

FIRST-GEN FAMILY RESOURCE GUIDE





We Celebrate Our **First-Gen Students**

Did you know that approximately 30% of West Chester University students are first-generation college students? More than 4,000 of our students are first-gen, meaning that none of their parents or guardians have completed a bachelor's degree. We also have more than 100 faculty and staff who identify as first-generation college students. So your student is part of a very proud tradition – one of thousands of “West Chester’s First.”

We celebrate our first-gens in many ways:

West Chester’s First committees –

Committees work year-round to make sure that our first-gen students are celebrated and supported. We offer a variety of programs, a first-gen theme community in one of our residence halls (launching in Fall 2020), opportunities to connect with other first-gen students, faculty and staff, and a website filled with information and resources. Check out www.wcupa.edu/wcfirst to find out more about all that we do, and to stay updated on information and events.

Alpha Alpha Alpha –

West Chester University is proud to have a chapter of Alpha Alpha Alpha on our campus, a national first-gen student honorary. To be eligible, students need to have completed 36 credit hours (most students apply in their sophomore year), with a 3.2 grade point average (GPA).

West Chester’s First student organization –

Is your student interested in joining others in starting a student organization specifically for first-gen students? Contact Evelyn Anderson, the group’s advisor, at eanderson@wcupa.edu to learn more.

Parent and Family Relations –

It’s so important for all family members to stay connected to their student, and our [Parent and Family Relations](#) website is filled with information to help you stay connected. Watch the website for details about a special event for first-gen students and their family members this fall!

First Forward Institution –

West Chester University is very proud to have been named a [First Forward Institution](#) in 2019 by NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, a leading national organization for colleges and universities. WCU was one of only 80 institutions in the country to receive this distinction.



30%
OF WCU STUDENTS ARE
FIRST-GEN



You **AND** Your Student Should Get Involved

We know that students who feel like they belong at WCU, stay at WCU and graduate. So it's important that you consistently remind your student that they belong at college. It's also important that you stay connected with your student and with what's happening on campus, so you have things to talk about and your student feels supported.

Here are a few suggestions:

If your student is living on campus in a residence hall, encourage them to stay on campus for the first several weekends of the semester, and participate in the **"Weeks of Welcome"** events for all new students. And if your student is commuting from home, they should still participate as much as possible during those first several weeks. They don't want to miss this opportunity, when everyone is new and wanting to meet others.

Talk to your student about exploring the **Borough of West Chester** to acclimate themselves with their new community. West Chester is a great college town, full of interesting restaurants and shops within walking distance to campus.

Encourage your student to get involved! They should check out the **Fall Involvement Fair** (an opportunity to learn about

all the student organizations they can join) in August, and participate in events specifically for first-gens sponsored by West Chester's First.

Remind your student that ALL students, no matter their background, can experience some difficulty with the transition to college, and may have fleeting thoughts about not belonging. Remind them that they are right where they need to be, and that **you are proud of them**.

Family members need to get involved too! Check out the **Parent and Family Relations** website on a regular basis to stay updated on engagement opportunities. You can also follow Parent and Family Relations on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/WCURamFam>) for daily content curated specifically for members of our Ram Fam!



Thoughts from WCU First-Gen Students



Amondo S. Clayton, II
Computer Science

“...West Chester starts our career on day one.”

Describe the best way that your family has supported you as a first-gen student.

A few months before college started, my parents informed me about some summer programs at the university. Once per week for eight weeks I met with faculty and students. They shared study tips and tricks, offered tours of the campus so I would know where to get the support I needed, and finally, they assured me that I would excel academically and personally. I

connected with other first-generation students. Even though none of us knew what to expect, we felt confident knowing that the university stood behind us one hundred percent. From the summer prep sessions, to orientation, to clubs and activities, my community has prepared me for academic success.

Have you experienced any pressures from your family? How did you talk with them about that?

Since coming to college, I have not experienced any pressures from my family. **I have learned how to appropriately love them and visit them regularly.** Even though I only live one hour away, I see myself moving to Silicon Valley after graduation for a job in the tech field. I have told them that I am preparing them for this separation.

How do you balance staying connected with your family while also being involved on campus and working on your academics?

I speak with my parents regularly. I have not experienced any problems communicating with them, as we have

an open line of communication. If I ever feel I cannot talk to them on the phone about something, I text them. **It is important to recognize what channels to use to communicate with your friends and family once you transition to college.**

Did you experience any challenges communicating with your family about college life?

I have not experienced any challenges in communicating with my parents about college life. They have always directed me along the right path. Additionally, **they made sure I had a solid foundation built with mentors and advisors.**

What one thing do you want to share with family members about being first-gen at West Chester University?

As a first-generation student, West Chester cares about the well-being of us, not the monetary aspect. **From the orientation, to the tutoring, to the resource offices, West Chester starts our career on day one.**

“...they made sure I had a solid foundation built with mentors & advisors.”

Describe the best way that your family has supported you as a first-gen student

I feel super blessed to have a family who supports me in any way possible to help me achieve the goals I have set out for myself. My parents, especially, have always pushed me to do my best and cheer me on as I go. **I am very lucky to have a family who continues to encourage me and helps me take every opportunity that crosses my path.**

Have you experienced any pressures from your family? How did you talk with them about that?

I am fortunate enough to not really experience much pressures from my family, besides them being upset that I am really busy and cannot go home to visit them at times. I make sure to keep in touch with them over the phone and they are very understanding otherwise.

How do you balance staying connected with your family while also being involved on campus and working on your academics?

As I am an out-of-state student and very family-oriented, staying connected to my family can be challenging but is very important to me. My

“I am very lucky to have a family who continues to encourage me...”

schedule is extremely busy at times, but **I make sure to connect with my parents by phone call or FaceTime call for a few minutes almost every day.** This keeps me grounded and really helps when I am overwhelmed since I do not go home until holiday breaks.

Did you experience any challenges communicating with your family about college life?

Sometimes it can be hard to explain to my family why I am involved in so much when it often stresses me out, but **I try to emphasize my interest in making the most of my college experience!** My busy schedule is hard to follow and keep up with myself, so I am sure it is for them as well.

What one thing do you want to share with family members about being first-gen at West Chester University?

Being a first-generation student at WCU is awesome in the sense that everyone here is so welcoming and accommodating. There are so many resources available to help, as being a first-gen student can be stressful with parents not being really familiar with the college process. **My best advice to anyone, but especially first-gen students would be to get involved in as much as possible and make the very most out of your few years in college!**



Bianca Maggio
Nursing

“...staying connected to my family can be challenging but it is very important...”



Joyline Jefferson
Social Work

“...they gave me words of encouragement and reassured me that I am able to overcome any and all obstacles.”

it's easy to become unbalanced. I feel my family often pressures me to be present for a lot of engagements or events. **I think it's difficult for them to truly understand my lifestyle because they have not personally experienced it. I have let them know that there are times when I have to make important decisions for myself and sometimes say no to others to keep myself afloat.**

but they **gave me words of encouragement and reassured me that I am able to overcome any and all obstacles.** I have found myself having hard conversations with my family about my success because I never want them to think that I am better than them. My only objective is for my accomplishments to inspire and encourage them to work hard for their dreams.

“My family’s love and support is necessary to get me through not only these four years of school, but the rest of my life.”

Describe the best way that your family has supported you as a first-gen student.

Initially, it is very exciting and empowering to be the first one to step out and pursue a college degree. There are some challenges, because there are a lot of things you have to learn on your own. My family has done their best to support my organization events and let me know they are rooting for me. **I think the best support that I have received from them is through questions. When they ask me questions about my major, campus life, goals, etc., it makes me feel supported.**

Have you experienced any pressures from your family? How did you talk with them about that?

When I get really focused on my studies, the events on campus are increasing, working one or two jobs while socializing,

How do you balance staying connected with your family while also being involved on campus and working on your academics?

Family is a big part of my life and they play a big role in my academic success. **I try my best to reach out to them on a daily basis through text or over the phone just to check in on them.** Sometimes, campus events and family events may overlap, but I do my best to balance the two. Luckily, my family is very understanding when I am unable to attend family events and hope I can make it to the next one.

Did you experience any challenges communicating with your family about college life?

When I have expressed my concerns or frustrations, they were unable to fully understand the depths of the problem,

What one thing do you want to share with family members about being first-gen at West Chester University?

I would like to share that everyone has a different calling in life, and I feel that my personal calling was to further my education. **My family’s love and support is necessary to get me through not only these four years of school, but the rest of my life.** This opportunity is not only to better myself, but to create a better legacy for our family and another path for the next generation. **My family matters the most, and I am happy and proud to have taken this first step towards furthering my education so others can walk down this path if they choose.** I want my family to know that no matter where you come from, what cards you were dealt, and what struggles you’ve had to endure, nothing is impossible, because you are possible!

Describe the best way that your parents have supported you as a first-gen student?

My parents connected me with family members who are in college and who graduated, and had them talk to me about their experience. By doing this I was able to already identify specific things I needed to know about college such as financial aid, scholarships, advisors, housing, academic support, finding a mentor, etc.

Have you experienced any pressures from your family? How did you talk with them about that?

I’ve experienced the pressure of **trying to be the perfect role model for my two younger siblings.** I’m the first person in my family to go to college, and it was tough on me because I always did the paperwork on my own which was very difficult to understand. I let them know that I’m doing the best I can to have a smooth transition, and that I would appreciate

“My planner helps me organize the assignments I need to finish, as well as the different obligations I have for clubs on campus and spending some time with my family...”

their support. **I always felt it was my responsibility to be five steps ahead, and I wanted them to know that if they could try to help me out as much as they could it would be greatly appreciated.**

How do you balance staying connected with your family while also being involved on campus and working on your academics?

It’s important to know what your priorities are. I personally like to call my family once a week if possible, and the occasional Facetime with my siblings. By prioritizing some time to talk with my family and getting involved it gets difficult, but that’s why **I take full advantage of my planner. My planner helps me organize the assignments I need to finish, as well as the different obligations I have for clubs on campus and spending some time with my family.**

Did you experience any challenges communicating with your family about college life?

Challenges include the importance of getting involved so that I can network with other students and faculty members, but they see it as me spending too much time with my friends. Sometimes they don’t really understand the stress I’m

under with my classes and trying to be a good example to my younger brothers so that when they go to college, it’ll be easier for them. They are starting to have a better understanding of all the things I’m trying to juggle as a college student.



Nebiyou Elias
Double Major:
Actuarial Science & Statistics

“There will be ups and downs, but your student will be able to figure it out...”

What one thing do you want to share with family members about being first-gen at West Chester University?

I would say that it’s normal to worry about your student but also know that they’re in good hands. **There will definitely be some ups and downs, but your student will be able to figure it out on their own or with students/faculty/staff who are here to support them.** College is the time for them to learn more about themselves while making mistakes, and they need to learn how to solve them independently but also know that if they need assistance, they can find it.

“Call your first-gen students, we need you!”



Shelby Kaminsky

English

Describe the best way that your family has supported you as a first-gen student.

My mom supported me by always being there for me, she is the one who drove me up and back to WCU to move in and move out. I wouldn't have been able to attend WCU without her being willing to drive me there. **My brother and sister always gave me life advice.** They taught me to understand finances, how much things cost, and how to go about doing things I've never done before, like filling out FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form!

Have you experienced any pressures from your family? How did you talk with them about that?

My family is really hands off so they didn't really pressure me. I felt pressure from myself to get good grades, have a job, and be involved in order to keep my scholarships. That was very stressful, but I made it through school with very little debt!

“...they were always excited to hear how well I did each semester.”

How do you balance staying connected with your family while also being involved on campus and working on your academics?

I stayed connected with my family through group text messages. I would send pictures and keep up with family on Facebook or through text. They all tried not to bother me much because they didn't know my schedule, but I wish they had called me more! **Call your first-gen students, we need you!**

Did you experience any challenges communicating with your family about college life?

I didn't really talk about my classes much with my family, but I did share about my jobs and co-curriculars. And **they were always excited to hear how well I did each semester.**

What one thing do you want to share with family members about being first-gen at West Chester University?

Being first-gen at WCU was difficult, but it was well worth it! I wish my family understood how difficult college is especially when you're on scholarships, work multiple jobs, and have five classes. **My family supported me and loved me which is the best thing you can do, but it's nice to acknowledge your students accomplishments!**

Describe the best way that your family has supported you as a first-gen student.

My family has been a support for me throughout my college career. They have supported me physically, mentally, and financially the past two years. **There have been times where they would come up on the weekend with food for the next few days, whenever I needed to get something off my chest they always listened and they even have helped me study for difficult exams.**

Have you experienced any pressures from your family? How did you talk with them about that?

No, I have not experienced any pressure from my family, but **I have always felt this burden on my shoulder being a first-generation student.** I have spoken to them about it and told them about my anxiety that is caused by the high expectations I set for myself. However, **they have reassured me countless times that they are proud of me for making it here, and will support me in any major I decided to pursue.**

How do you balance staying connected with your family while also being involved on campus and working on your academics?

Me and my family are extremely close, so I tend to call them at least once every day to check up on how things are going. Whether the conversation lasts one minute or 15 minutes, I always make sure I check in with them. As for seeing them, whenever I have a free weekend I try to go visit home around once a month. **You don't want to go home every weekend and distance yourself from the many wonderful things the campus has to offer.**

Did you experience any challenges communicating with your family about college life?

Being the first one in my family to leave home, it was challenging to get adjusted to not being around my family. **I did not want them to worry about me, therefore I did not always tell them how I felt. I suggest if you are feeling any similar feelings during your first year that you talk to your family.** They are here for you and you should not feel like you have to go through anything on your own.

“Being a first-generation college student is something to be proud of.”

What one thing do you want to share with family members about being first-gen at West Chester University?

Being a first-generation college student is something to be proud of. I have great pride whenever I wear my West Chester's First-generation t-shirt. Be proud that your child has made it this far already. I encourage all families to be their child's number one fan. Support from you guys will go farther than you know throughout this college experience.

McKenzie Occean
Respiratory Therapy



“...talk to your family. They are here for you...”



Joyce Romero

Marketing

“...do your research and find ways that you can help...”

Describe the best way that your family has supported you as a first-gen student.

The best way my family has supported me as a first-generation student is providing a comfortable open space to talk to them about what I am involved in and what I may be struggling with. **They have been active listeners and always ask how they can help me. I feel like sometimes when you go to college you feel like you do not want to bother your parents, but having them ask questions provides relief and comfort.** Lastly, they continue to show up for my accomplishments and talk about how proud they are of me.

Have you experienced any pressures from your family? How did you talk with them about that?

I think the biggest pressure has been in the beginning of college when they wanted to talk to me on the phone or see me every weekend. **I had times where I was busy with school or**

“They have been active listeners and always ask how they can help me.”

co-curriculars, and was not always available until nighttime when they were sleeping. I felt my inability to frequently connect with them might make them feel neglected and that I did not care. **As we had more conversations, there was more understanding on both sides.**

How do you balance staying connected with your family while also being involved on campus and working on your academics?

I stayed connected with my family by finding time to talk on the phone and scheduling events in advance. Keeping

that open communication really helps to understand what is going on at home with family and at school. Asking questions and being interested in what your student is going through and involved in allows your student to be comfortable sharing more stuff as college progresses. I think that if my parents did not take the time to understand what my life consisted of it would not have been as successful.

Did you experience any challenges communicating with your family about college life?

My parents are from Ecuador, and the education system here is very different. So telling my parents I was President of Mu Kappa Tau (marketing honors society), was difficult for them to even understand what that meant, how important it was, or even what those responsibilities entail. **Once I explained the organizations and jobs that I had, they better understood what I did and they were able to ask me about them.**

What one thing do you want to share with family members about being first-gen at West Chester University?

It's important to do your research and find ways that you can help them throughout this journey. Be sure to show up for them and show off their accomplishments. Being a first-gen can be difficult when you do not have someone you can immediately contact to help you navigate college. Family members need to step out of their comfort zone to ask questions. You might feel self-conscious for asking because you feel like most people already know, but being knowledgeable helps your student and makes the process easier for them.



WAYS TO PAY FOR COLLEGE

WCU understands that the cost of a college education should not be taken lightly.

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 pay for college in a variety of ways. The first step to obtain money for college is to fill out the free **Federal Application for Student Financial Aid (FAFSA)** on the [FAFSA website](#)

The 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 students' eligibility for federal student aid. The FAFSA results are then sent to the Financial Aid office at West Chester University. Our office determines how much additional financial aid your student will receive in the form of grants, scholarships and loans. Read about the different types of aid on the West Chester University [Financial Aid website](#) and in our [Financial Aid Guide](#)

In order for your student to be eligible for many forms of aid, WCU should receive the FAFSA by our priority deadline of February 1st every year. We recommend students complete the FAFSA by December 1st at the latest to allow for processing. In addition, we recommend all WCU students check for institutional scholarship applications (including the General Scholarship application) starting in February in the [Scholarships](#) section of our Financial Aid website.



WE SUPPORT OUR STUDENTS' SUCCESS

West Chester University provides a number of services to support students' academic success including:



Tutoring

Tutoring in our **Learning Assistance and Resource Center** (LARC, located in Lawrence Center)— including:

- Small group
- One-on-one
- Online, available 24/7 through **Smarthinking**
- Review sessions for our most challenging courses

Visit their website to find out how students can sign up for tutoring.



Writing Center

Help with writing in our **Writing Center** (Green Library)

- 30-minute appointments
- 60-minute appointments
- Face-to-face appointments
- Online appointments

Visit their website to **schedule an appointment** or learn more.



Success Coaching

Success Coaching (in Lawrence Center)—assistance from an experienced peer who can help students with some of the challenges of college like

- Time management
- Note taking
- Test taking
- Developing a calendar/ planner

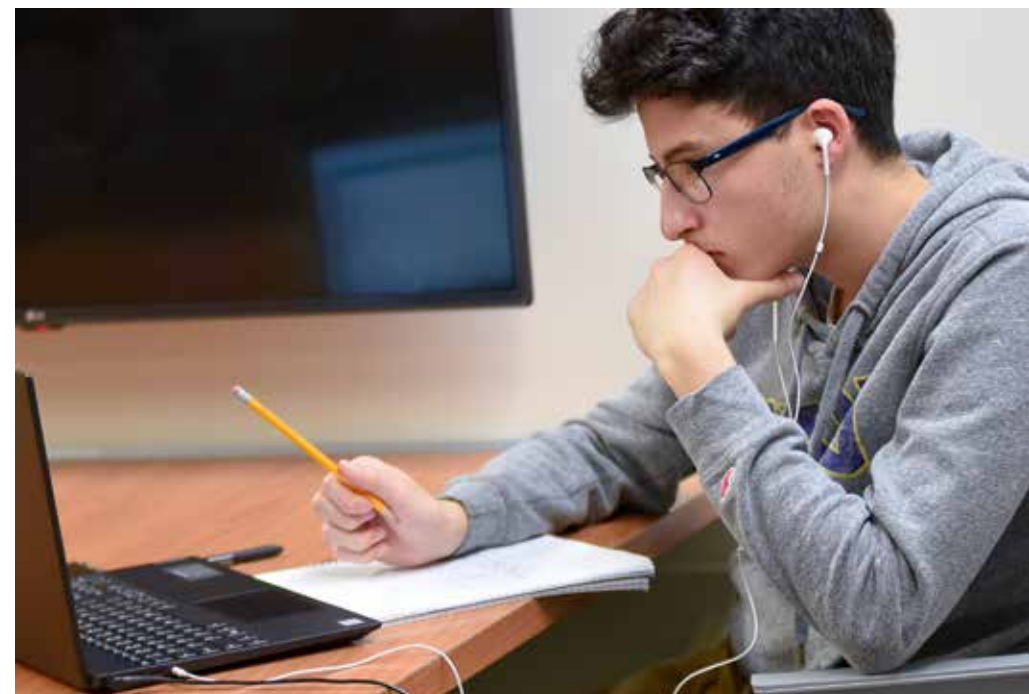
If you are interested in working with a Success Coach, reach out to Ms. Rita Patel Eng at **successcoaching@wcupa.edu**

Learning Accommodations

The **Office of Services for Students with Disabilities** (OSSD) is available to meet with you to discuss what you need in order for learning to be accessible to those with documented disabilities. You can reach out to **OSSD@wcupa.edu** to make an appointment. The OSSD also houses the testing center where faculty will arrange for students who qualify to take exams in a quiet, distraction free space.

First-Year Experience

In addition, we have prepared for students' success in our First-Year Experience (FYE) Course that every incoming first-year student will take at WCU as part of their General Education degree requirements. FYE is taught by some of the university's best faculty who are interested in connecting with students in their first semester at WCU. This course introduces students to their major area (or if they have not selected a major, it helps students explore to determine a major), the science of learning, and the liberal arts education they will receive at WCU.



If you have any questions about how we work to ensure student success at WCU, please reach out to us at **studentsuccess@wcupa.edu**.

Your Team

In addition, there are teams of professionals at West Chester who are here to support student success. The folks who are on your team include:

- 1 Your student success coordinator**, who you **can find on this website**.
- 2 Your academic advisor**, who will be assigned to you at the beginning of the fall semester. You can find out who your advisor is in MyWCU. In some programs, this might be your student success coordinator for the first year. You can learn more about advising **on this website**.
- 3 Our Exploratory Studies faculty** who are here for students who need help selecting a major or are not sure about their major. You can find **more information or schedule an appointment on their website**.





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