



CENTER FOR FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT SUCCESS

AN INITIATIVE OF NASPA AND THE SUDER FOUNDATION



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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George Mason University Receives First-gen Forward Designation;
National Honor for Commitment to First-generation Student Success

FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA (March 1st, 2021) - The Center for First-generation Student Success, an initiative of NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and The Suder Foundation, recently announced the 2021-22 First-gen Forward cohort. The First-gen Forward designation recognizes institutions of higher education who have demonstrated a commitment to improving experiences and advancing outcomes of first-generation college students. Selected institutions receive professional development, community-building experiences, and a first look at the Center’s research and resources.

At George Mason University, first-generation students are defined as students whose parent(s)/legal guardian(s) have a highest level of education from a community college; did not complete a bachelor's degree; or completed a degree outside of the United States. As of Fall 2020, Mason reported that 20% of all first-time freshmen and 26% of all undergraduate degree-seeking students were first-generation college students. 78% of first-gen students enrolled in Fall 2020 were attending full-time. First-generation college students face various barriers when trying to excel both academically and socially. Mason works to eliminate these additional barriers and foster first-generation student success through intentional programming and catered support. This support includes:

- **Early Identification Program:** George Mason University’s college preparatory program for first-generation students in collaboration with local schools.
- **Student Transition Empowerment Program:** Mason’s Center for Culture, Equity, and Empowerment’s (CCEE) initiative created to enhance the recruitment, engagement, and retention of first-generation college students accepted to George Mason University.
- **First-Generation Peer Mentoring Program:** CCEE’s mentoring program to support first-generation student success.
- **First-Generation Student Task Force:** Task force led by Mason Faculty/Staff who were first-generation students themselves.

“The Center is so pleased to welcome George Mason University into the 2021-22 First-gen Forward cohort. Through the application process, it was evident that Mason is not only taking steps to serve first-generation students but is prepared to make a long-term commitment and employ strategies that foster an environment of success for this important population,” said Dr. Sarah E. Whitley, assistant vice president, Center for First-generation Student Success.

Dr. Creston Lynch, assistant vice president for University Life at Mason said, “We, at Mason, are excited to be in this First-gen Forward cohort because it not only further positions our faculty and staff to continue their amazing and comprehensive work in support of first-generation students, but it also aligns directly with the Mason University Life vision that “every student succeeds” during and after their time here.”

As a First-gen Forward Institution, interested faculty and staff will be afforded multiple opportunities to engage with peer institutions who are also creating environments that improve the experiences and outcomes of first-generation students. Selected institutions will send representatives to the First-gen Forward Workshop slated for early-June and will participate in monthly phone calls, virtual professional development, goal setting, blog development, annual reporting, and more. After two successful years in the program, institutions are eligible to apply for the Advisory leadership designation.

“First-gen Forward is an exciting opportunity for George Mason University to join a dedicated community of professionals prepared to share evidence-based practices and resources, troubleshoot challenges, generate knowledge, and continue to advance the success of first-generation students across the country. We are excited to see a groundswell of activity from the First-gen Forward cohort and know Mason will be a significant contributor,” offered Dr. Kevin Kruger, president and CEO of NASPA.

To learn more about the Center for First-generation Student Success, visit firstgen.naspa.org.

NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education is the leading association for the advancement, health, and sustainability of the student affairs profession. Its work provides high-quality professional development, advocacy, and research for 15,000 members in all 50 states, 25 countries, and 8 U.S. territories. Visit naspa.org for more information.

The Center for First-generation Student Success is the premier source of evidence-based practices, professional development, and knowledge creation for the higher education community to advance the success of first-generation students. Through four strategic priority areas, the Center drives higher education innovation and advocacy for first-generation student success.

