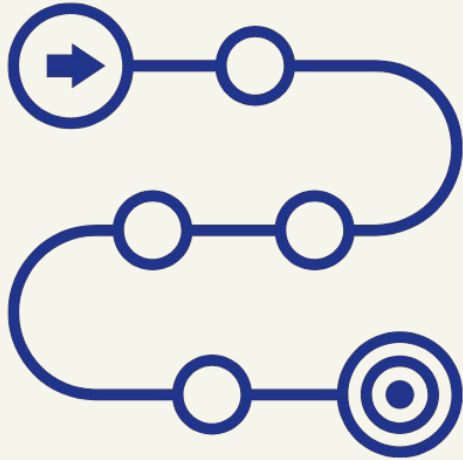
Assistant Director
Expert Guidance and Recruitment Strategies
FirstGen Forward

Goal For Our Time Together

- Explore the key principles of **team dynamics** and **collaborative partnerships** and how they drive first-generation student success in higher education settings.
- Demonstrate how **strategic partnerships operationalize first-gen success work**—enabling resource sharing, expanded reach, coordinated programming, and sustainable impact.
- Equip participants with **practical tools to assess, strengthen, & expand collaborative networks** at their institutions.

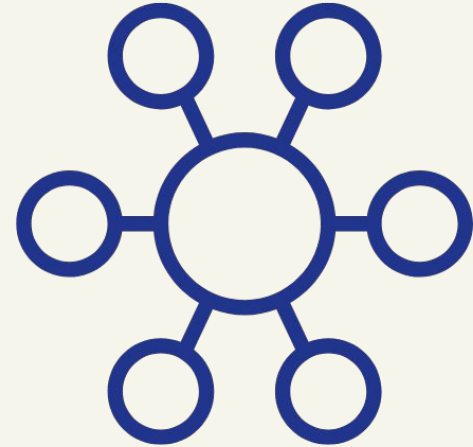
Why This Matters

Fragmented support



VS

Integrated support



Partnership Mapping



Take 2 minutes to reflect:

- Who are your current key collaborators for first-gen work?
- What makes these partnerships effective?
- Who is missing from your collaboration network?

FGF Leadership Team Structure

- **Cabinet-level Champions (institutional commitment, resource allocation)**
- **Primary Contacts (coordination, implementation)**
- **Institutional Research (data collection, analysis)**
- **Faculty Representatives (academic integration)**
- **Student Affairs (support services coordination)**
- **Student Representatives (lived experience perspective)**

Distributing Responsibilities Effectively

Strategic Alignment

- Match responsibilities to institutional roles
- Utilize existing expertise and knowledge

Balanced Distribution

- Prevent overloading key individuals
- Distribute both visible and behind-the-scenes work

Positional Leverage

- Utilize formal and informal influence
- Position champions at multiple levels

Clear Accountability

- Establish ownership for outcomes
- Create transparent expectations



Communication Channels



Weekly Touchpoints

- Quick operational updates
- Immediate needs coordination

Monthly Reviews

- Data insights discussion
- Progress evaluation
- Course corrections

Quarterly Planning

- Strategic direction setting
- Comprehensive analysis
- Cross-departmental alignment

Communication Essentials

- Accessible documentation
- Consistent platforms
- Clear urgent vs. routine protocols

Team Effectiveness Framework

Trust & Safety

Creates an environment where team members can take risks, speak honestly, and be vulnerable.

- Psychological safety encourages open dialogue about challenges
- Requires leaders to model vulnerability and openness
- Develops through consistent, respectful interactions

Clarity & Alignment

Ensures all team members understand and commit to shared goals and priorities.

- Clear definitions of first-gen student success
- Shared understanding of roles and responsibilities
- Consistent communication of strategic direction

Engagement & Ownership

Fosters deep commitment where team members take initiative and responsibility.

- Distributed leadership across positional boundaries
- Proactive identification of issues and opportunities
- Mutual accountability for outcomes

Learning & Adaptation

Embraces continuous improvement through reflection and evidence-based adjustments.

- Regular review of what's working and what's not
- Data-informed approach to program refinement
- Willingness to experiment with new approaches

Breaking Down Silos

Practical strategies:

- Cross-functional projects
- Shared metrics and goals
- Joint professional development
- Celebration of collaborative successes



Partnership Mapping Exercise



Current Key Collaborators:

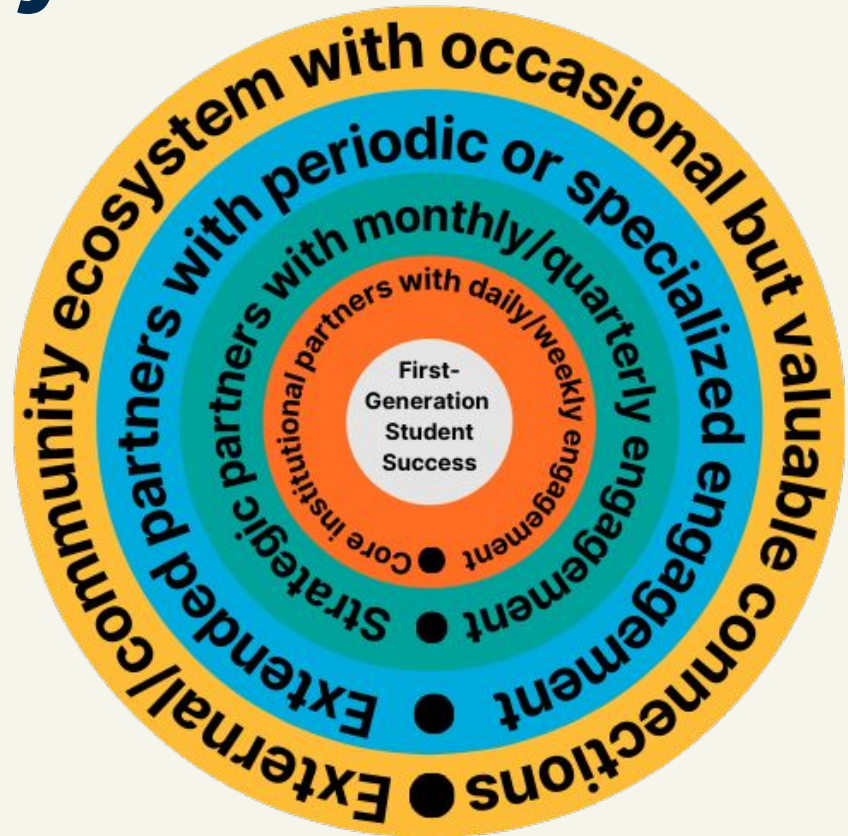
- Who are your current key collaborators for first-gen work?
- What makes these partnerships effective?
- Who is missing from your collaboration network?

Reflection:

- What's one immediate step to strengthen role clarity?

Partnership Ecosystem

- **Strategic Alignment:** Connect partners to institutional mission
- **Mutual Benefit:** Create value for all involved
- **Intentional Engagement:** Right partners at the right time
- **Resource Leveraging:** Maximize impact through collaboration



Creating Mutually Beneficial Relationships

Partnership value proposition framework:

- What you offer
- What you need
- Shared goals
- Win-win outcomes

Example: Academic affairs and career services partnered on discipline-specific career guidance

- Results included higher student engagement in both areas

Overcoming Partnership Barriers

Common barriers identified in Network:

- Resource constraints
- Competing priorities
- Territoriality
- Misaligned expectations



Partnership Planning Activity



Select One High-Potential Partnership

- Choose a partner from your earlier reflection
- Focus on immediate impact potential

Complete the Mutual Benefits Section:

- What you offer to this partner
- What they can provide to your initiative
- Shared goals that align both missions

Define Your First Action Step:

- One concrete step to initiate or strengthen
- Specific timeline and responsibility

Key Takeaways

- Team effectiveness requires intentional design
- Clear roles enable shared responsibility
- Strategic partnerships multiply impact
- Communication protocols prevent silos
- Continuous improvement applies to collaboration too!

At-a-Glance Schedule Highlights

12:10 PM – 1:15 PM CT

Networking & Lunch
All Leader Academy Attendees
Brazos

1:25 PM – 2:15 PM CT

Expert Guidance Meetings & Continuous Improvement Work Time
Primary Contacts
JW Marriott 408 - 409

1:25 PM – 3:15 PM CT

Postsecondary Data Partnership: File Submission Open Hours
Data Submitters
JW Marriott 402 - 403

Lunch & Networking

All Leader Academy & Champion Convening

2026 FirstGen Forward Leader Academy

At-a-Glance Schedule Highlights

1:25 PM – 2:15 PM CT

Expert Guidance Meetings & Continuous Improvement Work Time

Primary Contacts

JW Marriott 408 - 409

Postsecondary Data Partnership: File Submission Open Hour

Data Submitters

JW Marriott 402 - 403

1:20 PM – 2:20 PM CT

Moving Forward in the Age of AI: Leveraging Intelligent Tools to Advance First-gen Student Success

Champion Convening Attendees

JW Marriott 203 - 204

Expert Guidance Group Meetings & Continuous Improvement Work Time

Presenter



**Wendy Beesley,
M.P.A**

she/her/hers

**Assistant Vice President,
Network Strategies
FirstGen Forward**

Goals For Our Time Together

- *Overview of Continuous Improvement Cycles (CIC)*
- *Establish your team's **shared vision** - "WHY"*
- *Draft a **strategic framework** for your first-generation efforts*
 - *Institutional Focus: Strategic Alignment*
 - *Challenges and Opportunities*
 - *Voices and representation: Beyond the "6"*
 - *The To Do's and your CIC*
- *Identify a **starting point** from **WHERE YOU ARE***

Continuous Improvement Cycle Framework

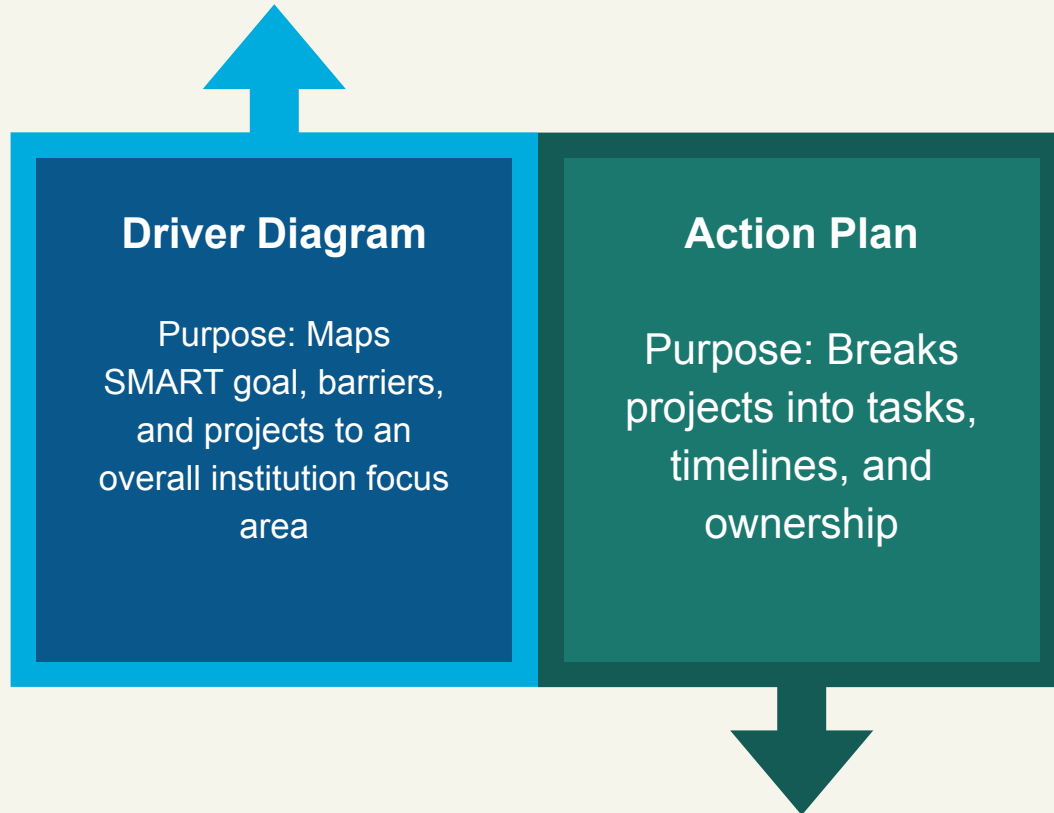
30-60-90 days

Continuous Improvement Cycles help you:

- ❑ complete big projects in bite-sized chunks;
- ❑ project manage your work (stay organized); and
- ❑ learn fast and make mid-course corrections more easily.

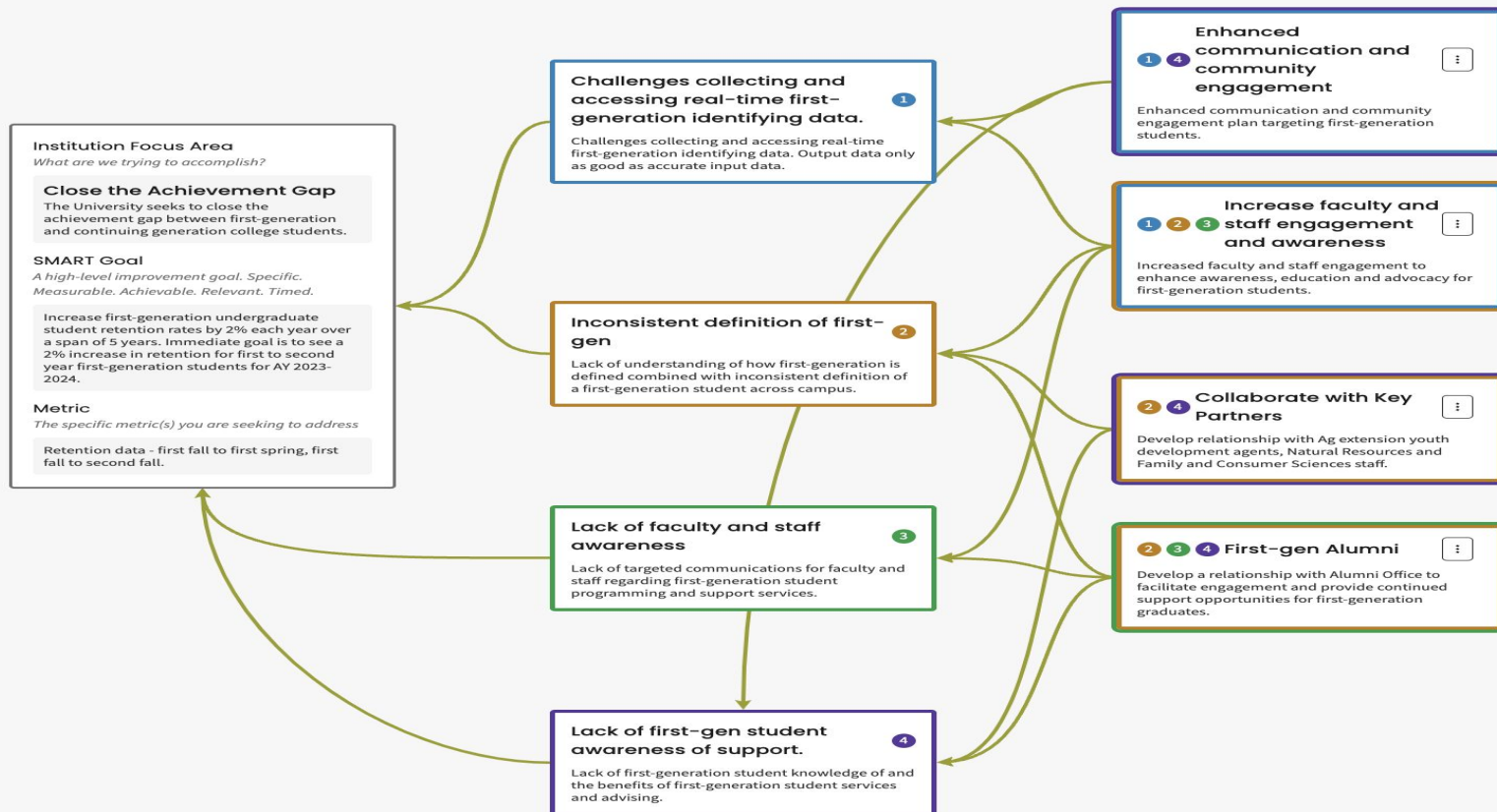


Continuous Improvement Cycle Tools



Primary Barriers

Improvement Projects



Helpful Resources for Discussion

- Leader Academy Workbook: Driver Diagram Generation Template (pp. 20-26, 43-45)
- Institutional Strategic Plan
- Institutional Data
- Insights Tool Report - STAY TUNED!
- Expert Guide



Our “WHY”

Step #1: Identify the Institution Focus Area for this work: your **WHY** – BIG PICTURE!

- What impact areas do we want to begin addressing to advance first-generation student success at our institution?
- How do we align our efforts with our Strategic Plan?
- In what ways can we broadly engage the campus in first-generation efforts?

Provide CLARITY

Step #2: How will you know you are making progress?

Areas of consideration

- Pinpoint key components of your project.
- Data discussion: What do you have? What do you need? What questions do you have of your data?
- Map where institutional strategic priorities align to the first-gen priorities and challenges.

At-a-Glance Schedule Highlights

2:20 PM – 3:20 PM CT

Cohort Seven Insights Tool Report Presentation
All Network Leader Academy Attendees
JW Marriott 408 - 409

3:20 PM – 3:45 PM CT

Snack Break
All Leader Academy & Champion Convening Attendees
Brazos

3:45 PM – 4:30 PM MT

Institution Work Time
All Network Leader Academy Attendees
JW Marriott 408 - 409

Postsecondary Data Partnership: File Submission Open Hour

Data Submitters

Postsecondary Data Partnership: File Submission Office Hours

What is required?

- Cohort and course files.
 - These data files must include the first-generation variable.
- Submit 3-5 years of historical data by August 1 to the PDP.
- Share dashboard and/or analysis-ready file access with FirstGen Forward. This can be completed in the PDP by staff with the Data Authorizer role at your institution.

At-a-Glance Schedule Highlights

2:20 PM – 3:20 PM CT

Cohort Seven Insights Tool Report Presentation
All Network Leader Academy Attendees
JW Marriott 408 - 409

3:20 PM – 3:45 PM CT

Snack Break
All Leader Academy & Champion Convening Attendees
Brazos

3:45 PM – 4:30 PM MT

Institution Work Time
All Network Leader Academy Attendees
JW Marriott 408 - 409

Cohort Seven Insights Tool Report Presentation

ALL Network Leader Academy

Presenter



**Catherine
Johnson, M.Ed**

she/her/hers

**Associate Director
Data Expert Guidance and Analytics
FirstGen Forward**

Presentation Purpose

- Share aggregate Insights Tool data for Cohort Seven institutions
- Highlight participating institutions: ESU, Michigan Tech, NIU, Suffolk, UNT Dallas, and USD
- Provide a combined view of data to support understanding across the cohort
- Establish a foundation for discussion and comparison among institution.

Workbook Instructions



Please follow along in your workbook to see your institution's data to compare and benchmark with your peer institutions. Each slide will have the workbook icon shown on the right with the corresponding page number in the workbook to reference.

Network Leader Data Elements

Data Tools

- Insights Tool
- Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP)
- Continuous Improvement Cycle Reflections
- Readiness and Progress Audit

Data Reports

- Insights Tool Report
- Insights Tool Presentation
- PDP Momentum Metrics Report
- Network Leader Portfolio

Data Support

- Annual Data Summit
- Data Curriculum During Monthly Workshops
- Webinars
- E-Learning Modules
- PDP dashboard tours

Insights Tool Considerations

The Insights Tool Report and Presentation are **not** empirical research.

Rather, the Insights Tool:

- is a compilation of insights from across your community
- is a reflection of current efforts to support first-gen students
- often illuminates gaps in knowledge and communication

Things to keep in mind:

- important institutional context will offer depth to these findings
- your invaluable perspective is essential in understanding and applying recommendations
- a team approach is necessary to sort and prioritize information and recommendations

Insights Tool Methodology

- **Insights Tool was administered from February to March 2026.**
- **Cohort Seven institutions had similar participant numbers with 21 – 51 participants from each institution.**
- **The following institutional functional areas completed the Insights Tool inventory from TBR institutions:**
 - Academic Affairs
 - Admissions/Enrollment Management
 - Alumni Affairs
 - Athletics
 - Career/Professional Development
 - Development/Foundation
 - Financial Aid
 - Institutional Research
 - Multicultural Affairs/Diversity & Inclusion
 - Student Affairs
 - TRIO

Institutional Perceptions



The **most important factors** driving institutional decisions on first-generation student success identified by participants:

Completion/degree attainment

Sense of belonging

Persistence and retention

00:30

Please review your institution's data in the workbook.



Institution-wide Perceptions

Overall, Cohort Seven participants agreed that their institution:

- has **recognition** of the first-generation population (91%)
- is **interested and engaged regarding topics** related to first-generation student success (85%)
- is a **supportive environment** for first-generation students to succeed (79%)
- is eager to make **institution-wide improvements** in the way they support first-generation students (74%)

Areas with lower agreement across the cohort included having an established mission statement for first-gen success (53%) and having learning outcomes established for first-gen success (50%).

00:30

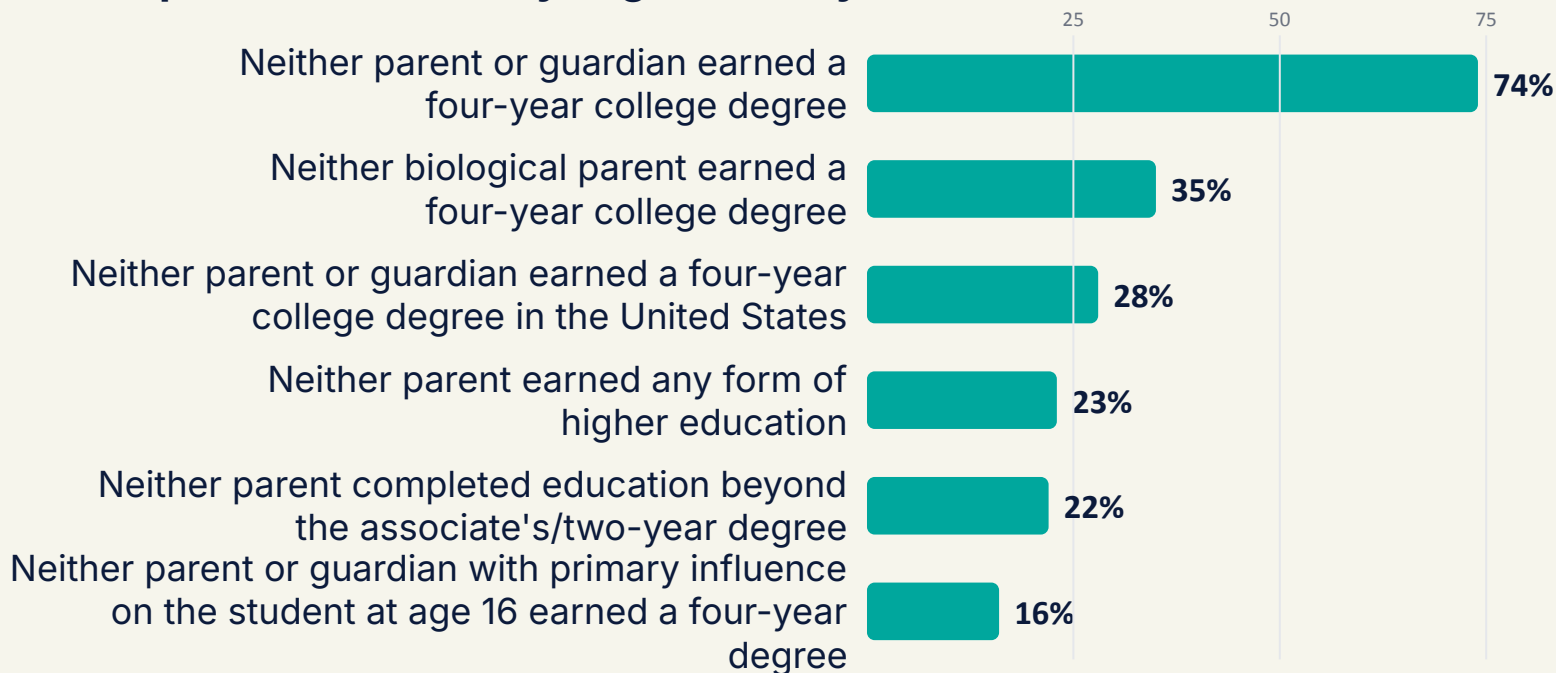
Please review your institution's data in the workbook.

First-generation Definition



Across Cohort Seven, **68%** of participants agreed there is a formal definition of first-generation students at their institution.

The response most closely aligned with your institutional definition(s):



Pause & Reflect



How do you feel about the participants' knowledge of your institution's first-generation definition?

What challenges are there on your campus regarding the first-generation definition?

Network Leader Actionable Priorities

1. Aligning Leadership & Institutional Strategy
2. Mapping & Auditing Institutional Efforts & Resources
3. Elevating Actionable Data for Decision-making
4. Fostering Knowledge Across the Institution

1. Aligning Leadership & Institutional Strategy



Overall, Cohort Seven institution participants agreed that their president and cabinet-level leaders:

- are **informed** about the first-gen student population at their institution;
- have **publicly identified as first-gen or an ally**;
- have **prioritized first-gen success** as a campus initiative or goal in the strategic plan; and
- **allocate financial resources** to support first-gen student success.

Pause & Reflect



How can your institution increase the visibility of your senior leaders' support?

2. Mapping & Auditing Institutional Efforts & Resources

Does your institution offer the following dedicated services for first-generation students?

- Dedicated office or center = **NO**
- Other identity offices or centers offer programming and services for first-generation students = **UNSURE**
- Dedicated physical space for first-generation students to gather = **UNSURE**



00:30

Please review your institution's data in the workbook.

2. Mapping & Auditing Institutional Efforts & Resources



Participants agree that the following communication types have been tailored for:

Communication Type	Students	Families
Email Communications	67%	61%
Institutional Website	60%	59%
Campus Activities Engagement	45%	23%
Orientation Materials	41%	40%
Admissions and Enrollment Materials	37%	40%
Social Media	36%	24%
Academic Advising Materials	15%	10%

$\geq 50\%$ (strength)

$\leq 25\%$ (critical gap)

Recommendation: Email and website are clear strengths for both students and families — use these as models. Academic advising materials (15% students, 10% families) represent the most critical gap. Social media and campus activities also lag significantly for family audiences.

00:30

Please review your institution's data in the workbook.

3. Elevating Actionable Data for Decision-making



For communications tailored for first-gen students, two areas exceeded majority agreement:

- Email communications (67%)
- Institutional website (60%)

However, several communication types fell below 50%:

- Campus activities engagement (45%)
- Orientation materials (41%)
- Admissions and enrollment materials (37%)
- Social media (36%)
- Academic advising materials (15%)

Recommendation:

Consider ways your institution can improve communication with first-generation students.

00:30

Please review your institution's data in the workbook.

3. Elevating Actionable Data for Decision-making



Participants agree that my institution...	C7
uses first-generation data in decision-making about programs and services	69%
identifies first-generation students in the student information system	64%
uses first-generation data in institution-wide decision-making (strategic planning, fundraising goals, etc.)	53%
disseminates data reports about first-generation student success	50%
makes data about first-generation students easily accessible	43%
uses data to identify successful course-taking patterns for first-generation students	38%

Strength: Cohort Seven shows strong use of first-gen data for program decisions (69%) and SIS identification (64%). Growth area: Course-taking pattern analysis (38%) and data accessibility (43%).

3. Elevating Actionable Data for Decision-making



The **top ways students can self-identify** as first-generation:

Application for Admission

When participating in mentoring program

During orientation

Pause & Reflect



How do you feel about your institutions' data collection and use in data-informed decision-making?

What areas would you like to strengthen?

4. Fostering Knowledge Across the Institution



Participants agree that staff and faculty...	Staff	Faculty
are aware of institutional support and programming for first-generation student success	56%	43%
are provided with materials or standard language to visibly identify as first-gen or as an ally	55%	52%
participate in formalized mentoring of first-generation students	45%	41%
are provided with training or professional development workshops to understand the first-generation student identity	42%	39%
receive information during new staff/faculty onboarding regarding institutional first-generation student success initiatives	23%	38%
receive data on first-generation students in their courses	—	20%

Recommendation: Staff awareness (56%) and ally identification materials (55% staff, 52% faculty) are bright spots. Prioritize onboarding integration and course-level data sharing — these are the lowest-lift, highest-signal gaps to close first.

00:30

Please review your institution's data in the workbook.

Centering the First-gen Student Experience



Does your institution offer the following for first-generation students?	YES	NO	UNSURE
Graduation/commencement	✓		
Career readiness programs			●
Internship/co-op experience	✓		
Education abroad	✓		
Mentoring programs	✓		
Counseling professionals with an awareness and understanding of the first-generation student experience	✓		
Support for commuter students or living-learning/residential communities			●
Transition assistance programs	✓		

00:30

Please review your institution's data in the workbook.



Next Steps

Work with your team and FGF Expert Guide to work on the following:

1. Initial reactions and observations
2. Discussion and group work
3. Strategic planning and action steps
4. SMART goals and action plan

At-a-Glance Schedule Highlights

3:15 PM – 3:45 PM

Snack Break & Networking
All Leader Academy & Champion Convening Attendees
Brazos

3:45 PM – 4:30 PM

Institution Work Time
All Leader Academy Attendees
JW Marriott 408 and 409

Snack Break & Networking

Leader Academy & Champion Convening

Institution Work Time #2

All Leader Academy Attendees

Presenter



**Wendy Beesley,
M.P.A**

she/her/hers

**Director, Expert Guidance,
FirstGen Forward**

Driver Diagram Components

Institution Focus Area

Institution-level objective that supports the overarching aim of closing completion gaps between first-gen and continuing-gen students.

SMART Goal

High-level improvement goal/objective you want to achieve set within the broader Institution Focus Area that is Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant, and Timed.

Metrics

Data relevant to the SMART goal, where measurable progress toward the goal is expected to positively impact the metric.

Primary Barrier

Potential challenges or obstacles that hinder progress towards your SMART goal.

Improvement Project

Small-scale, action-oriented efforts designed to initiate progress toward a larger goal by directly addressing a primary barrier.

Objective: Insights Tool Reflections



Guiding questions:

- What is your overarching focus area (GOAL)?
- What are some barriers to achieving your goal?
- How will you address barriers?
- Who will you need to engage in this work?
- Consider the role of data in your planning.

At-a-Glance Schedule Highlights

Tomorrow 6/11/2026

7:30 AM – 8:50 AM

Breakfast

All Leader Academy & Champion Convening Attendees
Brazos

9:00 AM – 9:45 AM

Network Knowledge: Transformation Grant Highlights
All Leader Academy & Champion Convening Attendees
JW Marriott 203-204

Day 2

Welcome Back Network Leaders & Champions!

Network Knowledge: Transformation Grant Highlights

**All Leader Academy & Champion
Convening Attendees**

Virginia Commonwealth University

PDP Analysis Training at the 4th Annual You First Summer Institute for Faculty and Staff



Elizabeth Bambacus, Ph.D.

**Director of First-Generation Student
Experience**

bambacuses@vcu.edu





Virginia Commonwealth University

Elizabeth Bambacus, Ph.D.



The Opportunity: Faculty/Staff-Grown Initiatives

**Spring Research
Symposium and
Research Grants**

**Faculty Learning
Community**



**Faculty/Staff
Mentoring**

Spring Symposium

The Opportunity: Faculty/Staff-Grown Initiatives

Spring Research
Symposium and
Research Grants

Faculty Learning
Community



Faculty/Staff
Mentoring

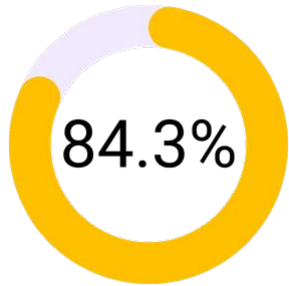


Spring Symposium

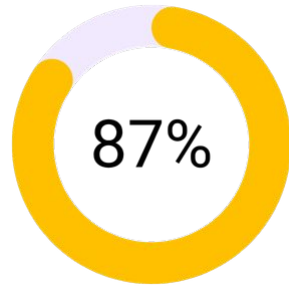
The Opportunity: Achievement Gaps

Credit completion rates

First-gen

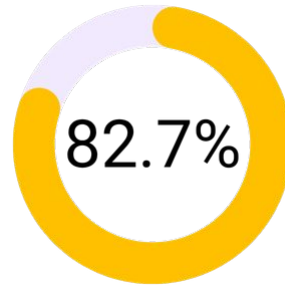


Cont-gen

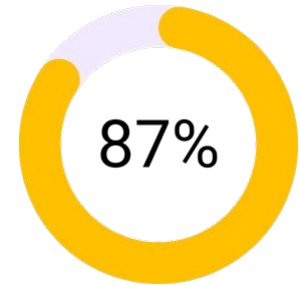


Retention rates

First-gen



Cont-gen



2023-2024 cohort data from the PDP

The Strategy: FGF + Summer Institute



PDP access for all

The charge: be curious

The Action

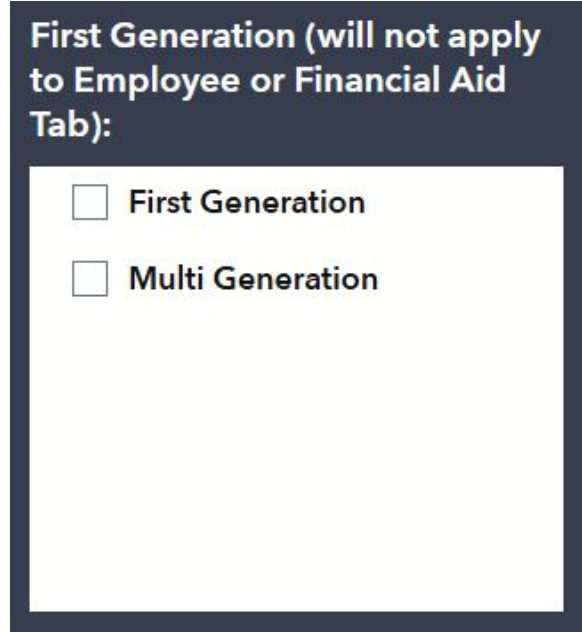
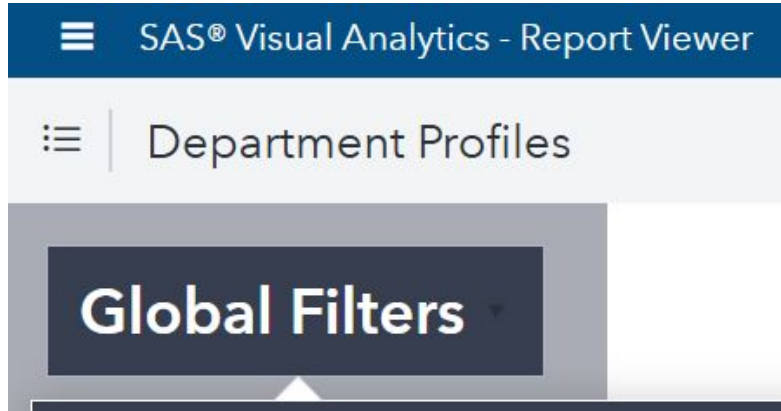
Two-day deep diving into data (May 2026)

Energetic conversations with actionable plans

Positive feedback about cross-campus collaborations, data
access,
focus on action, and student panel

Fall 2026 follow-ups planned

Impact and Learning



The more people in the conversation, the more opportunities for positive changes

Key Insights

- Ask for what you need--the answer might be “yes.”
- Empowered faculty and staff empower students
- Faculty and staff are often left in the dark about data and how to access it--give them tools to encourage their curiosities.

North Carolina Central University

Destination HBCU: First-Gen Graduation



Dekendrick Murray, Ed.D.

**Executive Director for Student Access
& Success**

dmurra41@nccu.edu



FIRSTGEN FORWARD

NETWORK CHAMPION CONVENING

**NORTH CAROLINA
CENTRAL UNIVERSITY**

Student Access & Success Programs



June 11, 2026

Rooted in Data, Driven by Purpose:

*How NCCU Is Moving
First-Gen Students Forward*

Dekendrick G. Murray, MSL

Executive Director, Student Access & Success Programs

North Carolina Central University

THE OPPORTUNITY | Who We Are & Why This Work Matters

SECTION 1 OF 4

8,775+

Total Students
Enrolled

64%

Pell-Eligible
Undergraduates
(5,616)

31.4%

First-Generation
Students
(2,755)

84%

Black / African
American
(7,371)

"First-generation students at NCCU don't just need a program — they need an ecosystem built for their success."

PDP DATA | First-Year Enrollment Trends

First Year Enrollment

Reset Dashboard

Definitions and Visualizations Guide

Data Sources: Institution(s): NORTH CAROLINA CENTRAL UNIVERSITY [002950-00] Institution Type: Four Year

Chart Settings: Filters: None applied.

Edit

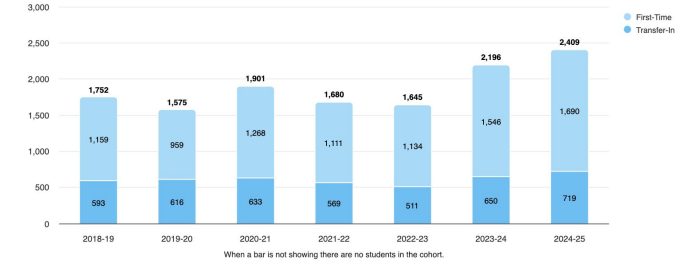
2024-25 Cohort

Total Enrollment
▲ 2,409
+9.7%

First-Time Enrollment
▲ 1,690
+9.31%

Transfer-in Enrollment
▲ 719
+10.62%

Enrollment Trends by Enrollment Type



PDP DATA | 2024-25 Cohort Demographics

Enrollment Type



Race/Ethnicity



Gender



Age at Entry



THE OPPORTUNITY | What the Data Revealed: The First-Gen Gap

SECTION 1 OF 4

~8-9

PERCENTAGE POINT

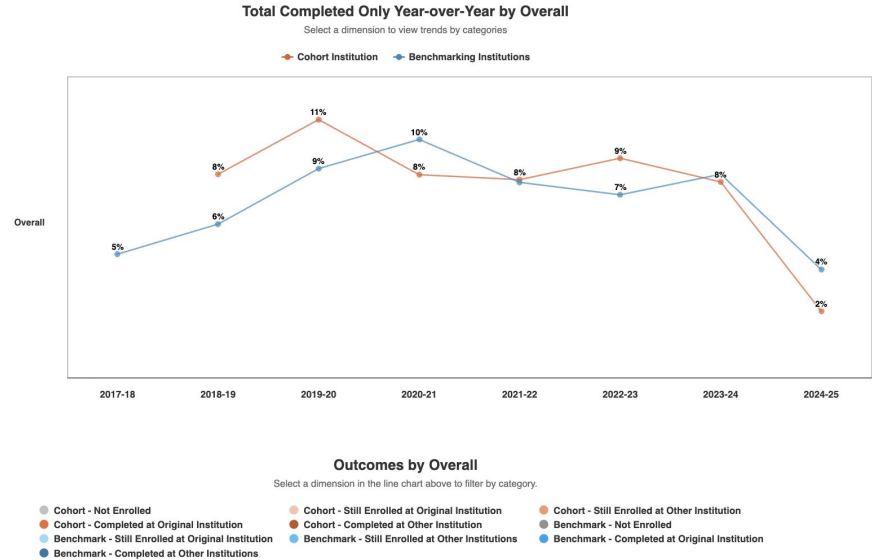
gap in 4-year completion between first-gen and continuing-gen students

vs.

35-36% first-gen

44-45% cont-gen

PDP DATA | 4-Year Completion by First-Generation Status (Any Institution, Any Credential)



Year after year, first-gen students complete at rates 8-9 points below peers. This gap — visible in the data, felt by our students — became our call to action.

THE OPPORTUNITY | Spring 2026 Student Focus Groups: What We Heard

SECTION 1 OF 4

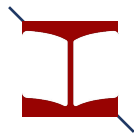


March – April 2026

Focus Group 1

First-Gen Experience
& Sense of Belonging

"When did you first feel like you belonged on campus?"



March – April 2026

Focus Group 2

Academic Success,
Advising & Support

"What makes an advisor or mentor truly helpful?"



March – April 2026

Focus Group 3

Career Readiness,
Financial Wellness & Future Planning

"How does financial stress impact your college experience?"

STUDENT-VOICED PRIORITIES EMERGED:

Belonging & Community

Connection and peer relationships are the #1 reported factor in staying enrolled.

Academic Momentum & Advising

Students need proactive, consistent advisors who stay engaged beyond Week 1.

Career Readiness & Financial Wellbeing

First-gen students carry unique financial stress that affects academic performance.

THE STRATEGY | What We Designed: Integrated First-Gen Ecosystem



TRIO SSS-STEM Success Program

Undergrad Admissions



LCI Student Accessibility Center

Aspiring Eagles Academy



Pre-College Access Programs



TRIO SSS-Teach Preparation

School of Graduate Studies



Men's Achievement Center

Scholarships & Student Aid




First-Gen Student Success




TRIO SSS-Accessibility Program

University Faculty



First-Gen Connection Hub/ Counseling Center

New Student & Family Programs



Living & Learning Community (Annie Day Shepard Hall)



TRIO SSS-Classic Program

*Veteran/ Transfer Services



TRIO Ronald E. McNairs Program

Career Center



Women's Center

THREE STRATEGIC DRIVERS (informed by PDP data + student focus groups)

Belonging & Community

Academic Momentum & Advising

Career Readiness & Financial Wellbeing

THE ACTION | What We Built: Programs, Partnerships & Infrastructure

SECTION 3 OF 4

BELONGING



TRIO Living-Learning Community

35 first-time scholars, Annie Day Shepard Hall. Pre-semester workshops on navigation, time management & conflict resolution. TRIO-designated UNIV 1100 sections.

COMMUNITY



First-Gen Student Advisory Council (FGSAC)

First-Gen Champions Recognition Breakfast · First-Gen Paint & Sip · Leadership programming & ambassador network. Students don't just receive support — they build identity.

PARTNERSHIP



Cross-Campus & Community Partnerships

TIAA (100+ care packages + financial coaching) · SC Next Step Consulting · NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation · Legacy Life Navigators, LLC. · Men's Achievement Center · Women's Center · Counseling Center · McNair Scholars Program · Office of Scholarships & Student Aid. Extending reach without additional cost.

DATA



PDP-Informed Continuous Improvement

PDP dashboards reviewed in regular team cycles. Term-to-term drop-off points identified and actioned in real time. student focus groups conducted Spring 2026 to validate data with lived experience.

THE ACTION | Institutional Investment: Grant Funding & Scholar Reach

SECTION 3 OF 4 | INSTITUTIONAL INVESTMENT

\$4.15M+

New TRIO, First-Gen Forward
John Hopkins, Wake Forest, Grant
Funding

\$61,600

In Scholarships Supporting
Student Success

500+

TRIO & First-Gen Scholars
Served Per Semester

3.1

**Average GPA of TRIO Acce[SSS]
Scholar**

Targeted academic support, proactive advising, and a community of scholars drives real academic outcomes. A 3.1 GPA average among our supported scholars reflects the return on intentional investment.

THE IMPACT | Retention & Persistence: NCCU vs. Benchmark Institutions

SECTION 4 OF 4

90%

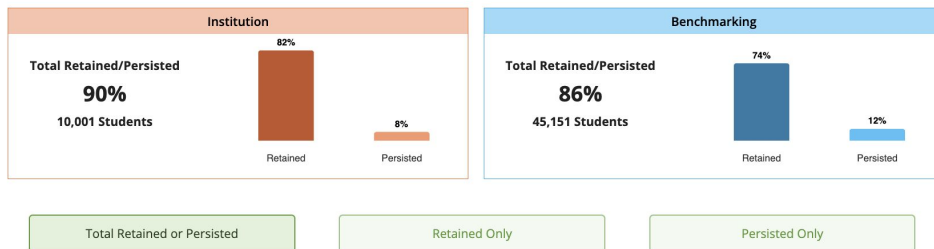
NCCU Retention Rate
(6 consecutive cohort years)

+4-6 pts

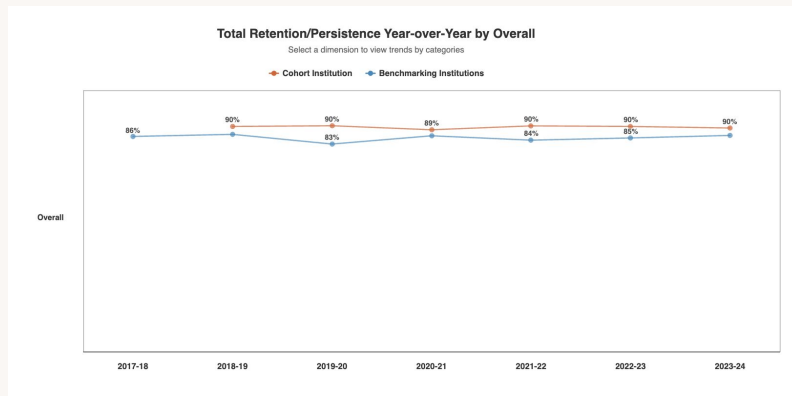
Above Peer Benchmark
Institutions

PDP DATA | Total Retention / Persistence Year-over-Year

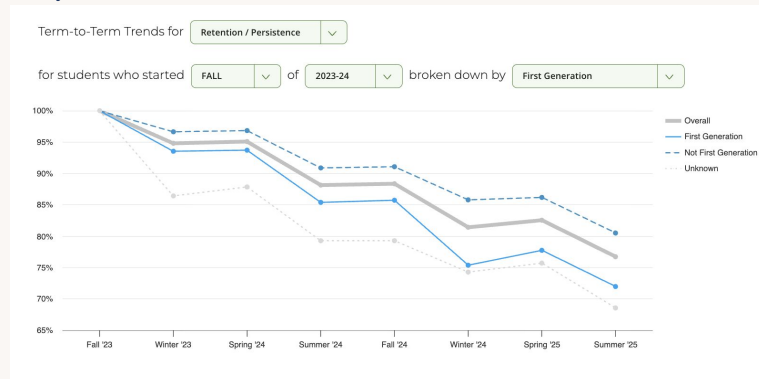
For the cohort institution, over the last 7 cohort years, **8% more students were retained** and **4% fewer students persisted**, compared to selected benchmarking institutions, in their second academic year.



PDP DATA | Total Retained / Persisted vs. Benchmark



PDP DATA | Term-to-Term Retention by First-Generation Status (Fall 2023-24 Cohort)



THE IMPACT | Completion Outcomes: Progress & the Persistent Gap

SECTION 4 OF 4

88%

Completed or Still Enrolled
at 2 Years (vs. 84%
benchmark)

35–38%

Bachelor's Degrees Conferred
at NCCU (annual, 2019–2022)

The Unfinished Work



While our retention is strong, the first-gen completion gap remains our most urgent priority. Our Spring 2026 focus groups gave us the qualitative roadmap: earlier intervention at Year 2 transitions, more consistent advising, and programming that addresses the whole student.

PDP DATA | Year-Over-Year Outcomes by Overall (2017–2025)

Change from 2023-24 Cohort to 2024-25 Cohort

Total
Transfer-Out
▼ -9.57 %

Transfer-Out
to 4-Year
▼ -4.71 %

Transfer-Out
to 2-Year
▼ -4.86 %

Average Credits Earned
Before Transfer
▼ -8.01

Year-Over-Year Transfer-Out Rates to Any Destination Institution broken down by Attendance



THE IMPACT | Student Voice: What 229 First-Gen Students Told Us

SECTION 4 OF 4 | Fall 2025 SSS Survey + Spring 2026 Focus Groups

45% cite fatigue & poor study habits as top obstacles

59% need stress management support (personal wellbeing)

30% say finances are their #1 source of stress

54% say parenting responsibilities affect ability to stay enrolled

STUDENT VOICES

"Just trying to manage my workload between school, work, and personal issues."

— SSS Survey Respondent

"I've had to cut my study time because of my son. I've missed classes and had to do makeup exams because I didn't have childcare coverage."

— Childcare Survey Respondent

"I haven't been able to take a chance to look around campus for resources — that's why I joined this session."

— Focus Group Participant, Spring 2026

THE IMPACT | Data → Action → Outcome: Destination: HBCU First-Gen Graduation

SECTION 4 OF 4 | FirstGen Forward PDP Transformation Grant Awardee

DATA



What PDP & Data Showed Us

- ▶ First-gen 4-yr completion gap: ~8–9 pts below peers
- ▶ Term-to-term drop-off sharpest at Year 2 summer transition
- ▶ 45% of students cite fatigue/study barriers as obstacles
- ▶ 30% report finances as primary stressor

ACTION



Destination: HBCU First-Gen Graduation

- ▶ Track 150 first-gen students via predictive analytics dashboard
- ▶ Mentoring, workshops & social programming tied to risk indicators
- ▶ Train 15 faculty/staff on PDP analytics for advising
- ▶ Annual Data-to-Action Retreat for cross-campus alignment

OUTCOME



Measurable Targets (by 2027)

- ▶ 5% increase in fall-to-fall first-gen retention
- ▶ 3% increase in 4-year graduation rates
- ▶ HBCU First-Gen Analytics Framework disseminated to 10+ peer institutions
- ▶ First-Gen Canvas resource library live and continuously updated

FirstGen Forward PDP Transformation Grant | \$5,000 Award | Dec 2025 – Nov 2026 | Outcome: HBCU First-Gen Analytics Framework for national replication

THE IMPACT | What We've Learned & What Comes Next

SECTION 4 OF 4 | LEARNING & NEXT STEPS



Data Shows the What. Students Show the Why.

PDP dashboards revealed the completion gap. Our focus groups told us the cause. Together, they give us direction. Neither alone is sufficient.



Belonging Is a Retention Strategy.

The #1 theme from three focus groups: students stay when they feel connected. Identity-building programming is not soft — it is strategic.



Partnerships Multiply Impact Without Cost.

TIAA, SC Next Step, DVR, TMC and community partners extended our reach without expanding our budget. Cross-campus alignment is a force multiplier.

WHAT'S NEXT

↑ Destination: HBCU First-Gen Graduation — tracking 150 scholars via predictive analytics through Nov 2026

↑ FIPSE Student Success grants (pending): campus-wide basic needs, belonging, and student success infrastructure

↑ HBCU First-Gen Analytics Framework: replicating NCCU's model for 10+ peer institutions by 2027

USE YOUR DATA.

LISTEN TO YOUR STUDENTS.

**BUILD THE COMMUNITY
THEY DESERVE.**

*First-generation students don't need to be fixed.
They need to be seen, supported, and given the
tools to do what they were always capable of doing.*

*They arrive. They graduate.
They lead. They come back.*



Thank You

Dekendrick G. Murray, MSL

Executive Director
Student Access & Success Programs
North Carolina Central University

NCCU | Durham, NC

Tarleton State University

IGNITE: Inspiring Growth, Networking, Innovation, and Transformative Experience



Rachel Weldon-Caron

**Assistant Vice President for TRIO
Programs and First-Generation Initiatives
RWeldonCaron@tarleton.edu**





TARLETON STATE
UNIVERSITY®

Member of The Texas A&M University System



IGNITE

Inspiring **G**rowth, **N**etworking, **I**nnovation, and **T**ransformative
Experiences

Ms. Rachael Weldon-Caron & Dr. Kristin Herrmann



IGNITE

Inspiring **G**rowth, **N**etworking, **I**nnovation, and **T**ransformative **E**xperiences

The goal of IGNITE is to empower first-generation science and mathematics students by providing the support, skills, and opportunities they need to thrive during their academic experience and into their future careers.

Through:

Mentoring 🔥 Opportunity Awareness 🔥 Career Coaching

MENTORING 🔥 OPPORTUNITY AWARENESS 🔥 CAREER COACHING

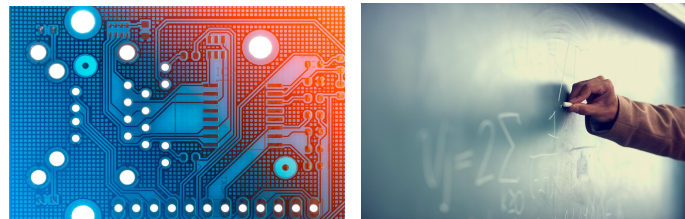
- Connect first-gen students with both peer and faculty mentors to build a strong support network.
- Offer workshops to help students discover opportunities in research, internships, and outreach and how to gain access to these experiences.
- Hold STEM specific resume-building workshops, networking events, and professional development.
- Prepare students in pursuing STEM internships, jobs, and graduate programs.
- Help students to navigate their academic journey, build confidence, and feel a sense of belonging at Tarleton and in STEM fields.



SURVEY DATA – KICK-OFF EVENT

In one word, what does being first-gen mean to you?



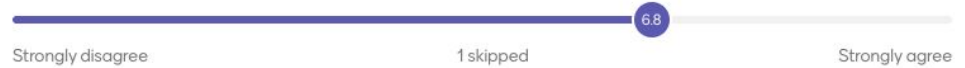


SURVEY DATA – 2ND EVENT

How much do these statements describe your connection with other first-generation students?

6 / 6

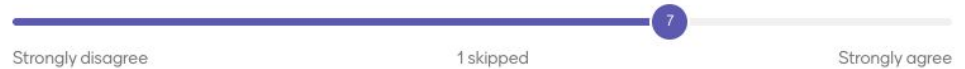
> I know other first-generation students at Tarleton.



> I feel connected to other first-generation students.

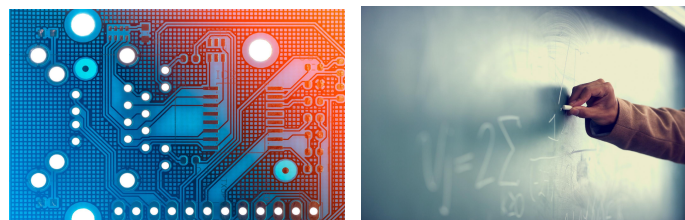


> I have opportunities to build relationships with other first-generation students.



> I feel supported by other first-generation students.





SURVEY DATA – 2ND EVENT

How does IGNITE affect your sense of belonging and confidence?

6 / 6

> IGNITE helps me feel more connected to Tarleton.



> IGNITE helps me feel more connected to STEM.



> IGNITE helps me feel more confident in my academic ability.



> IGNITE helps me feel supported as a first-generation student.



SURVEY DATA – 2ND EVENT

What is one change that would improve your experience?

“More opportunities to connect with faculty about events going on. The most recent event was helpful in getting to meet a couple other staff and hear their insight and I would like to see more of that”

“Faculty coming and talking about what they do and how we got here”

“Some opportunities aren’t obtainable as a senior, so seeing some after graduation support maybe with professional school or development of a career or even application aid with able opportunities.”



Thank you!

I'm first-gen and proud because...

I get to do something my parents couldn't

First to do it.

My parents are proud

I've proven to myself that I can do this.

Of those who've helped me get here

I get to see what I'm capable of

Get to explore all of these opportunities to be a better me

I have an opportunity that people in my family don't get to have and I get to create a legacy for my family in the future to come and set an example for those younger than me in my family.

I'm have all these family members that are supporting me and want me to be better than they are and I'm making my own path ahead

First STEM major



IGNITE

Inspiring Growth, Networking, Innovation, and Transformative Experiences





TRANSFORMATION
GRANT

University of Washington Tacoma

First 3 Momentum Dashboard: A PDP-Aligned Student Success Outcomes Framework



Bonnie J. Becker, Ph.D.
Associate Vice Chancellor
for Student Success and
Associate Professor



**Dominic Jay "DJ" Leon
Guerrero Crisostomo**
Assistant Director of the
Office of First Gen



Amanda Figueroa
Associate Vice Chancellor
for Social Mobility

At-a-Glance Schedule Highlights

9:50 AM – 10:35 AM

Network Knowledge: HigherEd Trends
All Leader Academy & Champion Convening Attendees
JW Marriott 203-204

10:45 AM – 11:35 AM

Institution Work Time
All Leader Academy & Champion Convening Attendees
JW Marriott 203-204

11:40 AM – 12:00 PM

Closing Session
All Leader Academy & Champion Convening Attendees
JW Marriott 203-204

Network Knowledge: Higher Ed Trends

All Leader Academy & Champion
Convening Attendees

Network Knowledge: HE Trends

1. Building a Campus Network of First-Gen Champions

- Professional development, faculty/staff engagement, and building institutional capacity

2. Engaging Alumni Affairs Through Mentorship & Ambassador Programs

- Alumni serving in student mentor and ambassador roles

3. Building Leadership Buy-In for First-Gen Success

- Strategies for engaging administrators and navigating institutional resistance

4. Making First-Gen Visible

- Branding, outreach, and reducing stigma around first-generation identity

5. Engaging First-Gen Alumni & Fundraising Strategies

- Building alumni connections, storytelling, and advancement opportunities

2026 FirstGen Forward Leader Academy

6. Supporting the Supporters

- Balancing student support with faculty/staff well-being and capacity

7. Tracking the First-Gen Student Journey

- Longitudinal data, lifecycle tracking, and understanding student progression over time

8. Using Data & Storytelling to Drive Action

- Communicating impact, demonstrating ROI, and leveraging narratives alongside data

9. First-Gen Success at Two-Year Institutions

- Unique challenges, opportunities, and strategies within community college contexts

10. Connecting Career Services to First-Gen Success

- Career readiness, workforce preparation, and cross-campus collaboration

2026 FirstGen Forward Network Champion Convening

At-a-Glance Schedule Highlights

10:45 AM – 11:35 AM

Institution Work Time

All Leader Academy & Champion Convening Attendees

JW Marriott 203-204

11:40 AM – 12:00 PM

Closing Session

All Leader Academy & Champion Convening Attendees

JW Marriott 203-204

Institution Work Time

**All Leader Academy & Champion
Convening Attendees**

Presenter



**Wendy Beesley,
M.P.A**

she/her/hers

**Assistant Vice President,
Network Strategies
FirstGen Forward**

NETWORK LEADER

1. Continue planning discussions
2. Align on FOCUS AREA
3. Return to campus: GO! (pg.29)
 - a. Who?
 - b. What?
 - c. When?



NETWORK CHAMPION

1. Institution Team: Planning time
 - Action Item for return to campus
 - NEXT STEP Goals

OR

2. Champion Collaborations: Connect
 - Support
 - Motivate
 - Advocate

At-a-Glance Schedule Highlights

11:40 AM – 12:00 PM

Closing Session

All Leader Academy & Champion Convening Attendees

JW Marriott 203-204

Closing Session

**All Leader Academy & Champion
Convening Attendees**

Reflection



What is one key insight you are taking with you?



What is one action you will take in the next 30 days?



What support or partnership will you need to move this work forward?

We Want Your Feedback!

Please take a few minutes to complete the post-event evaluation:

- **Scan the QR code on the screen.**
 - **Also available in the NASPA App, Linktree, & Basecamp**
- **Paper evaluations available if you prefer.**
- **Submit your response before you leave today.**
- **Takes just 10-15 minutes to complete.**



FGF #SSHE26 Highlights

Friday, June 12, 2026

- **From First-Gen Is a Flex to First-Gen at Scale: Building a National Movement for Student Success**
 - 8:00 AM - 9:15 AM | JW Marriott 311
- **Translating Data to Action: Institutional PDP Insights to Advance Student Success**
 - 1:30 PM - 2:20 PM | JW Marriott 309
- **FirstGen Forward Network: Joining a Community of Practice for First-generation Student Success**
 - 2:30 PM - 3:20 PM | JW Marriott 402
- **Faculty as Catalysts: Leveraging First-Generation Faculty Fellow Programs**
 - 4:10 PM - 5:00 PM | JW Marriott 201
- **Demystifying Academic Publication: Practical Strategies and Tips for Scholar-Practitioners**
 - 5:15 PM - 6:05 PM | JW Marriott 306

Saturday, June 13, 2026

- **From Ideation to Innovation: A Driver for First-generation Student Success**
 - 8:10 AM - 9:00 AM | JW Marriott 307

Network Leader Academy & Champion Convening Attendance Badge

1. **Navigate to the Leader Academy widget on the NASPA Events App**
2. **Find the section titled “Leader Academy Attendee Badge” or Champion Convening Attendee Badge”**
3. **Find your name on the list, click, & download**
4. **Post your badge to highlight your skills on LinkedIn and other social media**



Reaching Back to Move Forward



Reach back to the ideas, relationships, and lessons that shaped these past two days.



Reach back to the stories that remind us why this work matters.



Then move forward with renewed purpose, stronger partnerships, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

First-generation student success is not a destination. It is a journey we advance together.