



## Working with First-Generation Students

American University uses the Common Application to define a first-generation student as someone whose parent(s) never attended college. First-generation students may self-identify in that way, or as someone whose parent(s) attended but didn't complete college, or completed college at a foreign university, but don't understand the customs of American institutions.

### What the National Research Says:

- 30% of undergraduate students are first-generation
- 3 out of 5 first-generation students don't graduate
- Disproportionately Hispanic and African-American
- More likely to be enrolled part-time
- More likely to be economically insecure

### What the research is less likely to mention:

- First-generation students are brave, tenacious and willing
- Understand the value of obtaining higher education
- Have refreshing perspectives about academia/college life

| First-Generation Students May:  | Faculty/Staff Can:   |
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| Feel like they don't belong on campus, or like they don't know how to "do college."   | Understand that campus can be like a foreign culture. Try to remove stigma around asking for help. Encourage getting involved on campus.   |
| Not recognize the vocabulary of academia.   | Check for clarification, provide a brief glossary of terms in your course/office materials (ex. Office Hours, registrar, etc.). Review terms as needed.  |
| Be unaware of resources available to them.  | Include resources relevant to your course/office in your materials. Mention that many of the resources have already been paid for as a part of a student's fees, and are accessible at no additional cost. |
| Not know the rules. Boundaries may be blurry; they might not know what they don't know. Questions about content are thoughtful and earnest. | Help students learn how to learn. Allow missteps, suggest study groups. Keep standards high.   |
| Work one or multiple jobs, leaving little time to study/enjoy campus activities.  | Suggest applying for on-campus jobs (campus employers are more understanding of students' schedules). If applicable, encourage work/life balance.  |