FIRST-GEN STUDENTS
CREATING AN ENGAGING & INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

**WHAT IS IT?**
A first-generation student is identified as a US student whose parents/guardians have not received a four-year, US bachelor’s degree (Toutkoushian et al., 2016). First-generation students tend to experience a variety of educational, financial, and social barriers that make successful completion of a bachelor’s degree more difficult than for their continuing-generation peers (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015).

**RESEARCH...**
Pascarella et al. (2004) emphasize the importance of academic and classroom engagement for first-generation students. They contend that first-gen students may benefit from their academic experiences comparatively more than their continuing-gen peers because these experiences build cultural capital they might otherwise not have access to.

Research also validates the importance of providing students with resources for accessing academic support, both in and out of the classroom (Brazil-Cruz & Martinez, 2016).

**TEACHING STRATEGIES...**
- **Communicate high expectations** for all students, in a supportive way. For first-gen students, communicate that they belong in the university and are capable of achieving at the highest levels.
- **Model what you expect** students to do so that they can perform in ways that meet your high expectations.
- **Be transparent** and emphasize the learning outcomes of your course and explain how specific tasks/projects are designed to help students achieve these outcomes.
- **Provide structured and/or scaffolded learning experiences** to help students move to more independent problem solving and learning.
- **Tap into students’ prior experiences and prior knowledge** and help them explore how they can apply it to the new content.

**DATA ...**
42% of UC Davis students self-identify as first-generation students. 1st Gen students are more likely than other students to report that family and/or job responsibilities are obstacles to their school work or academic success (UCUES, 2018).

**STUDENTS SAY...**
“I appreciate when instructors discuss or identify student support resources on the syllabus. When I know where to turn, I don’t have to ask for help if I feel uncomfortable.”

“Sometimes I enjoy working with peers in class who are not already my friends. Interacting with others in class helps me meet those who I may not have met within my own circle.”

“I really enjoyed the professor I had who shared that she, too, was a first-generation college graduate. I was inspired by her success and openness to support my own journey.”

**REFLECTION...**
- How can you be more explicit in your expectations of students (i.e., incorporate study guides, student work exemplars, or rubrics)?
- How can you systematically consider whether assignments or exams assume prior cultural knowledge that may not have been covered in class?
- How do you develop students’ critical analysis skills, demonstrating the processes of evaluating and critiquing ideas, that may be unfamiliar to first-gen students?