Exploring Culture Awareness: First-Generation Students

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For science to serve our community, our community must be fully engaged in science.

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How Can I Support First-Generation Students?

Some students may be unfamiliar with the term “first-gen” or feel uncomfortable when asked about it. Acknowledging hard work and taking on new challenges is likely to be appreciated by all.

First-generation students may not be familiar with “typical” college experiences. Provide support as they learn institutional processes, rethink a major, or consider enriching experiences such as extra- and co-curricular activities, internships, research, and study abroad.

First-generation students are more likely to come from lower-income households. Some may feel guilty about being in college rather than helping at home. Remind them that their pursuit of education is in the long-term best interest of their family. Help them explore their best scholarship, financial aid, and employment options.

Many colleges and universities have programs that support first-generation students. This includes TRIO programs designated to serve first-gen and other underrepresented students. [www.usd.edu/student-life/trio](http://www.usd.edu/student-life/trio)

Who is a First-Generation (First-Gen) Student?

A first-generation student is generally defined as one who does not have a parent with a bachelor’s degree. At USD, approximately 22% of first-time, degree-seeking undergraduates are first-gen.

First-time, degree-seeking, first-gen undergraduates are a diverse group. At USD, 62% are White, 14% are Hispanic/Latino, 10% are Black, 7% are Multiracial, 4% are Asian, and 2% are Native American.

A disproportionate number of USD’s students of color are first-generation. Conversely, a disproportionate number of USD’s white students are not first-gen.

What are the Strengths of First-Generation Students?

First-generation students bring strengths to their campus community. These include experiences and ties to different regions, languages, religions, and community and household stores of knowledge.

Families of first-generation students are often proud of their children and supportive of their endeavors. Students may feel alienated, though, from family or friends who do not have the similar experience of being a college student.

Many first-generation students have gone on to do important things. These include Justice Sonia Sotomayor (Supreme Court), Howard Schultz (former CEO of Starbucks), and Oprah Winfrey (actress, executive, philanthropist).