



First Scholars® Insights Tool

WHAT IS THE FIRST SCHOLARS INSIGHTS TOOL?

The First Scholars Insights Tool is intentionally designed to facilitate understanding of your institution's capacity to implement systemic cultural shifts that will holistically support first-generation student success. The questions contained in this inventory tool cover a vast array of topical areas identified by empirical research and evidence-based practices as imperative to first-generation student matriculation, persistence and completion, and post-graduation career and continued education trajectories. These components are essential to the process of systemic change and vital to creating successful outcomes for first-generation identifying students. Each question set is broken down into content areas that work in conjunction to enhance and clarify the thought process around creating a culture of success.

Originally, the Insights Tool began as a set of questions thought leaders within higher education posed as they began to consider how to address the continuing disparities in persistence and credential completion by first-generation students. The original questions approached inquiry both broadly and deeply by considering the touchpoints critical across the post-secondary experience for first-generation student success. The evolution of these foundational questions has resulted in the Insights Tool, an inventory that seeks to discover successful strategies for scaling and areas for growth.

WHY THE INSIGHTS TOOL IS VITAL:

The Insights Tool is designed to highlight areas for scaling programmatic initiatives and intentional practices that demonstrate a positive impact on student persistence and completion. Additionally, the Insights Tool pinpoints areas for continued growth by identifying potential gaps where intentional focus can be directed.

By gathering information from colleagues across the institution, the breadth of knowledge related to both first-generation student support structures and the institution's preparedness to respond to gaps will be illuminated. Of equal value, having colleagues across the institution participate in the inventory assures your partners in this work that their voices are heard, multiple stakeholders are

considered and can assist in discovering who is not part of the conversation but should be.

WHO SHOULD CONTRIBUTE:

The Insights Tool contains questions that should be answered by **at least one individual** affiliated with each of the following areas:

- ***Admissions/Enrollment Management***
- ***Alumni Affairs***
- ***Athletics***
- ***Development/Foundation***
- ***Finance/Business Operations***
- ***Financial Aid***
- ***Institutional Research***
- ***Multicultural Affairs/Diversity & Inclusion***
- ***TRiO***

The Insights Tool contains questions that should be answered by **up to five individuals** affiliated with each of the following: *(please consider representation across the division and those who serve on your first-generation focused steering committee or working group(s)).*

- ***Academic Affairs***
- ***Student Affairs***
- ***Graduate or Professional School***

Allies in this work may be found amongst individuals and parts of the institution not considered before. By asking institutional colleagues to provide greater context for how the institution prepares for, identifies, and supports first-generation students at the institution, we will be better equipped to provide a robust Insights Tool report tailored specifically for your institution. This report will be instrumental in determining the student-centered and institution-focused actionable outcomes of focus for the institution. Institutions will receive inventory feedback via tailored Expert Guidance critical to identifying institutional strengths and understanding where gaps exist.

WHEN TO ENGAGE:

Each designated institutional participant will be contacted via email with the following information:

- Access to a pre-recorded, informational webinar specific to the Insights Tool;
- A modified version of this information sheet;
- The Insights Tool Guidebook;
- Affiliation-specific question set; and
- Link to the Insights Tool

First Scholars and Center staff will be available to assist you and your institutional colleagues throughout the Insights Tool completion process. It will be imperative that all Insights Tool sections be completed by the deadline outlined in the Institutional Commitments form and Participation Agreement.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE:

To complete this inventory, we ask that the individuals have a general working knowledge of first-generation student programming and support structures at the institution or insight into the institution’s philosophy regarding support for first-generation students. In addition to this Insights Tool Guidebook, the specific question set based on each individual’s institutional affiliation will be provided. Both the Guidebook and question set are designed to provide additional guidance to assist in the completion of the inventory.

On average, the inventory requires twenty minutes to complete. Individuals affiliated with Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, TRiO, and Institutional Research may find the inventory will take longer to complete. Please note, not all questions in the question set will be asked due to built-in logic. All information shared via submission will be for internal use only. Data in the Insights Tool report will be de-identified and used in aggregate.

Questions on this inventory should not be implicitly understood as indicating any form of recommendation by First Scholars or the Center for First-generation Student Success. Instead, inventory questions have been included to encourage you to think holistically about first-generation student success and consider what knowledge is critical to propel institution-wide systemic transformation.

Once the Insights tool has been completed by all institutional representatives, institutions will receive a comprehensive report and consultation with the First Scholars Expert Guidance team to assist in identifying institutional strengths, understanding where gaps exist, and intentionally utilizing existing resources for increased first-generation student success.

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Guide to keywords and phrases

Asset-based - Asset-based recognizes and builds on a combination of the human, social, and physical capital that is a by-product of one's lived experience. Acknowledging and building upon what people value most and the skills, knowledge, connections, and potential inherent in each unique individual.

Cohort - a group of individuals having a or a shared characteristic (such as first-generation status) or set of characteristics in common.¹ In the case of First Scholars, your institution is placed in a cohort with peer institutions (Merriam-Webster, n.d.a).

Cultural Capital - The knowledge and skills acquired through belonging to or exposure to particular symbolic elements that hold meaning within social class spheres. The acquisition of cultural capital increases the ease with which an individual may move between social class spheres.⁶ Cultural capital is composed of embodied (knowledge consciously acquired or passively inherited), objectified (property with economic benefit), and institutionalized (academic or professional credentials) capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Expert Guidance - A hallmark of the First Scholars experience, Expert Guidance consists of customized support tailored to the specific needs of an institution with the purpose of maximizing progress towards goal attainment.

First Scholars Integrated Framework - Evidence-based solutions integrated into a comprehensive framework that higher education institutions can utilize to propel institution-wide systemic transformation and confidently scale holistic student support across the academic career of first-generation students.

First Scholars - First Scholars is an ecosystem of processes, tools, and guidance designed to work with your institution's specific environment.

First Scholars Network - A community of First Scholars institutional partners committed to transforming the higher education landscape through

systemic, scalable approaches that elevate potential and advance outcomes for first-generation students today and in the future.

First-generation student(s) - A vast majority of institutions have chosen to use TRiO's federal definition of first-generation college student: those whose parents did not complete a bachelor's degree. The specific definition of choice varies by institution, and many institutions have expanded this definition to broaden the number of students considered to be first generation. A discussion of definitions—and consideration around particular definitions—can be found in the [First-generation Student Success: A Landscape Analysis of Programs and Services at Four-year Institutions](#) or the [National Data Fact Sheet: Demographic Characteristics and Postsecondary Enrollment](#).

Holistic - encompassing emotional, social, physical, creative, and spiritual aspects of one's lived experience.

Institutional Readiness Assessment - An assessment designed to provide vital information that will determine your institution's readiness to engage in the First Scholars Network.

Imposter Syndrome - the persistent inability to believe that one's success is deserved or has been legitimately achieved as a result of one's own efforts or skills. Intense feelings of intellectual inauthenticity (Clance, 1985).

Institutional or Higher Education Jargon - words, acronyms, phrases, or expressions that are used by a particular profession or group and are unfamiliar or unknown to those outside of that group or profession. In this case, it would be words, acronyms, phrases, or expressions that are unique to higher education or a particular institution.

Intersecting identities - In 1989, Kimberle Crenshaw introduced the term "**intersectionality**" as a Black feminist theory that describes how biological, social, and cultural categories such as gender, race, class, ability, and other dimensions of **identity** are interconnected with systems of oppression and as such experiences are shaped not solely by a single facet of identity but by the intersections of one's identities (Crenshaw, 1989).

Matriculation - to enroll as a member of a body and especially of a college or university ((Merriam-Webster, n.d.b).

Satisfactory Academic Progress – indicates successful completion of coursework towards a degree or certificate and is evaluated based on grades posted at the end of each semester and prior to the beginning of the upcoming semester, the completion of a certain percentage of attempted credits, and making progress toward completing a degree within a certain time frame (American Public University System, n.d.).

Social Capital - The information, support, and resources available to an individual through connections and networks of relationships⁶.

Student Support System - Student support systems may comprise a number of individuals who are a part of the network students rely upon for emotional/financial/mental/spiritual support prior to, and throughout, their higher education career. A student's support system may consist of parents, guardians, siblings, community members, former and current educators and advisors, friends, mentors, etc. Because a student's support system should be defined and determined by each individual student, it is imperative to consider ways to be as inclusive of these individuals as possible.

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