

## On the Frontline:

Supporting First-Generation Military-Connected Students

# **Your Presenters**



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# **Outcomes**

- Identify the unique challenges faced by military-connected, first-generation students and understand their impact on students' academic and personal experiences.
- Describe at least three specific support strategies, including mentorship programs and community-building initiatives, to foster success for these students.

 Develop an action plan to implement one or more new initiatives or resources at their institution aimed at supporting military-connected, first-generation students.

# Agenda

- Welcome and Introduction
- Understanding the Military-Connected,
   First-Generation Experience
- Research-Based Strategies and Support Resources
- Group Activity: Developing Inclusive Support Plans
- Q&A and Closing

# Who Are Military-Connected, First-Generation Students?

**General Definition:** Students who are both first in their families to attend college and connected to the military (active-duty, veterans, or dependents).

### **Quick Statistics:**

- Approximately 62% of student veterans identify as first-generation college students (NCES, NPSAS 2020).
- Median age is often higher than traditional students (e.g., mid-20s to early 30s).
  - average age of undergraduate military learners is 32 years old. This data is based on the 2019–20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study.
- Tend to be more likely to work full-time while enrolled.

# **Unique Strengths**

### **Resilience and Adaptability:**

Experience overcoming adversity in the military.

### **Global Perspective & Cultural Competency:**

 Lived or worked in diverse environments, giving them a broadened worldview and an appreciation for diverse perspectives.

### **Leadership Skills:**

Proven teamwork and decision-making abilities.

### **Resourcefulness & Problem-Solving Abilities:**

 Military-connected students are accustomed to working with limited resources and thinking critically to find solutions, which enhances their ability to navigate academic challenges.

#### **Commitment to Goals:**

Highly motivated to complete degrees to support themselves and their families.



# **Unique Challenges**

### **Academic Preparation:**

- Interrupted schooling due to deployments or transitions.
- Less familiarity with academic structures and jargon.

#### **Financial Barriers:**

- Navigating complex military education benefits (e.g., GI Bill).
- Balancing family responsibilities with limited funds.

### (New) Cultural Adjustment:

- Navigating dual identities (military and first-gen).
- Feelings of isolation in both military and academic settings.



# Case Study: John's Journey

### **Background:**

John, a 28-year-old Army veteran and first-gen student, enrolled in a state university.

### He struggles with:

- Understanding transfer credits.
- Balancing parenting and part-time work.
- Feeling disconnected from younger classmates.

### **Support Provided:**

- Connection with a campus veteran resource center.
- Peer mentoring with a first-gen military-connected alumni group.
- Workshops on maximizing GI Bill benefits.

### **Outcome:**

 John successfully adjusted and graduated with honors.

# Recommendations for Support

## **Dedicated Support Services:**

- Establish military and first-gen resource centers.
- Create staff roles specializing in military benefits navigation.

### **Peer and Alumni Networks:**

 Develop mentoring programs pairing military-connected first-gen students with alumni.

## Flexible Academic Options:

 Recommend evening and online courses to accommodate work and family obligations.

# **Best Practices Overview**

### **Holistic Student Support**

- Use integrated services that address academic, financial, and personal needs.
- Example: One-stop centers that combine financial aid counseling, academic advising, and mental health support.

#### **Proactive Outreach and Communication**

- Identify military-connected first-gen students early and engage them through tailored messaging.
- Example: Targeted emails about resources specific to their needs (e.g., GI Bill workshops).

# **Best Practices Overview**

# **Inclusive Campus Culture**

- Create spaces and programming where these students feel seen and supported.
  - Example: Host a "First-Gen and Military Appreciation Week."

### **Peer and Alumni Networks**

- Facilitate relationships with peers and alumni who share similar backgrounds.
  - **Example:** Peer mentoring programs that match military-connected students with first-gen alumni.

# Research Findings Supporting Best Practices

 Academic Success: Students with access to tailored advising and proactive support show higher retention and graduation rates.

• Sense of Belonging: Inclusive campus initiatives correlate with greater engagement and satisfaction.

 Financial Stability: Early education on financial aid and military benefits reduces dropout risks due to financial stress.

# **Examples from the Field**

# **University of Firsts: Military-Connected and First-Gen Cohort Model**

- Description: Special orientation for military-connected first-gen students.
- Outcome: Students in the cohort reported higher satisfaction and retention rates.

# **Examples from the Field**

# Firsts Community and Technical College: Embedded Advisors

- Description: Advisors trained in military benefits and first-gen challenges stationed at a Veterans Resource Center.
- Outcome: 90% of students who accessed this service successfully re-enrolled the following semester.



# **Examples from the Field**

### **Statewide Partnership:**

- Description: A consortium of universities and local veterans' organizations offering career counseling and internships.
- Outcome: Increased employment rates post-graduation.

### Institution: University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA):

- Data Utilization: UTSA recognizes that two-thirds of its military-affiliated students are first-generation. <u>insidehighered.com</u>, <u>Nov. 2024</u>
- Targeted Support Services: The university offers tailored programs to address the specific challenges faced by this demographic, including academic advising and career services.



# Group Activity: Developing Inclusive Support Plans

# **Small Group Discussion:**

- 1. Brainstorm a support plan for military-connected, first-generation students at their institutions, incorporating strategies discussed.
- 2. Share ideas with the larger group, fostering cross-institutional insights and collaboration.



# Looking Ahead -Implementation Steps

- Start Small: Pilot one or two initiatives based on campus needs.
- Leverage Data: Use institutional data to identify gaps and measure outcomes.
- Engage Stakeholders: Involve faculty, staff, and external partners in program planning and execution.

# **Resource Sharing**

#### **Online Tools**

- **Military OneSource:** Comprehensive resources for service members and their families.
- Student Veterans of America (SVA): Campus chapters offer peer support and leadership opportunities

#### **Professional Associations**

#### NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education

- Military-Connected Students & Families Knowledge Community
- https://www.naspa.org/
- Offers professional development, research, and best practices for supporting military-affiliated students in student affairs.

#### **ACPA – College Student Educators International**

- Coalition for Veterans and Military Affiliated Students
- https://www.myacpa.org/
- Focuses on student affairs practitioners supporting military-connected students.

## National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO)

- https://www.nacubo.org/
- Provides guidance on financial aid, tuition assistance, and compliance for military students.

#### **Veteran-Centered Organizations Engaging Student Affairs**

#### **Student Veterans of America (SVA)**

- https://studentveterans.org/
- Engages student affairs teams in building and sustaining veteran-friendly campus environments.

#### Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) – Syracuse University

- https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/
- Offers research, training, and initiatives for student affairs professionals working with military-affiliated students.

#### Council of College and Military Educators (CCME)

- <a href="https://ccmeonline.org/">https://ccmeonline.org/</a>
- Provides training and professional development for student affairs professionals on military student success.

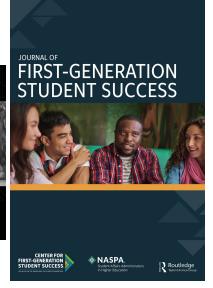


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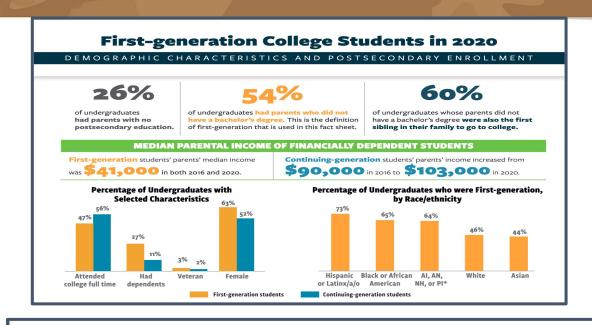


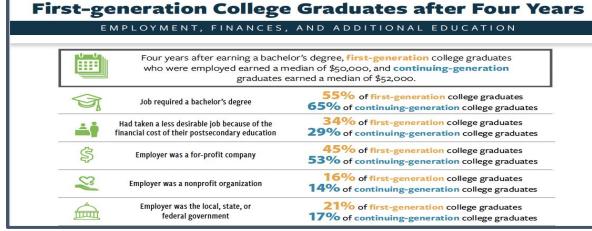














#### FIRSTGEN FORWARD PUBLICATIONS

#### An Annotated Bibliography on First-generation College Students: Research from 2008-2019

This <u>annotated bibliography</u> examines hundreds of entries, placing each into chapters centering on eleven topics: career readiness; classroom teaching and pedagogy; graduate and professional school students; intersections of identity; low-income & working-class students; student refugees; mass media and popular culture; memoirs and fiction; parents and families; social and cultural capital; and student success.

#### First-generation Student Success: A Landscape Analysis of Programs and Services at Four-year Institutions

The report, First-generation Student Success: A Landscape Analysis of Programs and Services at Four-year Institutions, led by the Center for First-generation Student Success, details how institutions serve first-generation students, the challenges institutions encounter in providing support, and how first-generation students perceive their institutional experience.

#### National Data Fact Sheets on First-generation and Continuing-generation College Students

These <u>fact sheets</u> provide national statistics about the background characteristics, postsecondary experiences, and outcomes of first-generation and continuing-generation college students in the United States from 2019.

#### First-generation Students in Community and Technical Colleges: A National Exploration of Institutional Support Practices

This <u>report</u> features the perspectives of administrators and student services practitioners who work daily to improve first-generation student outcomes, the voices of first-generation community and technical college students reflecting on their unique experiences, and analyses of the programs.

#### Journal of First-generation Student Success

The Journal of First-generation Student
Success joins other publications of
NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in
Higher Education, adding another robust
resource available to NASPA members. The
Journal is managed by the Center for
First-generation Student Success and seeks
to publish practice articles grounded in
research and literature and, reciprocally,
research articles that speak to practice.

#### National Data Fact Sheets on First-generation College in 2020

These <u>fact sheets</u> provide information about first-generation college students' demographic characteristics, enrollment characteristics, and experiences during the early COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the findings are similar to those in the <u>National Data Fact Sheets from 2019</u>.







# **Questions?**



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