



XAVIER UNIVERSITY
THRIVE
CENTER



Family Resource *Guide* | Supporting Your First Gen Student at Xavier University



About the THRIVE Center

Empowering Students to Thrive



THRIVE

The THRIVE Center is dedicated to empowering every student to excel both in and out of the classroom. Grounded in the values of Cura Personalis, Ignatian Belonging, leadership, dignity, and respect, we offer resources, mentorship, and leadership development to support students' academic and personal success.

Rooted in Mission

Aligned with Xavier University's mission to educate students intellectually, morally, and spiritually, the THRIVE Center creates welcoming spaces where all students—especially first-generation and at-risk students—can belong, grow, and lead with purpose.

Signature Programs

Through impactful experiences like:

- × **First Steps** – A summer bridge and year-long program designed to support incoming first-generation students through faculty guidance and peer mentorship.
- × **Smooth Transitions** – A pre-orientation and year-long program that helps first-year students transition from high school to college, with support from a dedicated peer mentor.
- × **Arrupe Scholars** – A year-long program offering targeted communication, workshops, and peer mentorship to foster success and belonging for first-year students.

A Hope-Filled Future

Inspired by the Universal Apostolic Preference to accompany young people in the creation of a hope-filled future, we ignite hope that fuels confidence, purpose, and possibility.

A National Commitment

As a proud First Gen Forward Network Institution, we celebrate resilience, uplift first-generation voices, and champion equity in student success.

A Community That Cares

Through community, collaboration, and courage, the THRIVE Center ensures students feel seen, valued, and equipped to thrive—at Xavier and in the world they are called to transform.

Welcome Message from the Director

Samuel Terry



Welcome to Xavier University!

I'm truly honored to welcome you and your student to this new chapter. As someone who was once a first-generation college student myself, I know just how meaningful—and sometimes overwhelming—this experience can be for an entire family. That's why we created this guide: to walk alongside you. We want you to feel equipped, supported, and seen as you help your student navigate this important chapter of their life. Inside, you'll find helpful tips, answers to common questions, and encouragement that we hope will bring peace of mind and confidence.

At the THRIVE Center, we believe that when families are supported, students thrive. Your love, sacrifices, and unwavering belief in your student are powerful—and we see that. Please know that we're here not only for them, but for you too.

From one first-gen family to another: thank you. Thank you for trusting Xavier. Thank you for encouraging your student to dream big. And thank you for letting us be part of their journey.

With gratitude and hope.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Samuel Terry". The signature is stylized and fluid.



Meet the THRIVE Team



Samuel Terry

Director, THRIVE Center

Sam, he/him/his, is an experienced professional with over 20 years of experience in higher education. He is uniquely qualified and proficient in adult learning, student success, diversity, and student retention initiatives. As Director he oversees and advances initiatives related to First-Gen students. He has extensive experience in program leadership, student retention, and takes a student-centered approach to program development, student success and retention. Samuel is proud of his HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) background. He holds Bachelor of Science degrees in Accounting and Management Information Systems from Winston-Salem State University, and a Master of Science in Adult Education from North Carolina A&T State University. He is also a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

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Diamond Brown

Assistant Director, THRIVE Center

Diamond, she/her/hers, is a Cleveland native who has a passion for cultivating community and creating systems of support for historically marginalized communities. She is a First-generation college graduate and an Alumna of Xavier University. Her passion for creating change and building networks of support and community through the lens of Ignatian Belonging, led her to her current role at Xavier University

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Tamara Serrano Chandler

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Tamara, she/her/hers, was born in NYC and raised on the island of Puerto Rico. Prior to joining Xavier in 2023, she spent 12 years coaching, advising and supporting students in Latino/a/x Studies at WSU in Detroit. With a MA in American Culture Studies, she uses Ethnic, Gender and Women's Studies to inform her work within higher education and student success. At Xavier her work focuses on advising student organizations along with the recruitment, retention and success of diverse students at the university. In her free time, she loves spending time with her husband, their 4 kids and dog "Cinco."

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What is a First-Generation College Student?



A first-generation college student is typically defined as a student whose parents or guardians did not complete a four-year college degree. First-gen students are often the first in their immediate family to attend college, and their journey comes with both unique challenges and powerful strengths. These students are leaders, trailblazers, and community builders. They bring grit, determination, and resilience to everything they do. With the right support, they don't just succeed—they thrive. Your encouragement and partnership are essential.

WE ARE FIRST-GEN



Ruth Bader Ginsburg



Oprah Winfrey



John Legend



Bill Clinton



Sonia Sotomayor



Michelle Obama

Understanding the First-Gen College Experience



Being the first in your family to attend college is a tremendous achievement—and a powerful opportunity to shape your future. While the journey is exciting, it also comes with unique transitions:

Greater Independence

- ✕ Your student is navigating a new world—managing their schedule, classes, finances, and responsibilities—often for the first time.

Increased Academic Demands

- ✕ College coursework is more rigorous and may feel unfamiliar. First-gen students often learn to adjust without having a family member who's “been there before.”

New Social and Cultural Environment

- ✕ Building community takes time. Your student may encounter unfamiliar social settings, expectations, or even feelings of isolation—but they are not alone.

Balancing School, Work, and Life

- ✕ Many first-gen students manage part-time jobs, family responsibilities, and academic life all at once, developing strong resilience and time-management skills.



Maintain Regular, Open Communication



WHY IT MATTERS:

College can be overwhelming. Regular check-ins let your student know you care and are available to listen.

How to do it:

- × Set a routine for phone calls, video chats, or texts.
- × Ask open-ended questions to encourage sharing, rather than yes/no answers.
- × Listen without immediately offering solutions—sometimes your student just needs to be heard.

Examples & Conversation Starters:

- × “Tell me about your favorite class this week.”
- × “What was something challenging you faced today?”
- × “Who on campus do you enjoy spending time with?”
- × “How are you balancing school and your social life?”
- × “Is there anything you’re worried about or need help with?”



Celebrate Milestones and Progress



WHY IT MATTERS:

Recognition builds confidence and motivation.

How to do it:

- × Celebrate good grades, completion of a difficult project, or simply finishing a busy week.
- × Send encouraging notes, texts, or small care packages.
- × Attend campus events or family weekends when possible.

Examples & Conversation Starters:

- × “I’m proud of how hard you’re working this semester!”
- × “Tell me about that project you completed — I’d love to hear more.”
- × “What’s one thing you learned this week that you’re excited about?”



Encourage Use of Campus Resources



WHY IT MATTERS:

Xavier offers many supports designed to help students succeed; encouraging your student to use them can prevent small challenges from becoming big obstacles.

How to do it:

- × Familiarize yourself with campus resources and gently suggest them when appropriate.
- × Normalize asking for help as a strength, not a weakness.

Examples & Conversation Starters:

- × “Have you met with your academic advisor this semester?”
- × “If you ever feel stressed, the Counseling Center is a great resource.”
- × “There’s tutoring available if you want extra help in any class.”
- × “How is your connection with your Hope Igniter or peer mentor going?”



Promote Healthy Routines and Self-Care



WHY IT MATTERS:

Physical and mental health directly impact academic success and overall well-being.

How to do it:

- × Talk about the importance of sleep, nutrition, exercise, and downtime.
- × Encourage breaks and healthy habits during stressful times like exams.
- × Support them in seeking counseling or wellness services if needed.

Examples & Conversation Starters:

- × “How are you sleeping these days? Getting enough rest?”
- × “What do you like to do to relax or de-stress?”
- × “Have you tried any of the wellness programs at Xavier?”
- × “Remember, it’s okay to take a break when you need one.”



Support Financial Awareness and Responsibility



WHY IT MATTERS:

Physical and mental health directly impact academic success and overall well-being.

How to do it:

- × Money stress is common and can impact focus and well-being.

Examples & Conversation Starters:

- × “Do you know how to budget for your monthly expenses?”
- × “Have you talked to the Financial Aid Office about your options?”
- × “Let’s review your aid package together so you understand it.”
- × “Are there any unexpected expenses coming up we should plan for?”



Encourage Involvement and Building Community



WHY IT MATTERS:

Physical and mental health directly impact academic success and overall well-being.

How to do it:

- × Encourage your student to join clubs, organizations, or programs like Arrupe Scholars.
- × Ask about friends and campus activities.

Examples & Conversation Starters:

- × “What clubs or groups are you interested in joining?”
- × “Have you made any new friends or met a mentor?”
- × “What events have you enjoyed on campus?”
- × “Are there ways you’d like to get involved but haven’t yet?”



Recognize and Normalize Challenges



WHY IT MATTERS:

First-gen students often face unique pressures and obstacles.

How to do it:

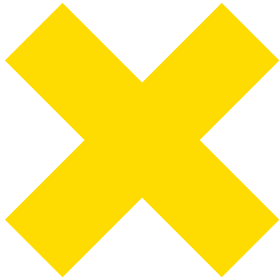
- × Acknowledge their experiences openly and empathetically.
- × Share stories of perseverance, if appropriate.

Examples & Conversation Starters:

- × “I know college can feel overwhelming sometimes; that’s normal.”
- × “Many students feel homesick or stressed—you’re not alone.”
- × “Remember, asking for help shows strength and courage.”



Encouragement Calendar



Supporting a first-generation college student is a special kind of journey—one filled with pride, hope, and sometimes uncertainty. While your student is learning how to navigate a new environment, your encouragement—whether through a simple text, a call, or a note—can serve as a powerful reminder that they are not alone. The transition to college is not just academic; it’s emotional, social, and spiritual. Students will experience highs and lows, moments of triumph and times of self-doubt. And while you may not be walking the halls with them, your words, gestures, and steady presence can help carry them through. This Encouragement Calendar is designed to give you insight into the rhythm of the academic year—highlighting the times when students often need an extra dose of love, support, and belief in their potential. Think of it as a gentle guide to being present with your student, even from a distance.

Encouragement Calendar



FALL

Month	What's Happening	How to Encourage
AUGUST New Beginnings	Move-in, orientation, and adjusting to campus life.	✕ Send a care package or handwritten note. ✕ Remind them you're proud and confident in their ability to succeed. ✕ Encourage them to explore campus resources like THRIVE and get involved early.
SEPTEMBER Settling In	First assignments and exams, homesickness, adjusting to independence.	✕ Check in with open-ended questions (e.g., "What's been your favorite class so far?"). ✕ Remind them it's okay to ask for help. ✕ Celebrate small victories to build confidence.
OCTOBER Midterm Season	Academic stress, time management struggles, social fatigue.	✕ Send a motivational message or favorite snack for study fuel. ✕ Suggest using campus resources like tutoring and academic coaching. ✕ Acknowledge their hard work and perseverance.
NOVEMBER Looking Ahead	Preparing for finals, planning for next semester, possible burnout.	✕ Help them reflect on how far they've come. ✕ Offer to listen without judgment as they process their experiences. ✕ Encourage gratitude and rest during Thanksgiving break.
DECEMBER Finals & Transition Home	Final exams, stress, anticipation of break.	✕ Remind them to pace themselves and prioritize sleep. ✕ Celebrate the end of their first term, no matter the outcomes.

Encouragement Calendar



SPRING

Month	What's Happening	How to Encourage
JANUARY New Start	Return to campus, new classes, winter blues.	✕ Encourage them to set realistic goals for the semester. ✕ Remind them of their strengths and growth from the fall. ✕ Send a note of encouragement to kick off the term.
FEBRUARY Staying Motivated	Cold weather, academic routine, dip in motivation.	✕ Send an uplifting message or check-in call. ✕ Encourage them to re-engage with clubs, mentoring, or THRIVE events. ✕ Remind them that support is always available.
March Spring Break & Midterms	Academic pressure, social distractions, planning for summer.	✕ Help them weigh summer options (internships, jobs, rest). ✕ Encourage healthy study habits during midterms. ✕ Celebrate their resilience and progress.
APRIL The Final Stretch	Final projects, exams, and emotional fatigue.	✕ Send a care package or words of affirmation. ✕ Encourage use of wellness and mental health resources. ✕ Remind them they're almost there—every step matters.
MAY Celebrations & Transitions	Finals, goodbyes, and preparation for summer.	✕ Acknowledge all they've accomplished. ✕ Support their reflections and transitions. ✕ Celebrate their growth—this journey is just beginning.

Key Campus Resources For Your Student



Academic Support

- × **Academic Advising Center** – Helps students choose majors and plan their course schedules.
- × **Tutoring Services** – Free tutoring in a variety of subjects to support academic success.
- × **Registrar's Office** – Manages course registration, transcripts, and academic records.

Financial Support

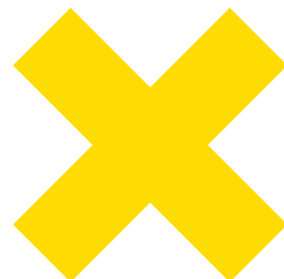
- × **Financial Aid Office** – Assists with scholarships, grants, loans, and work-study programs.
- × **Student Employment Office** – Helps students find on-campus and off-campus job opportunities to support their education.

Wellness and Counseling

- × **Counseling Center** – Confidential mental health services including individual and group counseling.
- × **Health Services** – Offers medical care and wellness education to support student health.

Career & Community

- × **Career Development Office (CDO)** – Provides career counseling, resume workshops, internship and job search support.
- × **THRIVE Center** – A dedicated center providing comprehensive support for first-generation students through academic coaching, mentoring, leadership development, and community-building programs.
- × **Office of Student Involvement (OSI)** – Coordinates clubs, leadership programs, and student engagement opportunities.
- × **Center for Faith and Justice (CFJ)** – Offers spiritual support, retreats, service opportunities, and promotes social justice in alignment with Jesuit values.
- × **TRIO Student Support Services** – A federally funded program that offers tutoring, academic advising, mentoring, and support specifically for first-generation, low-income, and students with disabilities.



Words Families Should Know at Xavier University



Understanding the language of college empowers you to better support your Musketeer. Here's a quick guide to common terms and important campus programs.

Academic Terms

- × **Credit Hour:** Measures class time. Full-time students take 12–18 credit hours per semester.
- × **Syllabus:** Course overview with assignments and expectations.
- × **Office Hours:** Time when professors are available for extra help.
- × **Prerequisite:** Required course before taking a higher-level class.
- × **Academic Advisor:** Staff who help with course and career planning.

Signature Xavier Programs

- × **Manresa:** Xavier's new student orientation experience, named after the town where St. Ignatius of Loyola had his spiritual awakening.

Financial Aid & Payment Terms

- × **FAFSA:** Federal aid application form.
- × **Xavier Grant/Scholarship:** Money awarded based on need or merit.
- × **Bursar's Office:** Handles tuition payments and holds.
- × **Payment Plan:** Semester-based tuition payment options.
- × **Hold:** Restriction on registration or transcripts due to unpaid bills or missing documents.



Words Families Should Know at Xavier University (cont.)



Campus Life & Resources

- × **Residence Hall:** On-campus housing where students live—each building has an RA (Resident Assistant) for support.
- × **RA (Resident Assistant):** A trained upper class student who helps guide and support residents. They build community and respond to concerns. Xavier Dining Plan: Prepaid meal options for use at Hoff Dining Commons, Blue Blob Café, Starbucks, and more.
- × **Counseling Services (Health & Wellness Center):** Offers free mental health support, wellness education, and crisis response. Located in the Health United Building (HUB).
- × **Career Development Office (CDO):** Helps students explore careers, prepare resumes, find internships, and connect with employers.
- × **Center for Faith and Justice (CFJ):** Offers retreats, service opportunities, and spiritual guidance—open to students of all faiths or no faith.

Academic & Administrative Terms

- × **Registrar's Office:** Manages course registration and transcripts.
- × **Degree Audit:** Progress report toward graduation.
- × **Major/Minor:** Primary and secondary fields of study.
- × **Study Abroad:** Programs for studying outside the U.S. Commencement: Graduation ceremony.

Jesuit Identity & Community

- × **Cura Personalis:** A Jesuit value meaning “care for the whole person”—the foundation of how faculty and staff support students at Xavier.
- × **Ignatian Belonging:** A core value promoted through Xavier programs— emphasizing inclusion, justice, and community in the spirit of St. Ignatius of Loyola.
- × **Jesuit Education:** A holistic approach to learning that emphasizes academic excellence, social justice, reflection, and service to others.



How To Tell If There Is a Problem



Sometimes students try to manage challenges on their own, but early support can make a big difference. Here are common signs that your student may be struggling and ways you can gently check in:

Signs Your Student Might Be Struggling

- × **Change in Communication:** Your student becomes quieter, stops returning calls or texts, or seems distant.
- × **Declining Academic Performance:** Sudden drop in grades, missed assignments, or withdrawn from classes.
- × **Changes in Mood or Behavior:** Increased irritability, sadness, anxiety, or signs of stress and overwhelm.
- × **Social Withdrawal:** Avoiding friends, campus activities, or previously enjoyed hobbies.
- × **Physical Symptoms:** Changes in sleep patterns, appetite, or appearance of fatigue.
- × **Financial Stress Signals:** Expressing worry about money, inability to pay bills, or asking for financial help.



How to Gently Check In



Express Concern Without Judgment:

- × “I’ve noticed you haven’t been yourself lately, and I’m here if you want to talk.”
- × “It sounds like things might be tough right now; I want to support you.”

Ask Open-Ended Questions:

- × “How are you feeling about school and everything else?”
- × “Is there something you’re finding hard to manage right now?”

Offer Support and Resources:

- × “Have you talked to your advisor or someone at the THRIVE Center about this?”
- × “Would it help if I helped you find someone to talk to, like a counselor?”

Respect Their Pace:

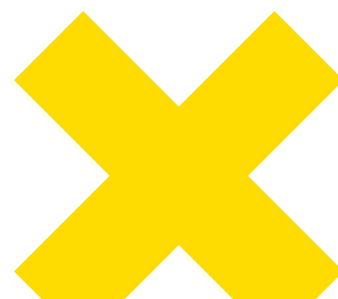
- × Let them know you’re available when they’re ready, and you care.

When to Seek Immediate Help

If your student shows signs of severe distress such as talking about self-harm, feeling hopeless, or expressing thoughts of suicide, encourage them to seek help immediately:

- × Contact Xavier’s Counseling Center or Emergency Services.
- × Use crisis hot-lines such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (988).
- × Be present and listen without judgment; take their feelings seriously.

Remember, your support and timely intervention can make a significant difference. Trust your instincts and don’t hesitate to reach out to campus resources or professionals for guidance.



Frequently Asked Questions



Q: What should I do if my student is struggling academically?

A: Encourage them to meet with their academic advisor and utilize tutoring services early. The THRIVE Center can also connect students to additional support.

Q: How can I help my student manage stress?

A: Support healthy routines, encourage counseling services if needed, and remind them to use campus wellness resources.

Q: What if my student is feeling homesick or isolated?

A: Encourage involvement in student organizations. The THRIVE Center can help build connections

Q: How do financial aid and billing work?

A: The Financial Aid Office can explain aid packages and payment plans. Encourage your student to communicate openly about any financial concerns.

