



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**FirstGen Forward announces inaugural class of Network Champion Institutions**

*Fourteen new institutions selected as FirstGen Forward Network Champions; recognized as national leaders in advancing first-generation student success*

**WASHINGTON, DC (August 6, 2024)** - [FirstGen Forward](#), formerly the Center for First-generation Student Success, today announced the selection of fourteen (14) institutions of higher education to its inaugural class of FirstGen Forward Network Champions. Network Champion institutions are an exclusive group serving as national leaders in advancing first-generation efforts and contributing to an important knowledge base of evidence-based practices, leadership engagement, and scaling student supports.

“We are pleased to announce our inaugural class of Network Champions in the FirstGen Forward Network,” said Dr. Stephanie J. Bannister, vice president with FirstGen Forward. “Not only are these institutions doing excellent work to support their own first-generation students, but they continue to provide support and add to evidence-based practices that serve as a model for all those working to support this population in higher education.”

The FirstGen Forward Network provides a three-phase approach to scaling holistic first-generation student success by engaging and empowering higher education institutions to transform the first-generation student experience, advance academic and co-curricular outcomes, and build more inclusive institutional structures. To date, 429 institutions of higher education, including two statewide systems, have entered the Network, representing 49 states and the District of Columbia.

Network Champion is the third phase in this approach, signaling institutions have invested the time and commitment to actively adopting the continuous improvement model and have aligned their efforts with institutional priorities to guide first-generation students to completion. While movement to this phase signals an important progression, Network Champions remain actively involved and committed to continuous improvement principles while emphasizing

institution-focused strategic priorities to improve first-generation students' experiences and completion rates.

“With 54% of current undergraduate students identifying as first-generation, achieving unprecedented FirstGen student success will have a life-changing impact across generations, as college completion is a significant contributor to education, workforce, and life success for the families of graduates,” said Maurice Jones, CEO of FirstGen Forward. “To be named a Network Champion is an honor and a testament to the work of these institutions, evidence that they are national leaders in this area, and they’ll serve as role models for the field for years to come.”

FirstGen Forward recognized the following institutions as Network Champions in 2024-25 (institutions listed alphabetically):

- Baylor University
- Elon University
- Furman University
- James Madison University
- Kansas State University
- New Jersey City University
- Northern Arizona University
- University of Central Florida
- University of Kentucky
- University of Louisville
- University of Memphis
- University of Nebraska Kearney
- University of Washington Tacoma
- Virginia Commonwealth University

To learn more about FirstGen Forward and the Network, visit [firstgenforward.org](https://firstgenforward.org).

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### **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.