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FirstGen Forward releases new national landscape report on first-generation student success in higher education and workforce

“First-generation College Students’ Career Entry: College Perspectives” is the first of six research briefs in the landscape analysis series

WASHINGTON, DC (April 15, 2025) - [FirstGen Forward](#), formerly the Center for First-generation Student Success, today announced the release of the first research brief in its new series, [*First-generation Student Success: A Landscape Analysis of Programs, Services, and Perspectives in Higher Education*](#).

Produced alongside [Phase Two Advisory](#), the first research brief, [“First-generation College Students’ Career Entry: College Perspectives”](#), examines first-generation students’ career exploration and entry as well as the ways that educational institutions help students to successfully navigate the transition into the U.S. workforce.

“There is significant research detailing first-generation students’ educational journeys, but very little scholarship specific to career development and potential ‘boundary crossing’ experiences by these students as they transition into their careers,” said Dr. Melinda Mechur Karp, founder and principal of Phase Two Advisory. “This brief begins to remedy this knowledge gap, examining the unique nature of first-generation college students’ career development, how higher education institutions approach this topic, and identifying areas to deepen and expand support to meet the needs of this population.”

Highlights from the research include:

- First-generation students rely heavily on institutional resources and mentors to aid their career journeys; similar to their higher education journey, first-generation students often lack existing family or social networks with familiarity of the career options available.

However, only thirty-six (36%) percent of respondents indicated that their institutions offer career programming tailored for first-generation students.

- There is a disconnect between what practitioners believe students need and what is provided; qualitative data highlighted interview preparation, navigating the hidden curriculum of the job market, and salary and benefits negotiation skills as critical areas of need.

“The data in this report reinforce the importance of supporting our first-generation students to *and* through degree or credential attainment,” said Maurice Jones, CEO of FirstGen Forward. “First-generation students represent over half of all undergraduate students in this country—they are the workforce of our future and key to keeping our country’s economy strong.”

“By 2031, seventy-two percent of jobs in our country will require postsecondary education,” said Jones. “Therein lies the work to be done, the opportunity we are pursuing. When we commit to first-generation student career development, we help strengthen our country’s workforce and help first-generation students access opportunities commensurate with their skills, education, and training.”

The new series is an update and expansion of two seminal reports by FirstGen Forward, [*First-generation Student Success: A Landscape Analysis of Programs and Services at Four-year Institutions*](#) (2018) and [*First-generation Students in Community and Technical Colleges: A National Exploration of Institutional Support Practices*](#) (2020). The full analysis will be released in a series of six research briefs, covering topics such as first-generation student support approaches and data definitions.

“FirstGen Forward’s landscape analyses have been instrumental in providing a data-driven foundation for first-generation student success efforts at higher education institutions for the better part of the last decade,” said Dr. Mary Fugate, assistant vice president of data analytics with FirstGen Forward. “But the landscape has shifted substantially since those initial scans—the pandemic, political changes, economic and enrollment challenges—making it vital that we revisit the work to determine what services higher ed currently offers to first-generation students and where gaps in support may exist.”

Additional briefs will continue to be added through Summer 2026. To read the briefs or other publications, or to learn more about FirstGen Forward, visit firstgenforward.org.

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ABOUT FIRSTGEN FORWARD

FirstGen Forward, formerly the Center for First-generation Student Success, accelerates success

for first-generation students in education, career, and life through collaborations with higher education, philanthropy, business, government, and individuals to eliminate the completion gap and broaden post-college opportunities. Our vision is a future in which first-generation students obtain postsecondary credentials; access opportunities commensurate with their skills, education, and training; and maximize their service to people and communities throughout the world.

ABOUT PHASE TWO ADVISORY

Phase Two Advisory works with colleges, foundations, and improvement networks to translate research evidence into equity-forward reform strategies. We provide strategic planning and implementation support, just-in-time research, and professional learning opportunities to leaders and practitioners throughout the higher education sector as they shepherd transformative change.