



# **Putting First Gen First:** Meeting the needs of first generation students

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- Bachelor of Communication - Information Design (Mount Royal University)
- Master of Education - Educational Research (University of Calgary)
  - Inclusive Education
  - Leading & Learning in the Digital Age
  - Capstone Research: Needs of First-Generation Students
- Worked in private-sector marketing & communications
- Nearly 6 years at UCalgary, working with undergraduate & graduate students



How did I become  
interested in  
first-generation  
students as a  
population?



*“It is important to understand that **first-generation students are a diverse group of students and not a monolith**, which means that their individual motivations, lacks, necessities and wants may differ, however when assessed as a group, **trends can be discovered in their experiences.**” - Emma Lockyer*



# Who *are* first-generation students?

- Students who do not have a parent who attended or graduated from post-secondary (depending on which source you use).
  - In a literature review I went with the broadest definition as I had sources that used both
- More likely than their continuing-generation peers to “drop out” / leave without completing a degree
- More likely than their peers to:
  - Be of a racial minority
  - Be from a lower socioeconomic background
  - Be from a rural community
- More likely to take out student loans and work more hours
- Typically have lower standardized test scores & less likely to have taken advanced high school courses (Advanced Placement, Honours, International Baccalaureate , etc)



# Social Capital

## What is it and why is it important?

*The networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively. - Oxford English Dictionary*

- Information sharing by parents, family members and friends
- Understanding unspoken norms
- Assistance navigating systems
  - Jargon
  - Who to ask
  - Available resources

## **Jamboard Activity**

*What are some barriers/challenges that first-gen students may face in post-secondary?*





# Barriers to access & success

- Lack of family support - both support to attend and emotional support while dealing with the challenges of higher education
- Academic preparation and confidence in academic abilities
- Financial resources
- Navigating institutional systems
- Time
- Lack of community





# Needs & wants of first-generation students

## Needs

- Understanding of academic systems
- Understanding of academic rewards
- Communities of belonging
- Peer support
- Psychological support

## Wants

- Support from faculty and advisors
- Engagement in extra academic programs
- Connection to community
- On campus employment
- Financial aid

## **Breakout Rooms**

*How can we as advisors help first-generation students overcome barriers and be successful in post-secondary?*





# How can we as advisors help first-generation students overcome barriers and be successful in post-secondary?

- Use clear language and avoid abbreviations, acronyms and jargon when communicating with students
- Provide clear referrals to to other campus resources and services
- Help find and foster community
- **Show support**

Questions?



**Want to connect?**

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