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11-9-2021

Governors State to Honor First-Generation Students

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University Park, IL,
November
09,
2021

Governors State to Honor First-Generation Students

Nov. 11 Event Part of NAPSA Initiative



[Governors State University](#) believes first-generation college students are worth celebrating, and on Nov. 11 the university will recognize these trailblazers at a special gathering.

“The event is going to be an opportunity for networking and socializing for first-generation students,” said Kelly Grab, GSU’s Director of [Community Standards](#) and [Student Advocacy](#), who helped organize the celebration.

“We also have faculty and staff members who identify as first-generation college students and have volunteered to share their stories.”

Through these short presentations, first-generation students currently enrolled at GSU can connect with the challenges experienced by faculty and staff members who ultimately succeeded in graduating and pursuing careers.

First-generation college students are those whose parents did not attend an institution of higher education, and cannot offer guidance about the experience. As a result, first-generation college students don't receive from their families the informational and sometimes moral support that could otherwise buoy their educational efforts.

"College is hard for anyone. It puts even the most prepared individual through the ringer," said Grab, who was herself a first-generation college student. "We're left to navigate these really complicated systems by ourselves. We don't have anyone who can experientially guide us, and that can feel very lonely."

After graduating from Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pa., Grab took a job with Vassar College, which [posted a story](#) about her inspiration as a first-generation student.

Governors State's event is a kick-off of sorts for the university's developing efforts to formally support first-generation students as part of an institutional cohort – First-Gen Forward. Along with 57 other colleges and universities, GSU is working with [NAPSA](#), a professional organization of student affairs administrators in higher education.

NAPSA's First-Gen Forward initiative challenges and empowers institutions of higher learning to find innovative ways to engage and support first-generation college students.

"As a first-generation college student, you're a trailblazer in your family. Your previous systems of support — your family — can't help you with this. You have to rely on institutions to support you," Grab said.

With its real-world focus and proximity to a variety of communities, GSU's student population has always included a high proportion of first-generation students, Grab said. The university wants to enhance the support it already offers this group by meeting an even broader array of needs.

Grab said the university is making permanent the [GEER Project](#), which started as a grant-funded initiative to help underrepresented, first-generation, and low-income students overcome barriers created by COVID-19 pandemic so they could graduate.

Another part of meeting the needs of first-generation students includes recognizing how overwhelming they might find the vast array of resources available to them. Grab said employees in the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) help students by making email and phone introductions.

"Our staff will even walk them over to the department or people they need to speak with, making that connection for them," Grab said.

Staff and faculty must remember that while university systems feel second-nature to them, she said, a first-generation student could feel completely lost. At the Nov. 11 celebration, Grab said faculty and staff will participate in a pledge to remember what life

was like when they started college, to empathize with first-generation students and support them as thoroughly as possible.

Likewise, the students will pledge to work their hardest and ask for help when needed.

“Students will walk away with inspiration, and also knowing there’s a whole university of individuals here to support them formally in their studies and informally in life,” Grab said. “There are so many people rooting for them, who want to help them be successful, and ultimately walk across that stage at graduation.”

The Nov. 11 celebration will be held in the E-Lounge from 1 to 3 p.m.