



## STATEMENT OF THE ADVISORY BOARD OF THE CENTER FOR FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT SUCCESS IN SUPPORT OF INVESTING IN FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS

Current societal tumult offers U.S. higher education—and society generally—a precious opportunity to reorient and revitalize. We, the [Advisory Board](#) of the [Center for First-generation Student Success](#), an initiative of NASPA and The Suder Foundation, call on higher education leaders at all levels to redouble commitment to *expansion* of robust educational opportunity. Truly daunting and unprecedented headwinds notwithstanding, we must, and we can, expand access to the country's principal means of upward social mobility and cultural vitality. We can, and we must, reinvent higher education for the common good.

Because they understand what is needed and what is possible, leaders disrupt the normal. It is their responsibility to do so, for such adaptation defines their role. In this vein, we urge higher education leaders to

- lead with boldness and compassion, looking at existing systems and practices with a focus on equity and inclusion, especially for first-generation students;
- Address cost-containment as essential to maintaining access to higher education—while tempering across the board budget reductions that, though necessary, may ultimately weaken institutions, rather than just set them on a course to recovery; and
- disrupt market forces that systemically reward institutions that can use accumulated wealth to compete for the relatively privileged few, perpetuating inequities rather than creating what our society needs and what our students deserve: diverse, inclusive, equitable and just educational environments for all.

Leaders are doing their jobs when they help maintain collective focus on shared purposes. As a vibrant democracy, the United States cannot grow and develop or reach its considerable collective potential without widely available access to higher education, without real opportunity for its citizens to avail themselves of higher learning in all its many valuable forms and facets. Higher education powers our dynamic society by enriching and

transforming the lives of diverse individuals. It fails in this mission when it unthinkingly reproduces privilege and validates unworthy traditions, when it curtails rather than expands opportunity.

As advocates for first-generation college students, we focus on students who are striving to earn a college degree without the benefit of family or networks with insights about the experience. They have in common a wealth of potential, desire to challenge themselves, and vast and diverse accumulated knowledge, skill, and vision, the result of preparatory study and lives led in earnest. First-generation students—a sizable constituency, sometimes even a majority at many colleges and universities —are among the best of us.

We call on colleges and universities, including their alumni, friends and supporters, to eliminate barriers that systemically disadvantage first-generation students, to review and allocate or reallocate institutional resources from merit- to need-based aid; and to demand all who serve as educators at our institutions to prioritize equity alongside excellence. Indeed, to recognize that excellence is flawed, if not impossible, without equity. All students benefit from inclusive pedagogy and can gain more in a diverse community of fellow learners.

Let us celebrate those institutions of higher learning that dedicate themselves to advancing first-generation students across all their intersectional identities and to facilitating realization of untold talent and potential. Let us celebrate the fostering of leadership potential and efforts to enrich whole communities that are often otherwise underserved and underappreciated. Let us invest in students of all ages and their success, even if this means rebalancing scarce resources, for in the end the return on this investment will benefit all. Let us advance our higher purposes by making our daily and often prosaic decisions regarding what is funded to be more about what is valued. We can and we must do better. It is the only truly practical way forward.

Through this statement, we, as members of the Advisory Board of the Center for First-generation Student Success, acknowledge our role as advocates, proudly support the Center's mission, and will continue to raise the profile of first-generation students across various facets of the higher education sector. We invite our colleagues

to visit this [First-generation Resource for Higher Education Leaders](#) curated for your use in amplifying your commitment to first-generation student success.

Sincerely,

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