

A green-tinted photograph of a graduate in a cap and gown kissing their mother on the cheek. The mother is smiling and looking up at the graduate. Other people are visible in the background, also smiling.

UF

# PARENTS + FAMILIES ARE PARTNERS

First-Generation Family Guide



# WELCOME TO **FLORIDA**

**CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR STUDENT BEING ACCEPTED** at one of the most prestigious universities in the country. This guide is your roadmap to be sure you are an integral part of your student's academic career at UF. First-generation students often possess diverse skills that can enhance their college experience. Adaptability, resilience, personal pride, ingenuity, and a strong sense of responsibility are what make first-gen students stand out. This is because of the lessons they have learned from you as their family members and support system.

At UF, we celebrate the diverse identities of the over 50,000 students pursuing higher education. Nationally, around 20% of all incoming first year students at four-year universities are the first in their families to attend college. These students are first-generation college students (first-gen). First-gen students set a new path and blaze a trail for their families and communities by attending college.

We recognize the transition from high school to higher education can be a unique adjustment for any student. To be first in the family to navigate this new experience can be exciting, challenging, or overwhelming for the student, as well as family members. The purpose of this guide is to help you learn more about UF and provide strategies for you to continue to help and support your student in college.







# THE **BIG 7** + YOUR STUDENT

**FROM OUR WORK WITH FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS**, we have discovered 7 competencies that our students acquire, develop, and use in order to be successful during their time in college as well as when they transition to life after college. We begin the family guide with these 7 competencies because we know you want to encourage your student to be successful at UF.

## THE COURAGE TO ASK FOR HELP AND SUPPORT

There are a number of resources to ensure your student gets the most out of their academic experience at UF. The following services are available to all UF students, but highly recommended for first-gen students.

- **ACADEMIC ADVISING** is offered for all majors at UF. Students can schedule appointments or walk-in to see academic advisors about degree requirements, course selection, minors, and various other academic related concerns. Academic advisors serve a similar purpose to high school guidance counselors.
- **THE UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER** has graduate students who proof read papers and help students learn how to improve their writing skills.
- **THE OFFICE OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT** offers various programs to promote a learning experience in which students can achieve their academic goals and reach their full potential.
- **PROFESSORS AND TEACHING ASSISTANTS** (TA's) set aside office hours to meet and work with students regarding course material, test preparation and their progress in class. Information on office hours can be found in the class syllabus (aka the class outline that students get at the beginning of each course). Students that utilize office hours not only have a better chance of doing well in the class, but are also likely to build a relationship with that teacher who could end up serving as a valuable mentor.
- At **THE BROWARD TEACHING CENTER**, tutors help students in areas such as math, science, engineering, and writing.

### → FAMILY TALKING POINT

**SUPPORTING YOUR STUDENT WHILE THEY ARE ADJUSTING TO THEIR NEW LIFE AT COLLEGE IS IMPORTANT.** You can help by showing you are available if they become stressed or overwhelmed. It is normal for students to go through an adjustment period in order to become fully comfortable with the academic demands of college. College classes are often designed to be challenging and require even the most academically talented high school students to truly apply themselves and change the way they approach learning. Not doing well on a test or an assignment can be hard for your student to deal with, but it can happen and is completely normal. Try your best to stay positive when talking with your student. If your student has not met with the professor, suggest they start there. Encourage your student to attend office hours. Recommend that your student seek the guidance of an academic advisor, which may also help. Even the Career Connections Center can provide support when students are trying to decide if their major best suits their academic strengths and interests. Changing majors as well as using tutoring resources are extremely common at UF. By asking for help your student is taking charge of their learning experience. Your support and encouragement can give your student added confidence in the process.

#### TALK TO YOUR STUDENT ABOUT:

- Developing good study habits
- Talking to professors during office hours
- Seeking a tutor
- Finding a way to take notes that works best for them
- Forming study groups with their peers

# 2 THE ABILITY TO BALANCE MULTIPLE RESPONSIBILITIES

Pursuing higher education is more than just attending classes. We bet your student was involved in co-curricular activities like National Honor Society, sports teams, or volunteering during high school. While in college, it's also very important for your student to get involved in similar ventures.

The University of Florida has opportunities for everyone from culturally-based student organizations to sports clubs. Co-curricular activities are vital for your student to further develop skills like teamwork, communication, and problem solving. If your student is having a hard time finding ways to get involved, consider suggesting these resources:

- **STUDENT ACTIVITIES AND INVOLVEMENT** (SAI) is comprised of three main areas including Student Organizations and Campus Events, Sorority and Fraternity Affairs, and the David and Wanda Brown Center for Leadership and Service. The three areas of SAI are home to over 900 student organizations.  
[www.studentinvolvement.ufl.edu](http://www.studentinvolvement.ufl.edu)
- **MULTICULTURAL AND DIVERSITY AFFAIRS** provide a wide range of services, educational opportunities, learning, support, outreach, activities and engagement for students. MCDA is a collaboration between the Institute of Black Culture; The Institute of Hispanic-Latino Cultures; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Affairs; Asian Pacific Islander American Affairs; and Intercultural Engagement.  
[www.multicultural.ufl.edu](http://www.multicultural.ufl.edu)
- **RECREATIONAL SPORTS** offers experiences that enrich the lives of students through fitness, sports and adventure play. Students can get involved in club sports, intramural sports, team building exercises and much more.  
[www.recsports.ufl.edu](http://www.recsports.ufl.edu)
- **GATOR ATHLETICS** are an integral part of college at UF. Student come together to cheer on UF's champion athletic teams. All registered UF students can attend any sporting event (excluding football) FREE with their Gator1 ID. Student football tickets are available for purchase at the ticket box office. [www.gatorzone.com](http://www.gatorzone.com)

## → FAMILY TALKING POINT

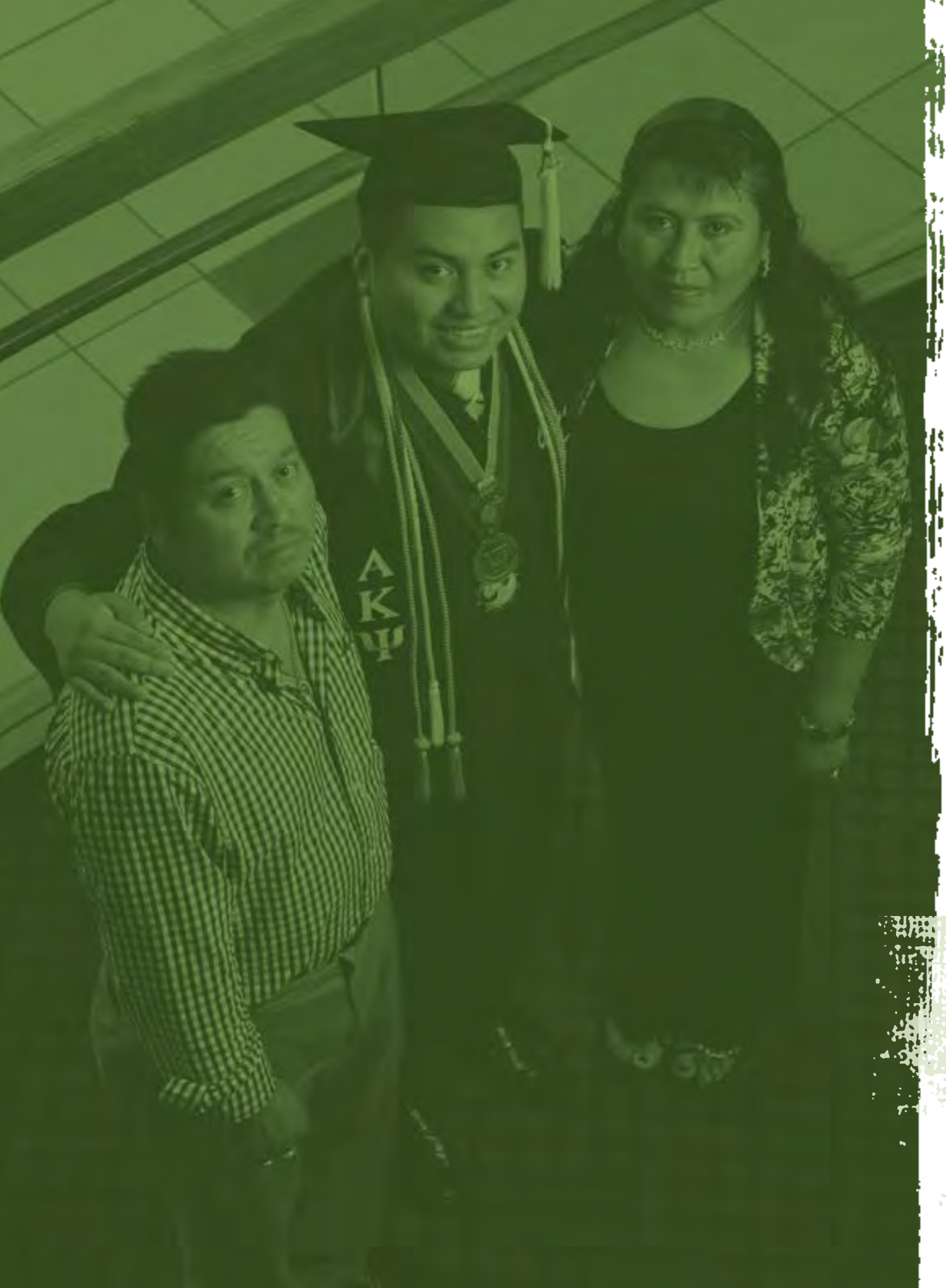
**MANY STUDENTS COME TO COLLEGE AS THE ONLY, OR ONE OF A FEW, STUDENTS FROM THEIR HIGH SCHOOL.** It's ok to come to college without knowing anyone. Encourage your student to use the first few weeks of the semester to bond with their roommates and classmates. Friends can be a great support in college; especially friends who share similar interests. Encouraging your student to look into the various organizations at UF is a great way to ensure s/he is beginning to form bonds and relationships with other UF students. Sharing your excitement and enthusiasm about your student being at UF can help them better adjust to college life.



As well as the responsibilities of classes and campus involvement, we also understand and acknowledge that your student may have commitments not directly tied to college such as work and family. We know that our first-gen students often continue their responsibilities back home while balancing college. While we encourage students to put academics first, we do support them in finding employment and staying connected to their families and communities. We recommend part-time positions, usually no more than 20 hours a week, that offer students a chance to work while also be successful in the classroom.

- **EMPLOYMENT ON CAMPUS** is often ideal due to schedule flexibility and location. Students may find jobs in various campus departments and offices; often these jobs will be labeled as OPS (Other Personnel Services). Some students may have the ability to work thru their financial aid awards in the form of Federal Work Study Positions.  
[www.sfa.ufl.edu/types-of-aid/employment](http://www.sfa.ufl.edu/types-of-aid/employment)
- **EMPLOYMENT OFF CAMPUS** can be found throughout Gainesville in various sectors. Students should keep in mind the time commitment and location of possible jobs. We recommend students maintain clear communication with employers regarding their class schedules. Students will get a copy of their syllabus for each class at the beginning of the semester. The syllabus will contain exam and quiz dates as well as due dates for all assignments. Students should always plan ahead to ensure work does not conflict with class responsibilities.
- **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS** are extremely important and often motivate first-gen students. Your student's role in your family is an integral part of their identity, but can sometimes be at odds with the transition to college. Being homesick is a common experience especially in the beginning of your student's time at college. Traveling home for visits and regularly communicating with you are great ways to stay connected, but in moderation. Students traveling home every weekend often end up struggling more in classes and have a harder time forming peer relationships on campus. We suggest students focus on being at college by putting academics first and creating communities on campus with the intention of celebrating the time they have here so that when they do travel home during long weekends and holidays they can truly enjoy the time spent with family.





## 3 THE KNOWLEDGE TO MAKE WISE DECISIONS WITH MONEY

The cost of a college education is not to be taken lightly. It is expensive. Every college or university determines their cost of attendance - the average cost of being at college for the academic year. Costs include everything from tuition and fees, housing, books, and more. Students fund college in a variety of ways. The first step to obtain money for college is to fill out the free **Federal Application for Student Federal Aid (FAFSA)**.

This application gathers information about your family income and assets. The FAFSA becomes available each year beginning October 1st. It is processed through the Department of Education and determines your student's eligibility for federal student aid. The FAFSA results are then sent to the financial aid office at UF. The financial aid office determines how much additional financial aid the student will receive in the form of grants, scholarships, and loans. In order for your student to be eligible for many forms of aid, UF must receive an error-free FAFSA by December 15 every year. We recommend students complete the FAFSA by December 1 at the latest to allow for processing. Estimated tax information may be used on the FAFSA website: [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov)

### FINANCIAL AID COMES IN A VARIETY OF FORMS:

- **GRANTS:** do not have to be repaid. These are typically awarded as need based federal or state aid.
- **SCHOLARSHIPS:** typically, these also do not have to be repaid. They generally come from private corporations or organizations or may come directly from UF.
- **LOANS:** money that a student may borrow to offset the cost of college. These must be repaid (including interest). Federal loans often have more leniency and lower interest rates but private loans are also an option.
- **FEDERAL WORK STUDY:** a program designed for students to earn money through part-time jobs on campus.
- **THE OFFICE OF STUDENT FINANCIAL AFFAIRS AT UF** creates an annual Financial Aid Handbook and also offers students financial aid advising and workshops to better understand the aid they receive. [www.sfa.ufl.edu](http://www.sfa.ufl.edu)

### → FAMILY TALKING POINT

**REMINDE YOUR STUDENT TO UPDATE THE FAFSA EACH YEAR.** Updating the FAFSA is often easier and quicker than the first application. Information from the previous year can be re-submitted if you do not anticipate any major changes in your finances. Help your student put finances in perspective. The financial aid money received is meant for school purposes. The costs associated with attending a university can be expensive and students sometimes feel obligated to offer financial support to their family. It is most helpful to students when families understand the financial burden of college expenses and encourage the student to make wise decisions with their money.



## AN APPRECIATION FOR THEIR BACKGROUND AS A FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT

First-Gen Students are embarking on brand new experiences that change the path of their lives and that of families. Understanding how their identity as a first-gen student impacts and shapes them is a crucial step in their development as college students, adults, and professionals. Your student's identity is made up of various components and the first-gen identity intersects with the characteristics and traits they developed at home. While at college, first-gen students should take advantage of the chance to explore the intersection of their identities.

- **STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS** provide an opportunity for your student to experience a different culture while also offering them the opportunity to earn college credit. Various programs going to several countries are offered during Fall, Spring, and Summer semesters as well as during shorter holiday breaks. For first-gen students, the ability to travel abroad might be non-existent if not for college. By participating in Study Abroad Programs, first-gen students are able to experience a completely new country and culture and expand their understanding of the world and their identity in it. Scholarships are available as well as various other funding options.

Often times, study abroad experiences do not cost very much more than the typical semester. Students are encouraged to talk to their academic advisor as a first or second year student if they are interested in studying abroad. While not a rule, most students go abroad in their sophomore or junior year. <https://internationalcenter.ufl.edu/study-abroad>

- The **FIRST-GENERATION EMPOWERMENT SUMMIT** is an all-day retreat focused on the power of claiming your story and better understanding the significance identity has on the college experience for first-generation students. The Summit is targeted at first- and second-year first-generation students.

### → FAMILY TALKING POINT

**REMINDE YOUR STUDENT THAT YOU ARE PROUD OF THEM AND THE PATH THEY ARE TAKING.** Encourage them to embrace all aspects of their identities and find empowerment in their community at home and at college. While all first-gen students are the first to attend and graduate from college, each student brings a unique culture and experiences with them. By immersing themselves in college and opportunities to explore their identities, your student is finding their place and developing skills to become independent.







## A NETWORK OF SUPPORT COMPRISED OF PEERS AND ADULT MENTORS

More than 10% of the University population is first-generation. There are also many first-gen faculty and staff members. First-gen students can connect through their shared experiences of getting to and through college. Having a community is one thing first-gen graduates have identified as a factor contributing to their success at UF. Your student can join the **First Generation Organization** (FGO). FGO exists to foster a diverse community amongst students who are first in their families to attend college by providing opportunities to strengthen self-awareness, strive for academic excellence, and develop leadership skills while giving back to the UF and global communities.

Connecting with First-Gen Peers is a way for your student to meet others with shared and common experiences. The transition to college is often made easier when students create a smaller community of peers. The process of going to college is difficult for all students and the pressure of adjusting and fitting in can cause stress. By joining organizations such as FGO, your student can make UF smaller and more personal. An important aspect of being first-gen is being a trailblazer and thus opening the door for others. Many first-gen students at UF are active in volunteering with local and home high schools to aid younger first-gen students in the journey.

In addition, the Division of Student Affairs is home to the Office of First-Generation Student Support. The caring staff aims to increase the enrollment of high-achieving first-generation students at UF while providing a variety of resources for current first-gen students to aid in the journey to academic success.

<http://firstgeneration.ufsa.ufl.edu/>

### A FEW RESOURCES OFFERED BY FIRST-GEN STUDENT SUPPORT:

- **ADVISING** - Students can come into the office to schedule a meeting with one of the First-Generation Student Support staff. Staff is available to assist students with navigating the college experience.
- **THE FIRST-GENERATION ACADEMY** (FGA) is a year-long leadership program that teaches self-awareness, career preparation, and global awareness. FGA is open to 2nd and 3rd year first-gen students.
- **THE FIRST-GENERATION ADVOCATE PROGRAM** connects students with faculty and staff on campus who support and understand the needs of first-gen students at UF. This is a great way for students to begin making connections to the faculty and staff members here on campus.

## → FAMILY TALKING POINT

**HAVE OPEN CONVERSATIONS ABOUT WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE A FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT.** Encourage your student to connect with other first-gen students and people who have been identified as active supporters of first-generation students. It is also good to reassure your student of your continued support and admit that you may not have all of the answers. While making connections can be intimidating, the first step can be explored via social media. Sit with your student and take the time to check out Facebook (UF Florida Opportunity Scholars Program), Instagram(MFOSatUF), and Twitter (@MFOSatUF).



## A CONFIDENCE IN THEMSELVES THAT THEY ARE CAPABLE OF SUCCESS

The University of Florida has graduated thousands of first-gen students. These alums have gone on to pursue advanced degrees in graduate school and professional school such as law and medical school. Many alums working in well-paying jobs where they use the skills they developed in life and in college. The Office of First-Generation Support is pleased to have a network of first-gen alums through the Machen Florida Opportunity Scholars Program who give back by sharing with current students their experiences since graduating from UF.

The **Featured Alumni Talks** have been a great addition to the services offered to first-gen students. The talks are either in person or via Skype and are designed so that alums can share their experiences and answer questions about their time at UF and as a professional. Many students find these talks informative and empowering, especially when thinking about what it means to be first-gen.

### → FAMILY TALKING POINT

**IF YOUR STUDENT HAS ANY DOUBT ABOUT HOW SUCCESSFUL THEY CAN BE, THEN PERHAPS THEY SHOULD HEAR FROM SOMEONE WHO WAS IN THEIR SHOES ONLY A YEAR OR TWO AGO.** First-gen students are just as capable of succeeding as their non-first-gen peers of succeeding. The skills that first-gen students bring to college-such as resilience, strength through adversity, passion, independence, and perseverance- are what is needed for success no matter what career path one takes. First-gen students can sometimes feel that they are “imposters” and do not fit in with fellow college graduates and professionals. It is important to help your student understand that not only are they deserving of their success and achievements, but they are well prepared and stand out because of their special first-gen identity.







# 7

## A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE INCLUDING SHORT AND LONG TERM GOALS

Graduating from college can be daunting. Prior to college, their educational journey was pretty planned: elementary school, middle school, high school, and then college. For the first time, students may experience an unsettling uncertainty.

UF offers many resources to prepare students for the transition out of college. The **Career Connections Center (C3)** is open to all students and alums for career advice. The C3 has many services such as resume critiques, mock interviews, and career fairs. The C3 also has a library and many online resources. In addition, the C3 helps students connect with companies looking for bright, new employees. [www.career.ufl.edu](http://www.career.ufl.edu)

Students also find mentors on campus to guide them along the way. First-gen students often have questions about how to achieve their career goals. Many students know where they want to go, but lack the knowledge of how to get there. The Life Coach Program is offered to all third and fourth year first-generation students. Students are paired with a trained UF faculty, staff, or graduate student to receive one-on-one guidance in post-graduation planning. <http://firstgeneration.ufsa.ufl.edu/life-coach/>

Internships are opportunities for your student to experience work in their desired field while also building their professional skills and resume. Internships can result in job offers and open the door for networking and professional relationships. It is very important for first-gen Students to take part in internships because they might not have any others chances to shadow and experience the career they desire. Students can take part in an internship for varying lengths of time during the year. While some students participate in internships during the academic semester, an ideal time is during an off-semester when they are not taking a full class load. Internships can be found through the C3 as well as within each academic college at UF. Some internships are paid and others are unpaid.

### → FAMILY TALKING POINT

**IT IS IMPORTANT YOUR STUDENT KNOWS THAT YOU WILL STAND BEHIND HER/HIM** no matter what academic major they chose and what career path they pursue. Encourage your student to carefully plan for their future. Part of that plan should encourage opportunities to network with professionals in that chosen field through internship or job shadowing experiences. You could sit down with your student to help craft career goals.

But remember, you may have different ideas for their career. Ultimately you want your student to be happy, healthy, and successful. Their eventual career path should excite them and you should be able to hear the passion in their voice when they talk about that career or major.





# STUDENT

## PERSPECTIVES



**MARIA GUADALUPE  
VILCHEZ**

**MAJOR:** Wildlife  
Ecology and  
Conservation

**Through the process of  
transitioning to college/UF  
what was the best support your  
family offered you?**

Mainly it has been just moral support because I know that they are there for me regardless of what I major in or get involved with. They remind me to continue the path I started on to follow my dreams and keep my intentions of graduating from UF.

**What family support do you wish you had?**

I wish I could see them more often, but I know that's hard when we're four hours away from each other. Sometimes all we can do is talk for hours on the phone, but it's not the same.

**Have you ever experienced any pressures from your family? How did you have a conversation with them to feel less overwhelmed?**

I feel like being first-gen and Latina, a lot of my family wanted me to become a doctor or a lawyer, but I'm an oddball. I like to be outdoors in nature so that's why my major is wildlife ecology and now I'm in the process of showing my family that there are viable jobs out there for me once I graduate. Luckily, I got involved early with research so I could show them that I could be successful in a different kind of field.

**What was the biggest hurdle in communication with your family about college?**

The financial aspect, especially since my mom doesn't grasp English fluently. The FAFSA application was something that was hard for us, but now that I'm at UF, there are resources to help me and my family like the First-Gen Student Success office and Student Financial Affairs.

**How do you balance staying connected with your family while also being engaged on campus with regards to academics and involvement?**

I call my mom daily and other family members every other day to keep in touch. I text my brother every day because I think it's important to share my exciting moments with him. I also use Facebook to update everyone about the fun things I'm doing on campus like holding a small gator in my hands or starting research. Getting involved is all about managing your time wisely and my family helps me remember that.

**What is one thing you want to share with first-gen family members about being a first-gen student at UF?**

Being a first-gen student at UF is great because you have all of this support from the First-Gen Student Success office and different people across campus who want you to be successful. It's not something that you're constantly worrying about every little thing and if you are, there's an office on campus that can help you and reassure you that everything will be okay.



**SHANNON ROBINSON**  
**MAJOR:** Biology

**Through the process of  
transitioning to college/UF  
what was the best support  
your family offered you?**

Although my family was unable to provide me with the financial support I needed these past three years of college, they gave something equally as important. They gave me emotional support.

After failed exams, dropped classes, and bad days they were always there for me. Even if they did not understand my struggles or know how to fix my problems they continually stuck by my side. My parents encouraged me to learn from my mistakes. They taught me the importance of being determined and resilient, and I could not have made it through these last few years without them.

**What family support do you wish you had?**

I could not wish for a better support system. Even though they weren't able to give me money for school they helped to make up for what they could not provide. I am extremely grateful just to have their emotional support, which is very important for anyone transitioning to UF.

**Have you ever experienced any pressures from your family? How did you have a conversation with them to feel less overwhelmed?**

I have definitely felt pressure from my family to do well in college. They were so familiar with my continual success in high school, but when I came to college, things weren't as easy for me. If it was difficult for me to understand my situation and it was even more challenging for me to explain it to them. But they were understanding and after explaining it to them, my mother said something two years ago that still resonates with me today: "This is your dream, and I will be here if you decide to follow through with it or if you change your mind completely. Follow your dreams for yourself because I am already proud of you." That was all I needed to hear at the time and it pushed me through my most difficult year at UF.

**What was the biggest hurdle in communication with your family about college?**

It has been trying to explain to them how much work is required to get into professional school after undergrad. My parents thought after these four years of undergrad I would automatically have a job and a steady career in my field, but that's not always the case. It took them a while to understand that after these four years, I will have to apply to do another four years of schooling. They also didn't understand why I needed to get involved in extracurriculars outside of academics because they were worried about my grades. I just had to continually remind them that my involvement was to help me get into professional programs after undergrad.

**How do you balance staying connected with your family while also being engaged on campus with regards to academics and involvement?**

Communication really goes both ways. I could honestly go a week or two without communicating with anyone, but I know how essential it is to stay in touch with those that are important to me. I try to call my family once a week. Sometimes our conversations are quick but other times we talk for hours. Regardless of how much time is spent talking to them I prioritize it because communicating with them helps me feel better about being away from home.

**What is one thing you want to share with first-gen family members about being a first-gen student at UF?**

Some things I want to share with first-gen family members is to stay in touch with your student. I can't tell you how good it makes me feel when I get a call or text from a family member. As students it's nice to know that the people back home still care. I would also say be understanding. Your student may change their major, drop a class, or do poorly on an exam and that does not mean they aren't working hard enough. UF is a really good school but that also means classes at UF have a very rigorous course load. So please don't be disappointed if your student is struggling but encourage them to keep working hard because it'll all be worth it at the end. I'm just a couple of months away from graduating and the hard work is finally paying off.





### JOHN NGUYEN

**MAJOR:** Applied Physiology and Kinesiology

**Through the process of transitioning to college/UF what was the best support your family offered you?**

The best support I received during my first time here at UF was the fact that my mother was extremely patient and helpful when I was still trying to adjust. My mother constantly reminded me that everything will eventually come together even if I did bad on an exam, missed a deadline, or if I made a mistake. My mother would also remind me that things like this happen because they are a teaching moment that I could learn and grow from. Everything we experience something as a college student is meant to teach us a little bit more about life.

**What family support do you wish you had?**

Guidance is the one thing that I wish my family could have given me. My family has provided me with a lot of wisdom, but the kind of guidance I needed then and now is what to do when it comes down to my academic coursework, my extracurricular activities and what things I should be allocating a lot of my time towards. Being first-gen means I need to figure out those things by myself, which leads to a type of stress that my family can't help relieve. It's the staff at First-Generation Student Success that can help guide me in ways my family can't.

**Have you ever experienced any pressures from your family? How did you have a conversation with them to feel less overwhelmed?**

There was never any pressure to have a certain path or have a particular major. However, I did have the pressure of being successful both academically during school and then financially after graduating. A big component of this pressure stems from the way my parents emigrated to the United States and the struggles that came with it. Because of this, they always pressured me to do well so that I would never have to go through what they went through. For a time, I addressed these pressures by keeping them to myself and charging through no matter what it was. After a while of this, it started to take its toll on my mental health. I spoke to my family about the challenges I've faced in college and helped them to understand that there isn't a clear-cut way to go about this even though it may seem like a lot of people are following a detailed plan of their life.

**What was the biggest hurdle in communication with your family about college?**

I think the hardest part is that they are not physically here with me which means they don't really understand what I am going through at the moment. I can let them know how stressed I am about a big exam coming up, that there is not enough time in the day to get everything done, or how everything is going wrong and causing me more stress, but they won't really get it. That part is still difficult because I'm in college by myself and I have to face these problems by myself.



### ALYSSA WILES

**MAJOR:** Exploratory (still deciding)

**Through the process of transitioning to college/UF what was the best support your family offered you?**

When I first came to college, I struggled to acclimate to my new life. The best support my family gave me was consistent communication. My mom and grandparents reached out to check on me often and always offered advice or a shoulder to cry on when I needed it. During these special phone calls, they would also keep me updated on everything going on at home, which made me feel connected to them. I wasn't sure what to major in but my mom always listened to me, helped me in my decision-making, and ultimately supported my choices.

**What family support do you wish you had?**

Honestly, on my college journey thus far, my family has supported me in every way possible. In a perfect world, I wish I had more time with my family. My freshmen year, my family came to visit me a couple of times and I didn't get to go home as much. When my family did visit UF, they made sure to help me with anything I needed while I had them close and immersed themselves in my life as much as possible. This made me feel so loved and I appreciated every moment, so my advice is to see your student every so often. I realize that this is not feasible for families, so the best thing to do is just be involved in their life and show them that you're interested in their life and always there for them.

**Have you ever experienced any pressures from your family? How did you have a conversation with them to feel less overwhelmed?**

Although my mom supports me no matter what, my family unknowingly put a lot of pressure to choose a major in science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM) so I could get a very high-paying job in the future. They always claimed that STEM is where all the jobs are and didn't realize that it's not what I'm passionate about. One day, I called my family and explained to them how I felt and told them that I needed to pursue what makes me happy in order to have a truly successful life. After this conversation, everybody has been very understanding and have talked with me about my studies in a respectful and supportive way.

**What was the biggest hurdle in communication with your family about college?**

For me, the biggest hurdle in communicating with my family about college was explaining what my life was like here at UF. I didn't know how to tell them about the difficulties I was having balancing my life in terms of academics, involvement, social activities, and "me time." I had a very difficult time with my newfound independence because I missed my family, yet I couldn't find time to visit home and they couldn't travel here that often. Basically, since my family wasn't watching me experience life anymore, I didn't know how to keep up with my new life in Gainesville and my life back home. In the end, I just found the right balance, which comes from realizing your own values and priorities and making the changes you want to see in your life.

**How do you balance staying connected with your family while also being engaged on campus with regards to academics and involvement?**

For me, staying balanced in these aspects is all about having a mutual understanding with my family. If I am free and they reach out to me, then I absolutely talk to them because I want to hear about them and everything going on at home. However, if I'm busy when they contact me, I just send them a text saying that I can't talk at the moment and that I'll get back to them when I can. It's the same situation when I reach out to my family members. I love being actively engaged on campus in all areas of my life, but it's important to keep in touch with family and make time for calls and visits because it makes my college experience better knowing that my family and I are still close and we're all okay.

**What is one thing you want to share with first-gen family members about being a first-gen student at UF?**

Honestly, it's hard. Being a first-generation student means that we have to explore unknown territory basically on our own. Even though UF has amazing resources and communities for first-generation students, we need our family. The best thing that first-gen family members can do for their student is be there for them. Listen to them, acknowledge their struggles, help guide them as best you can, and, most importantly, support them. Going to college is a hard thing, especially being first-gen, so having a reliable support system back home for when things get rough is life changing.

**“Faculty and staff members at UF have helped answer my questions and present ones that I didn't even know I had. These answers and guidance have helped me grow and understand where I want to go in life.”**

**- KERLIN LEMUS**  
*Political Science Major*



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