



Tips and Best Practices for Initiating or Supplementing First-Generation Programming for Law Students

The JD Advisors Section First-Generation Work Group asked member schools to complete a short survey to report on the types of first-generation programming law schools offer students. We did not suggest or ask for a definition of “first-generation” when surveying NALP members, but in following up with schools that offer programming, we asked how they define first-generation. Some schools reported that first-gen is defined as students who are the first in their immediate or extended family to earn a four-year undergraduate degree, others define it as first in their immediate or extended family to attend law school, while others let students define themselves. Despite the differences in definition, the members who contributed to this resource indicated that first-gen programming is generally open to all students, regardless of how the term first-gen is defined by the school.

Forty-eight schools initially responded to the survey. Twenty-two schools indicated that they offer some kind of first-generation programming and 26 schools indicated they do not offer first-generation programming. Thank you to all who responded.

After collecting the survey responses, we reached out to individuals who indicated they have initiated and/or currently manage some type of first-gen programming. We greatly appreciate those who took the time to share their best practices and tips, from which we derived the information contained herein. We have also noted, with permission, those members who are willing to speak with others about their experiences with this work. Many thanks to all who participated in this outreach.

We organized the results of our outreach in several broad categories, as set forth below. We hope this will be a helpful resource to those looking for ideas to supplement existing first-gen programming, and those looking to initiate new programs.

-Kate Harrison, Detroit Mercy Law

-Cindy Lopez, Legal Education Access Pipeline

-Becky Fitzsimmons, Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law

Potential Collaboration Partners:

- Identify administration/faculty/staff/student affairs/career services/internship director/clerkship director, etc. who are first-gen themselves, and want to help.
- Utilize recent alumni who identify as first-gen.
- Seek out main campus personnel (administration, first-gen group leaders, graduate students, e.g., Master of Higher Education program, etc.) to brainstorm and share the lift.
- Engage non-first-gen law students to participate in programming, mentoring, etc. One school mentioned that it is important to include supporters (allies) who have family members who did go to law school, so that cross-student information sharing takes place more naturally. By starting with a student group, they will have agency and ownership.
- When initiating first-gen programming, think about nailing down the objective and using data; research what is already on campus so you can figure out where the gaps are.
- Before beginning your programming, interview first-gen faculty to ask what they wish they would have known before starting law school.

Potential Opportunities for First-Generation Programming:

A. During 1L Orientation:

- Welcome all students (despite any understood definition); let students self-identify.
- Offer programming on financial literacy, emergency funding, degree planning, GPA calculator, etc.
- Help with meal planning, financial literacy, and food insecurity issues.
- One school mentioned that SBA members are part of the law school's Diversity Council, and there is one seat specifically for first-gen students.
- Offer "Welcome to 1L" events including panel discussions with practicing attorneys focusing on finding a job as a first-generation law student and bouncing back if one receives disappointing grades.
- Offer specific first-gen events related to OCI and job-hunting, types of legal employment, exams, and networking.
- One school offers admitted students the chance to attend a nine-session "Jump Start" program covering professional development topics.

- One school will offer a first-gen bootcamp in 2022 (funded by one donor) as a free residential summer program.
- Prior to orientation, offer a first-gen orientation (emphasizing fun first, then academics!).

B. Throughout the Year:

- Include first-gen topics and programming as part of a credit-bearing professional development course.
- Offer programming focusing on developing your narrative as a first-gen student (including dealing with imposter syndrome and learning the value of the strong work ethic often associated with first-gen students).
- Offer student/faculty events to encourage students to become more comfortable going to office hours.
- Host a dinner with first-gen judges.
- Offer financial planning and professional etiquette programs.
- Work with law firm sponsors to host lunch and dinner programs (e.g., “Being Your Authentic Self”), organize lunchtime tours of law offices (going in for the first time for an interview is intimidating) with a presentation on various practice areas.
- Offer mentor/mentee programs (upper-level students and recent graduates can serve as mentors to help first-gen students practice networking).
- Consider an alumni mentor program with monthly check-ins.
- Start a first-gen accountability group or groups – one for first-gen college and one for first-gen law school. Assign reading/outlining/exam preparation work; invite speakers to discuss setting goals, exams, etc.
- Offer a program focused on “Networking when you don’t have a Network.”
- Offer a program focused on salary negotiation.
- Create a first-gen student association. At one school, the First Start Coordinator is the advisor for this organization and works closely with the group to help bring first-gen practitioners to campus to speak as part of a “Practitioner Perspectives” series. The FGSA is also developing a community mentoring project to bring in area high school students from underrepresented and working-class backgrounds to visit to the law school.
- Create a student organization focused on first-gen students with program support from the Director of Student Life, student leaders, etc.
- Create a first-gen newsletter (highlighting first-gen students and helpful resources).
- Create a terminology cheat sheet for incoming students (e.g., “OCI,” “Civ Pro,” etc.).

- Initiate a networking program run by student group; invite various partners to discuss best practices for networking and investigating various practice areas.
- Develop a presentation hosted by the Office of Career Strategy focusing on foundations of professionalism, including the nuances of a law office (attorneys may have doors shut, may need to ask for work); interviews (most likely will meet with more than one lawyer; resources to prepare for interview); resume (remove references to high school and high school jobs); importance of professional associations (student groups, bar associations); professional dress, etc.
- Recognize and celebrate first-gen day in November: provide treats and posters with first-gen graphics where students can write why they are proud to be first-gen; one school bought stickers for students/faculty/admin to wear or post on their name plates outside their offices.
- Offer sessions on facilitating law school (ideally early in first semester of 1L year) – how to brief a case, how to outline, balancing family and school.
- One school hosts a suit stipend program as their flagship event. Students need to apply in November for gift cards (approximately \$200 each) awarded in January.
- Create first-gen scholarships – one school offers 10 full ride scholarships!
- One school mentioned that tracking a critical part of their mentorship program. During the first semester of 1L year, they do peer-to-peer-matching. Second semester they match an alum with a 1L first-gen student.
- Host monthly check-ins with first-gen students, led by an administrator or fellow.
- Host an etiquette dinner or speed networking event.
- Provide a 3L bar stipend.

Other Recommended Resources:

- Join the National Association of Law Student Affairs Professionals (www.nalsap.org). NALSAP's central aim is to provide a professional home for those who work in this field. More specifically, NALSAP seeks to provide:
 - Leadership, professional development, and law school student affairs resources.
 - A professional meeting place for law school student affairs officers to discuss and learn best practices and develop innovative and creative ideas.
 - Support for law student affairs professionals conducting research and writing scholarly articles and manuals relating to law students, law schools, and the legal profession.
 - Other resources include a very helpful annual conference listserv.

- Subscribe to Mentor in the Law, which provides Q&A and career coaching. It also includes a newsletter highlighting first-gen attorneys who share information about their jobs, what it means to be a first-gen attorney, and what they wish they would have known in law school (www.mentorinlaw.org).
- AccessLex, especially for financial aid information (www.accesslex.org).

Other Events:

- Plan outings and events for first-gen students and their families (picnics, movie night, law school tours, etc.).
- Host a 3L first-gen graduation dinner or other celebration.
- Host a dean's lunch for first-gen students.
- Recruit first-gen faculty to speak to first-gen students at a special lunch.
- One school hosts a first-gen professionalism series which is a graduation requirement; attendance at any first-gen programming can count toward the requirement.
- One school with a large percentage of first-gen students requires a one-credit Professional Identity Formation course (taken in either 1L or 2L year) taught by the Dean of Career and Professional Development. Topics include how values drive choices, career exploration, emerging issues in the practice of law, access to justice, multicultural lawyering, cultural competency, emotional intelligence, and mentoring. The class is also meant to address students' struggles with bar passage.

Other Ideas and Advice:

- Add a first-gen question to admissions application to identify and track first-gen students.
- Cultivate a list of resources for first-gen students who are new to the area. Some students reach out before they move to town prior to the start of the academic year and would like information on housing, miscellaneous services, etc.
- First-gen students at one school spearheaded the [Law School Crucible podcast](#) which addresses issues faced by law students both at school and in the profession.
- Create a library of textbooks to borrow for the semester. 3Ls are especially happy to donate. It can be hard to find space, but students greatly appreciated this resource. Use a Google sheet to track who borrows each semester.
- Create a LinkedIn group for first-gen students.
- Create a handbook on professional attire.

- Create a flyer to encourage individuals and groups to partner with you – think about the skills and help you need; reach out to alumni and students and get some quotes for this resource.
- Endow first-gen specific scholarships.
- Seek out alumni funding for hiring a person to oversee first-gen programs – and there is a need for someone to specifically shepherd the program, not just give money. One school mentioned that their donor became very involved with the students and became a trusted mentor.
- Offer a professional development stipend that first-gen students can use for job search costs; students required to meet with program coordinator for approval.
- It's important to have some kind of non-faculty/staff advisor for first-gen counseling and academic planning. This helps increase students' comfort level and willingness to share information. This also helps circumvent the "politeness barrier" that exists with faculty.
- Think outside of business hours. Many first-gen students are overwhelmed and may have other responsibilities/commitments during the day, and/or work part-time.
- Create a first-gen listserv into which students can self-select. Make clear in each email how school defines "first-gen" for purposes of self-selection.

Survey participants who are willing to speak to NALP members who may have questions:

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First-Gen websites and contact information shared by member schools:

- www.law.duke.edu/career/1gp
- www.elon.edu/u/law/students/student-organizations/first-generation-legal-professionals
- <https://gould.usc.edu/students/first-generation/>