



# Mentor Minute

Inspiration for the ES Mentoring Community

## This Month: First Generation Challenges

Understanding the unique challenges associated with first-generation student-hood will help you and your Scholar enjoy an even more effective relationship while giving them the support to succeed in college and beyond.

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Hello ES Mentors,

Welcome to the first issue of Mentor Minute!

Every month (okay, maybe two), the newsletter will focus on a specific topic, with a little bit to read, think about, and do regarding ES mentorship. This month's topic is the challenge of being a first-generation college student, something very familiar to scholars and their mentors. We appreciate your mentor work, and hope you find this newsletter helpful. We look forward to your feedback on it.

Thanks,

The ES Team



**Read This...** For more info on this month's topic, see articles below:

- [First Gen Struggles Don't End After Graduation ~Federal Way Mirror](#)
- [My Family Wanted Me to Go to College, I Felt Guilty..~Seattle Times](#)
- Book: 50 Things I Wish Someone Would Have Told Me About College: Straight Talk for First Generation College Students FROM First Generation College Graduates by Angel Flores

Around Evanston during December:

- Sat., Dec. 9: 5:00 PM  
[Holiday Tree Lighting](#)  
Sun., Dec. 10: 3:00 PM  
[ESO Holiday Concert](#)  
Sat/Sun, Dec. 15, 16, 22, 23: 7:00 PM  
[The Gift of the Magi](#)  
Tues., Dec 26: 6:00 PM  
[A Community Celebration of Kwanzaa](#)  
Sun., Dec 31: All Day  
[First Night Evanston](#)



## Check in topics:

College Scholars at this time of year: semester one grade reflection, financial aid check-ins, summer job and internship search, goal setting for semester two (grades, engagement, time management, etc...)

## Being a First Generation College Student

Most Evanston Scholars represent the first members of their families to attend college. First-generation status poses several unique implications and challenges worth thinking about as mentors.

- *Even the definition is controversial:* The definition of "first-generation" varies—a lot. Depending on how it's defined, it can apply to anywhere from 22% to 77% of all students, as one study found when it compared eight definitions of the term.
- *It's associated with positive and negative assumptions:* Beyond its definition, first-generation status can be associated with both stigma and advantage. It may be viewed as code for "low-income," or a signal for affirmative action, for example. At the same time, the majority of college admissions directors surveyed plan to increase focus on recruiting first-generation students. But Harvard admissions says it's just "one of 50 factors" considered.
- *First-generation college students have mixed feelings about it:* It's easy to imagine that kids who become the first in their families to attend college feel mostly positive about the achievement (as well they should). But it's not so simple. Beyond facing significant challenges adjusting to college (such as a lesser sense of belonging, many of these students report feeling guilty because their parents never had the privilege of higher education, and have often made financial sacrifices to get them where they are. The students may also struggle more with being away from family than peers who aren't first-generation might. Indeed, many Evanston Scholars say they feel this way.

For more information click on the links in white and/or the links to articles found on Page 1.



### From a Scholar Graduate:

*"As a first generation college student, the most important thing I received from my mentor was her unconditional support and unwavering belief in my success."*

*~2017 Lake Forest College Graduate and NEW ES Associate Director of College Success, Nancy Cardenas*

## How to Help Your Scholar

As a mentor, you can help your Scholar navigate the challenges of first-generation student-hood in several ways:

1. *Empathize:* Understand the challenges noted above, and how they might affect your mentee as they prepare for or attend college, even in ways they may not realize.
2. *Discuss (and listen):* Be willing to raise issues related to first-generation status with your scholar, and encourage them to share their hopes and fears. Listen actively and reflect back what you hear before diving into problem solving.
3. *Share:* Share with your mentee your own challenges adjusting to college life, even if you weren't a first-generation student yourself. Share with other mentors and ES staff what you learn about the first-generation challenges your scholar faces, and how you've addressed them together.