I AM FIRST: NAVIGATING GRADUATE SCHOOL THROUGH A PROACTIVE MINDSET

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Project Summary

In recent years, there has been a rise in interest in supporting first-generation college students. However, the vast majority of support for this diverse population is seen at the undergraduate level. While supporting first-generation undergraduate students brings innumerable benefits to our campuses and communities, it is equally as important to support first-generation graduate students (FGGS).

The need for awareness and advocacy has sparked interest in the development of the PFTF symposium: I AM FIRST: NAVIGATING GRADUATE SCHOOL THROUGH A PROACTIVE MINDSET.

This collaborative project seeks to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students, and specifically targeting FGGS from diverse disciplines and backgrounds.

Our half day symposium consisted of a series of workshops and discussions guided by:
- community counselors
- financial experts
- faculty from diverse backgrounds
- diverse graduate students.

Workshops & Objectives

1. **Explaining your work to family and loved ones:** Provided personal support for family engagement as graduate students embark on their journey.

2. **Every Penny Counts**
   - Focused on providing financial support, including helping students understand and navigate graduate financial aid, assistantships, as well as internal and external fellowships.

3. **Mental Health**
   - Promoted the importance of mental health and personal well-being. Provided students with tools to work through stressors and provided a stress management technique to help stay grounded and focused in their research programs.

4. **Real Talk**
   - Demystified graduate school through a diverse student and faculty panel.

Participant’s Insight

- “Really great job! I think this positively influence the grad school choices/decisions for the participants.”
- “Great event! It was definitely most helpful for first generation grad students. I will strongly recommend for events like this one to happen more often! Destiny & Melissa did a wonderful job. Thank you!”
- “Thank you for all the hard work and for doing work that matters!”
- “Great event and opportunity to learn and hear from people at different stages of academic development. Wonderful idea to educate and prepare potential graduate students and make them aware of their options...It was also very nice to hear the stories of those that were in the middle of the process and able to share their experiences with everyone...Great event in the support of all!”
- “The environment was very welcoming. I felt like I was able to ask questions and felt comfortable doing so. The information provided was beneficial, especially since I didn’t know too much about graduate school...Overall, the workshop was a great experience!”

Questionnaire Data & Responses

Future Directions

We hope to continue to empower FGGS across campus. In the future, we’d like to revitalize the symposium and make this PFTF project an annual event with more on campus support and resources.

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