

A Standout in Supporting First-generation Students

UC San Diego receives ‘First-gen Forward Advisory’ designation, a national honor for commitment to first-generation student success

When Aysia Pease—the first in her family to go to college—started her first year at UC San Diego, she was worried that she knew less about the experience compared to others in the cohort. Then she was invited to participate in the campus’ Student Success Coaching program, which supports first-generation students in navigating college through personalized assistance.

“After talking with my coach and learning more about the program, I breathed a huge sigh of relief,” she said of the program, which matches first-generation college students with nationally certified peer coaches and professional success coaches. “I wasn’t expecting to receive this kind of support.”

Pease will be a senior in the fall and after two years of being a mentee in the coaching program, she is now a coach herself who supports and advises other first-generation first-year students.

“The program is by far my favorite part of UC San Diego,” said Pease, a physiology and neuroscience major at Eleanor Roosevelt College. “I wanted to come into college and find a sense of community and that’s exactly what I found in our program. The Student Success Coaching Program helped me realize that being first-generation is a part of my identity and something to be proud of. We strive to show our students how important that identity is.”



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UC San Diego [Student Success Coaching](#) program, which serves 14% of the student body, is one of the many reasons the campus was recently designated a “[First-gen Forward Advisory Institution](#).” The university earned the recognition from demonstrating a commitment to improving experiences and

advancing outcomes of first-generation college students. The designation comes from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), which also recognized the Student Success Coaching Program earlier this year.

As part of the recent NASPA first-gen recognition, UC San Diego and other selected institutions will receive professional development, community-building experiences and more, while serving as a model for other campuses seeking to improve the outcomes of first-generation students.

“A crucial part of UC San Diego’s excellence is our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion,” said Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. “As a public university, it is our responsibility to offer an accessible and affordable education to talented students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Our goal is for our student body to reflect the demographics of California. To meet this challenge, we have expanded college access and affordability and invested in programs that meet the full needs of our first-generation students and students from underrepresented communities.”

Admitting, enrolling and seeing first-generation students across the graduation finish line

UC San Diego’s commitment to supporting first-generation college students is evident across the campus community and mirrors the journey of a first-generation college student from admission to graduation and beyond. For example, UC San Diego hosts first-generation panels for newly admitted students and community members through events such as Triton Day and Transfer Triton Day. The campus also supports first-generation college students in their transition to the university through OASIS Summer Bridge. Both Triton Days and Oasis Summer Bridge were offered virtually this year.

After first-generation students enroll, the campus supports their success with programs such as Student Success Coaching as well as the Chancellor’s Associates Scholars Program, which provides talented first-generation students academic support, mentorship, career advising and more in addition to scholarship and financial aid support.

And in the classroom, students get to learn from and interact with more than 150 faculty who are identified as first-generation. Many have participated in the Triton Firsts initiative events as guest speakers sharing their journeys of resilience and success.

First-generation students are also part of UC San Diego’s leadership. As Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Alysson Satterlund relates her journey as the first in her family to earn a college degree to many students with similar backgrounds.

“UC San Diego’s commitment to being student-centered is demonstrated through our robust programs that support and empower students throughout the entirety of their college journey,” said Satterlund. “We are thrilled to be a community that celebrates the many contributions of our first generation students.”



Nearly 40% of UC San Diego's students are the first in their family to attend college. "As a public university, it is our responsibility to offer an accessible and affordable education to talented students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds," said Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla.

UC San Diego efforts supporting first-generation students go through graduation and beyond.

This past spring, the campus launched a campaign to recognize first-generation graduates with the [virtual first-generation recognition site](#). About 220 first-gen graduates were recognized on the website which featured profiles of students translated into 16 different languages for families.

And at the alumni level, the first-generation alumni affinity group [Tritons Connect](#) allows first-generation college graduates to receive mentorship, network with other professional, and get connected to job opportunities.

New and existing resources put first-generation students first

[Student Retention and Success](#) programs and resources within the [Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs](#) unit recognize that the first-generation identity intersects with so many other unique attributes of our students.

"Our first-generation students come from and intersect with various student populations," said Ebonee Williams, Interim Assistant Vice Chancellor—Student Retention & Success. "Whether they are transfers, first-time students, military connected, undocumented, low-income or minority student populations, our unit consistently delivers holistic, data-driven and culturally relevant support for these students."

"As a First-Forward Advisory Institution we will serve as a role model for a cohort of colleges and universities trying to launch and increase their first-generation student success initiatives," said Lindsay Romasanta, director for the Student Success Coaching program. "Being part of this national network will enable select faculty and staff to engage with peer and aspirational institutions who are also creating environments that improve the experiences and outcomes of first-generation students. Overall, it strengthens our ability further our impact on first-generation student success."

UC San Diego's leadership on this issue has earned the support of alumna Sandra Timmons,'81, who was also a first-generation student. She and her husband are members of the [Campaign for UC San Diego Cabinet](#). Timmons is also a trustee on the [UC San Diego Foundation Board](#) where she chairs the donor engagement and stewardship committee and serves as chair of [Chancellor's Associates](#).

Timmons experiences as an undergraduate made an indelible impact on her giving. She supports a variety of causes across campus, and around the world, that help young people succeed academically and in life.

“Having been a first-gen student myself I know that navigating one’s way through school is difficult, with the greatest pitfalls being not knowing what you don’t know,” Timmons explained. ““Can you ask for help in classes, how to file for financial aid, or is it’s okay to want to do a year abroad if your family isn’t supporting you?” are questions these students have to navigate.”

Timmons has been a strong advocate of the Chancellor’s Associates Scholars Program for the inclusive community and guidance it provides in addition to financial support. When coupled with financial aid, the scholarship program offers students resources that cover the cost of education, including housing and supplies, making it possible for families and students to avoid loans while earning a degree.

“The program embraces students before they begin classes, which is a wonderful way to ensure students can learn about the educational system, get help with classes and can find a safe place to explore all the possibilities UC San Diego has to offer,” Timmons said. “Having others who are on the same path as you—first in your family to go to college, who have had similar struggles and experiences—lets you know you can do this, you do belong, and there are others with whom you share this process.”

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