First generation college students (FGCS) are the first ones out of their immediate family to attend college. FGCS have a disadvantage that works against their success in college. Due to the lack of information regarding navigating higher education, many miss out on valuable resources and services offered on campus. Creating ease of access of services and information offered that can assist in the success of these students is a must. The first step in creating an environment where these students feel support is to know common characteristics, difficulties, and understand their needs, to better assist them. For more information, contact the AmeriCorps VISTA, Lucero Martinez, at lmartinez4@niu.edu or at 815-753-8159. Also, check out the NIU student committee FAST on facebook. FAST serves to enhance the first-generation college student at NIU and provide college readiness information to K-12 students in the community.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF FGCS

01 encounter difficulties adapting academic and social life
02 are less confident in their academic performance
03 receive less support from family
04 feel pressure from families
05 delay entering college after high school
06 transfer from a community college
07 live off campus with family
08 lack awareness on unwritten protocols
09 various cultural and ethnic background
10 working class background
11 work full-time and are part-time students
12 lack knowledge regarding resources offered at campuses
13 do not know how to make use of resources offered
14 find it difficult to ask for help
15 view the college environment as non-supportive

WAYS TO HELP FGCS

01 promote participation in class and office hours
02 let them know the importance of asking questions
03 provide study tips, students may feel overwhelmed
04 help students feel comfortable in the classroom
05 create a safe space where they feel comfortable learning
06 help eliminate feelings of uncertainty in the classroom
07 inform students of campus resources
08 encourage the use of the Writing Center, labs and library
09 encourage extracurricular activities
10 mention the importance of participating in student organizations