

# First Generation College Students

## 10 Things Only First Generation College Students will Understand

### 1. Feeling the pressure of being “the trailblazer”

As you enter UNT as a first generation college student (FGCS), you may feel a mixture of excitement, anxiety, guilt, shame, pride, confusion and especially...PRESSURE. The responsibility of being “The First” and to excel not just for yourself but for the success of your entire family or community. It can feel like the weight of the world.

TIP: It’s important to talk to family about this extra pressure and let them know how you feel. Connecting with other “first-gens” can help, especially around discussing these unique experiences with others who will understand. You’re not alone

### 2. Feeling like everyone else gets something you don’t get

As you are the first to go through the college experience, it can often feel like everyone else already understands what to do and what not to do. They get it and you DON’T. The fact that other students are able to talk to family and relatives who may have gone to college can make it feel like they’re ahead of the game.

TIP: Ask questions. Letting your professors and advisors know that you’re a FGCS could also be a big help. They can point you towards resources or answer questions you have. Faculty and staff are there to help; they just have to know that you *need* the help.

### 3. Navigating Bureaucracy

One of the most difficult things to manage at UNT is the huge interconnected system it takes to manage 37,000+ students. FGCS can often feel overwhelmed or lost in the shuffle during these times.

TIP: Don’t lose hope when you face barriers. Filing paperwork and having repetitive conversations is a big part of navigating a university and it is normal to feel overwhelmed. UNT is a big campus with lots of resources. Once you find the office or person you need, they can usually help you with the rest. Hang in there.

### 4. Self-Doubt

A common feeling described by UNT FGCS is self-doubt in terms of academic and social performance. FGCSs often feel like they are not good enough or smart enough or connected enough to be here, despite the fact that they are equally as skilled or qualified as non-first generation students.

TIP: Talk with friends about your difficulties and ask for feedback from professors. This can help give you an accurate assessment of how you are doing here at UNT. [Counseling Services](#) can also help you build up yourself esteem if you want to do some more in depth work in this area.

### 5. Not having parents who can help

Another challenge can be the inability to turn to parents when making academic, financial, or social decisions. You can feel alone in this journey.

TIP: Utilize your campus resources. For example...You can discuss your academic progress with your advisor or a mentor; The [Career Center](#) can help prepare you for job interview; [Student Money Management](#) can help you with setting a budget. AND you can still talk to your parents about these issues! Each family has their own way of communicating and you may have to explain a few things so they understand but feeling connected to your parents may be worth the effort.

## 6. Feeling like you're losing your identity

As you become more and more accustomed to campus life at UNT, your identity will further develop and possibly shift. The problem is your family, community and culture does not. They might not understand how confusing financial aid or registration can get, or how difficult it is to be in class with 300 other people, or the constant balance of staying social and maintaining your GPA. Simultaneously the community and your family continue to evolve without you there. This can make conversations feel disconnected or confusing for some FGCS.

TIP: It is important to maintain these relationships and be patient and detailed oriented when describing things to friends and family from back home who may not know what it means to be part of the MEAN GREEN community. The [Multicultural Center](#) can also help people connect to each other and culturally specific events on campus that may remind you of home.

## 7. Managing two worlds

Often FGCS may need to manage their school life while also managing family life. This can include traveling between locations, (in some cases even) sending money or resources back to your family, or even switching languages when you go home.

TIP: It is important to try to take time for self-care if you find yourself in these situations. Join student organizations, talk with other FGCS, or join one of the therapy groups at Counseling & Testing Services.

## 8. Not knowing the social rules

A big part of college success is knowing the social rules like networking, how to talk to professors, knowing who/how to talk to people when you are struggling, etc.

TIP: Talk with professors, advisors, and get yourself out there. It may mean getting out of your comfort zone and it may feel awkward at first. You could utilize the [Career Center](#) or join a group at [Counseling Services](#) so you learn "the rules of the game".

## 9. Managing financial aid/Worrying about money

Let's face it, college is expensive and a large proportion of FGCSs come from lower income families. This can often mean making sacrifices and foregoing experiences other students get (i.e. Spring Break trips or joining the organization with costly dues). This can add an extra level of stress.

TIP: Keep an ongoing communication with [Financial Aid](#) and/or [Student Money Management](#). Understanding your financial status can decrease your anxiety and make you feel more empowered.

## 10. Being a first generation student gives you a sense of pride others will never understand!

FGCS are often a bridge for their families as they empower themselves with education and create better opportunities; they are role models for their younger relatives and their community. It is a brave thing to be "the first". You should take pride in this accomplishment and please don't forget that [Counseling Services](#) is here to support you in your journey.

*Adapted from Ohio State University Counseling & Consultation Service, 2016*

For more information about **Counseling & Testing Services** visit us in Chestnut Hall Suite 311, call 940-565-2741, or check out our website <http://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-testing-services> You can also follow us on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/UNTCTS> and Twitter (@UNT\_Counseling)

