

Four Tactics to Support the First-Generation Student

Collaborative Campus Strategies to Foster Student Success

Many students struggle with their transition to college, a problem exacerbated for first-generation college students, who are often left to navigate the transition without advice from their families. After almost a year of intensive research focused on supporting this student population, the Student Affairs Forum has developed a suite of resources to support your institution in these efforts. The strategies below highlight proactive, campus-wide approaches—leveraging resources and personnel from across the campus community—to ease transitional barriers for first-generation college students and represent part of our broader aim to support institutions in their efforts to improve the experiences and outcomes for these students.

TACTIC 1



Proactive Pre-arrival Outreach Campaign

PROBLEM First-generation college students often feel isolated once they arrive on campus, which has serious repercussions for their adjustment and, ultimately, persistence at the institution.

SOLUTION Launch a proactive email outreach campaign that sends biweekly messages of welcome and support. Emails should contain targeted scripting about the value first-generation college students bring to the institution, provide information about available campus resources, and share opportunities to connect with peers once on campus. Gather resources from divisions serving these students across campus to include in the campaign.

IN ACTION 69% to 76%

was the increase in the four-year degree completion rate for first-generation college students at UNC-Chapel Hill since implementing an outreach campaign.

TACTIC 2



First-Generation Advocate Video Campaign

PROBLEM First-generation college students have trouble finding role models on campus who they can relate to and who can help normalize their experiences transitioning into higher education.

SOLUTION Recruit students, faculty, staff, and alumni across campus to share their personal experiences as first-generation college students. Create videos of their stories, focusing on the challenges they faced, resources they accessed, and successes they've achieved, to normalize what incoming students are going through and feeling. Share the videos online, through a social media campaign, or show them at an event.

IN ACTION 77%

of students at San Jose State University reported feeling a connection to the institution after attending an event where the first-generation advocate videos were shown.

TACTIC 3



Jargon Reduction Audit

PROBLEM First-generation college students often get confused by jargon and unfamiliar terms used in outreach and communication materials, making the completion of enrollment and registration tasks more difficult and heightening feelings of insecurity.

SOLUTION Audit heavily accessed, student-facing materials for accessibility and, if necessary, provide more "student-friendly" translations of the text. A tool like the Gunning Fog Index¹ will assign a readability score to a block of text and provide suggestions for how to make writing more accessible to broad audiences.

IN ACTION 6.5 Points

marked the improvement in the readability score of financial aid materials that was achieved using the Gunning Fog Index by UNC-Chapel Hill.

TACTIC 4



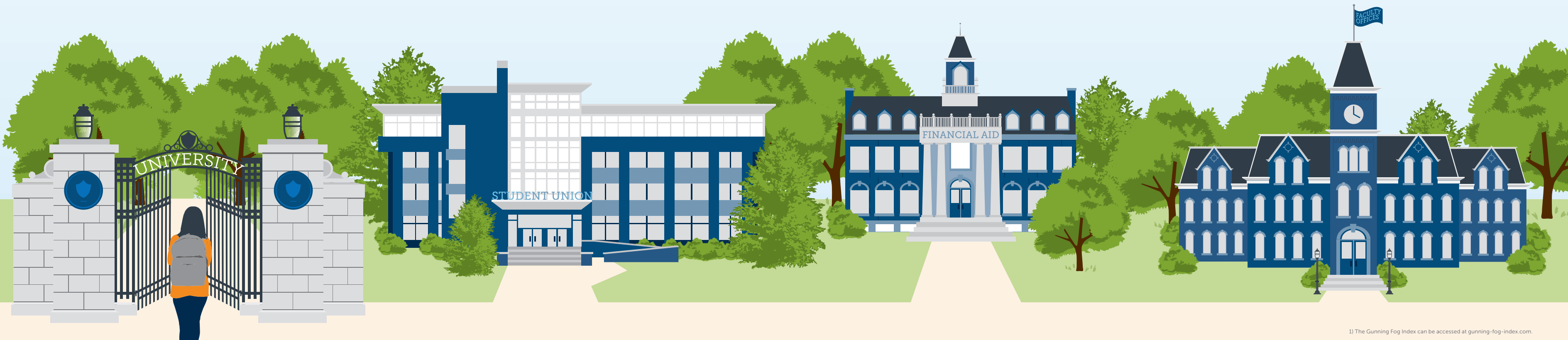
Visible Campus-Wide Support Network

PROBLEM First-generation college students are often resistant to or uncomfortable with asking for help from administrators and faculty, seeing it as a sign of weakness since they are often accustomed to accomplishing things on their own.

SOLUTION Create a campus-wide campaign that enables supportive faculty and staff to visually identify themselves to students. Provide decals or stickers—like those used in Safe Zone campaigns—for advocates to hang on office doors, making students more aware of whose door they can be comfortable knocking on with a question and showing them how large their network of support and community is on campus.

IN ACTION 1,000 Decals

were requested by faculty and staff in the first year of the program at the University of Rochester.



1) The Gunning Fog Index can be accessed at gunning-fog-index.com.