

Four Tactics to Support First-in-Family Students

Many students need help with their transition to university, and that can be even more true for first-in-family students who may not have the same support networks as some of their peers. The strategies below highlight proactive approaches for leveraging resources and personnel across the campus community to ease transitional barriers for first-in-family university students and improve their experiences and outcomes.



TACTIC 1

Accessible Pre-arrival Orientation and Training

PROBLEM

Transitioning to university can be particularly daunting and anxiety-producing for first-in-family students who don't know what to expect, which has serious repercussions for their adjustment and persistence.

SOLUTION

Create a short course (in-person or online) that can be accessed by all incoming (or prospective) students to demystify the university experience. This helps prepare first-in-family students without singling them out. The course includes specific advice on applying, developing study skills, preparing for a career, making friends, and caring for personal health and well-being.

IN ACTION

4.7/5 Stars

Rating of the free University of York two-week, online, asynchronous course where current students and staff discuss university life. The course addresses academic and social topics such as study skills, budgeting, and making friends.

TACTIC 2

Scholarship and Support Programme

PROBLEM

Financial burdens can be a large obstacle for first-in-family students deciding to apply to university and enrol, requiring both monetary and social support.

SOLUTION

Provide first-in-family students with a bursary and cohort-based support programme that focuses on the realities of student life. The best programmes begin during pre-entry and continue across the duration of the course. A fundraising and alumni engagement campaign can help finance the programme and provide professional mentoring to help prepare students for employment.

IN ACTION

£1,500

Bursary awarded to local first-in-family students by the First-Generation Programme at Manchester Metropolitan University. It provides financial support and personal, academic, and professional guidance through pre-entry and on-course programmes financed by a £2 million fundraising campaign.

TACTIC 3

Jargon Reduction Audit

PROBLEM

Jargon and unfamiliar terms used in university outreach and communication materials can confuse first-in-family students, making enrolment 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 content. If it is impossible to remove jargon entirely, consider providing a glossary to help students understand specific terminology.

IN ACTION

106

Words defined in a glossary by the First-Generation Scholars Network at the University of Hull to demystify academic jargon and signpost first-in-family students to further information and support.

TACTIC 4

Visible Campus-Wide Support Network

PROBLEM

First-in-family students can be resistant to or uncomfortable asking administrators and lecturers for help, even when they know they need it.

SOLUTION

Create a campus-wide campaign that enables supportive lecturers and staff to visually identify themselves to students. Provide stickers or transfers 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 extensive their network of support and community is on campus.

IN ACTION

1,000 Stickers

Requested by lecturers and staff in the first year of one such programme at the University of Rochester.

