



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Bill Barker

Senior Director of External Relations & Policy

bbarker@naspa.org

(202) 719-1188

FirstGen Forward releases book on first-generation graduate students

“Decoding the Academy: A Roadmap for First-generation College Students Through Graduate Education” examines first-gen graduate students’ experiences; offers recommendations for change

WASHINGTON, DC (August 25, 2024)—[FirstGen Forward](#) today released a first-of-its-kind book examining the complex layers and intersecting dimensions of the experiences of first-generation college students in graduate school.

“I am extremely proud to announce FirstGen Forward’s release of this important resource,” said Maurice Jones, CEO of FirstGen Forward. “Scholarship focusing on the experiences of first-generation graduate students is extremely limited, and I know that this book will be an important resource for anyone who is seeking ways to improve the graduate school experience for first-generation students moving forward.”

[*Decoding the Academy: A Roadmap for First-generation College Students Through Graduate Education*](#), authored by University of Minnesota—Twin Cities’ researchers Dr. Rashné Jehangir, Dr. Kelly Collins, Dr. Tai Do, and the University of Michigan’s Dr. Terra Molengraff, examines first-person accounts and vignettes from twenty-nine (29) first-generation college graduate students to analyze the current landscape of the first-generation graduate student experience and provide recommendations for change for anyone seeking to improve support for these students.

“Not only does this book shed light on how institutions of higher education can better prepare for and serve the first-generation graduate students, but it also honors their stories,” said Dr. Jehangir, lead author and professor of Higher Education and assistant dean of the Education Opportunity Program at the University of Minnesota—Twin Cities. “By integrating first-hand narratives into practical strategies, my coauthors and I developed recommendations that help practitioners support first-generation graduate students in ways that respect their unique experiences within their academic environments.”

The research supporting *Decoding the Academy: A Roadmap for First-generation College Students Through Graduate Education* yielded nine (9) themes that are explained and detailed in the book. A brief summary of these themes:

- **Black Boxes:** reviews the hidden expectations and rules within higher education, and how first-generation graduate students describe, negotiate, and navigate these rules and structures
- **Ivory Tower Socialization:** examines how first-generation graduate students moved from making sense of unknown structures, norms, and values to trying to live and learn within a culture that was often unclear or even at odds with their values
- **Building Capital:** highlights the multifaceted relationships established by first-generation graduate students within academic settings and throughout their time in graduate school
- **Doing (Me) Research:** looks at how first-generation graduate students use personal experiences and community connections to enrich academic inquiry while grappling with the intellectual and emotional labor inherent in research topics closely aligned with their identities
- **Jarring Juxtapositions:** uncovers how first-generation graduate students navigate the many tensions and dissonances at the heart of the first-gen experience
- **Family Role:** inspects how first-generation graduate students perceive, understand, and negotiate their roles in their families during the graduate school experience
- **Financing Education:** offers a critical exploration of the financial barriers that first-generation graduate students experience at the graduate level
- **Mental Health Management:** reviews the influential yet largely unacknowledged role of mental health, offering critical insights into interventions that institutions can employ and expand to the benefit of all students
- **Making Meaning of First-gen Identity:** demonstrates the impact of context, institutional narrative, and representation in faculty, staff, and peers on the process of sensemaking about the first-generation identity

Decoding the Academy: A Roadmap for First-generation College Students Through Graduate Education concludes by connecting theory to practice; providing a map for supporting first-generation graduate students offering recommendations for students, faculty and advisors, and the institution as a whole.

To access the monograph and other resources on first-generation students, or to learn more about FirstGen Forward, visit firstgenforward.org.

###

About FirstGen Forward

FirstGen Forward™, formerly the Center for First-generation Student Success, partners with higher education, philanthropy, business, the public sector and others to catalyze first-generation student success in education, career and life.