



# ***FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT SUCCESS***

**at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

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2023 Report by UNL's First Scholars  
Steering Committee



**OFFICE OF THE  
EXECUTIVE VICE CHANCELLOR**

*Undergraduate Education*



*First-generation student club members distribute t-shirts at the club fair.*



*First Husker program graduation pin.*

## **THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA–LINCOLN IS DEDICATED TO THE SUCCESS OF FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS.**

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln has been recognized as a First Scholar Institution by the Center for First-generation Student Success for its demonstrated commitment to advancing the outcomes of first-generation students through improving first-generation student success initiatives and institution-wide approaches. UNL’s participation as a First Scholar Institution follows its designation as a First Forward Institution in 2019 and Advisory Institution in 2021.

The First Scholars Steering Committee is excited to work with campus partners to build upon this recognition and address equity gaps in our first-generation students’ experiences. Nebraska is among 22 First Scholars institutions that will use data and research-supported strategies to engage in student-centered, systemic transformation over an 18-month period.

In 2023, 23.1% of UNL students were defined as first generation, meaning they come from families where neither parent/guardian has earned a bachelor’s degree. Our first-generation students face unique challenges which are often reflected in lower degree completion rates. Equity gaps for these students can be attributed to many factors outside of academic performance, including financial constraints, family or work obligations, and feeling isolated and out of place on campus. First-generation students also report feeling more frustration when navigating university systems compared to peers whose families can provide college-going knowledge and mentoring.

In spring 2023, 134 UNL faculty and staff completed the First Scholars Insights Tool survey to help identify opportunities to better support first-generation students. Our 74% response rate was the highest of all 22 First Scholars institutions in our cohort, demonstrating the commitment our faculty and staff have for improving first-generation student outcomes! We will be using the survey results and the data in this report during the 2023-2024 academic year to develop action plans in four areas:

- Connections and Celebrations
- Communications
- Policies and Procedures
- Faculty and Staff Development

UNL’s land-grant mission calls us to deliver on the promise of providing social and economic mobility through postsecondary degree completion for Nebraskans, with particular attention to those from historically marginalized and underserved populations. When our campus prioritizes the needs of first-generation students, we create a more inclusive and equitable campus for all students.

We are grateful for the engagement of our campus partners to help collectively strengthen our university systems, practices, and opportunities so that all Nebraska students can successfully achieve their dreams.

Sincerely,

First Scholars Co-Chairs



Amy Goodburn,  
Senior Associate Vice Chancellor  
and Dean of Undergraduate Education



Ryan Lahne,  
Assistant Vice Chancellor,  
Student Affairs

### FIRST SCHOLARS AND UNL STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVES

The launch of First Scholars contributes to ongoing efforts to build a campus culture where “every person and every interaction matters” in alignment with UNL’s N2025 Strategic Plan [go.unl.edu/n2025](https://go.unl.edu/n2025). In particular, First Scholars builds upon campus research and initiatives focused upon increasing degree completion and closing equity gaps. Over the past decade, a research team from the University of Southern California’s Pullias Center for Higher Education has been conducting qualitative studies on scholarship learning communities across the University of Nebraska system called PASS (Promoting At-Promise Student Success) [pass.pullias.usc.edu](https://pass.pullias.usc.edu).

The PASS research focuses on how to support students from low-income, first-generation, and historically underserved racial and ethnic communities, who are collectively termed “at-promise.” The term “at-promise” deliberately shifts away from deficit framing of students as “at-risk” to focus, instead, on the strengths, assets, and shared resilience that students from these populations bring to postsecondary learning. Equally important, the term “at-promise” signals the university’s promise to be accountable in creating the systems and structures necessary to support all students’ academic and career success.

PASS research identifies specific norms needed to create a validating campus culture as well as strategies that have successfully supported NU’s at-promise students’ persistence, degree completion, and career development. PASS research shows how institutions that employ comprehensive validating ecological supports achieve the greatest gains for at-promise scholars. The First Scholars steering committee and working groups will be drawing broadly upon this research and campus data as well as collaborating with other campus councils and committees focused on supporting UNL’s first-generation students, such as the First Generation Nebraska Advisory Board and the Retention Leaders Council.



*Fall 2022 first-year student orientation with peer mentors.*

## DATA ON FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

At UNL we use numerous data points to monitor undergraduates' academic performance and to understand key predictive factors and conditions for their success. Commonly used metrics include first-year retention, four- and six-year graduation rates, the percentage of students who earn thirty credits by their second year, and students' course grades of D's, F's, or withdrawals. We also use surveys, interviews, and focus groups to solicit feedback from students about their university experiences. This report provides just a snapshot of some of the campus data that can be used to understand our first-generation students' experiences. For more information about available teaching and learning data aligned with UNL's degree completion and equity goals, visit [go.unl.edu/analytics](https://go.unl.edu/analytics).

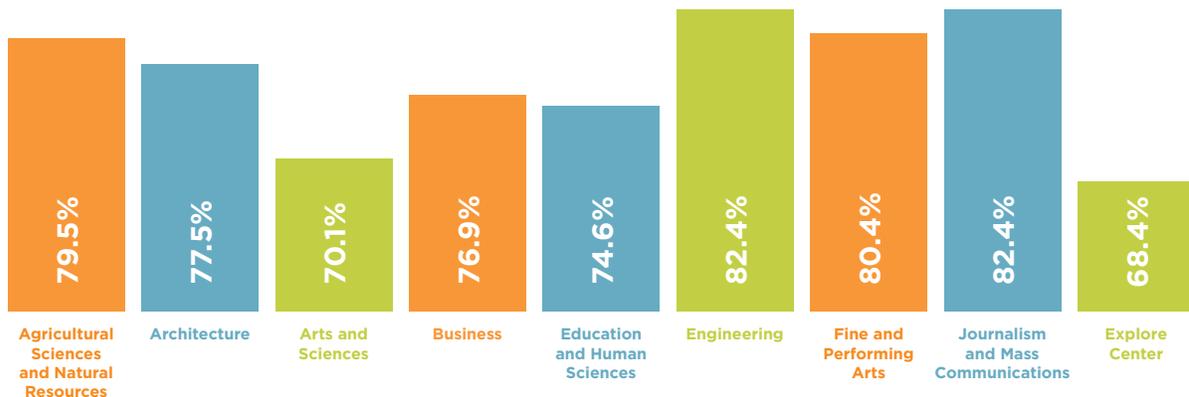
### First-Year Retention

One of the most common metrics for gauging how well an institution is supporting its students is the first-year retention rate. In 2022, the overall university first-year retention rate for UNL's first-generation students was 74.6%. This means that of the 1,168 first-year, first-generation students who started at UNL in 2021, 297 did not re-enroll in fall 2022 for their second year. In contrast, 83.8% of the 2021 first-year students who are not first generation enrolled for their second year in 2022. The 9.2% difference between these two percentages is what we call the equity gap in first-year retention between first-generation and non-first-generation students.



University retention rates for first-generation, first-year cohorts 2012-2021

In addition to the university rate, we also track retention rates by academic college. First-year retention rates for first-generation students beginning in fall 2021 by college are listed below.



First-generation, first-year retention for 2021 cohort by college



*First-year students participate in the First Husker program.*

**Intersectional Identities**

Students have multiple and intersecting identities that can influence and shape their university experiences. First-generation students whose racial and ethnic identities have been historically marginalized and/or who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds often have compounding challenges that further impact their retention rates.

The below table shows first-year retention rates for first-generation students further disaggregated by ethnicity/race and Pell-eligibility. Pell-eligible students receive non-repayable federal subsidy awards for post-secondary education based on “exceptional financial need” and thus represent students who come from the lowest income levels. This table shows how layering Pell-eligible status onto ethnicity/race for first-generation students often further impacts their retention rate negatively. For example, Hispanic first-generation students in the fall 2021 cohort retained at 76.7% while Hispanic, first-generation students who are also Pell-eligible retained at 74.7%, a 2% lower rate. Four of the six categories showed this additional negative impact on retention.

Ethnicity/Race	Number	UNL Retention Rate	Also Pell-eligible Number	Also Pell-eligible UNL Retention Rate	Retention Rate Difference
American Indian/Alaska Native	4/9	44.4%	3/6	50.0%	+5.6%
Hispanic	165/215	76.7%	118/158	74.7%	-2.0%
Black/Non-Hispanic	38/61	62.3%	32/49	65.3%	+3.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	76/88	86.4%	41/48	85.4%	-1.0%
White/Non-Hispanic	522/704	74.1%	201/284	70.8%	-3.3%
Two or more races	45/68	66.2%	28/43	65.1%	-1.1%

***2021 cohort retention rates for first-year, first-generation students by ethnicity/race and Pell-eligibility***

### 30 Earned Credits by Year Two

Another metric for measuring first-year students' academic progress is the percentage who earn thirty credit hours by the beginning of their second year. Because most undergraduate degree programs require students to earn 120 credits over eight semesters for a four-year bachelor's degree, second-year students who have not earned at least 30 credits are considered "off track" for timely degree completion.<sup>1</sup> The table below shows the four-year trend for first-generation students in the first-year cohort by college who earned 30 credits by their second year.

College/Unit	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021
Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources	61.17%	84.17%	76.92%	75.76%
Architecture	81.25%	83.33%	88.89%	83.33%
Arts and Sciences	70.24%	69.04%	79.53%	79.35%
Business	66.91%	69.80%	73.77%	68.42%
Education and Human Sciences	68.75%	62.30%	68.29%	77.32%
Engineering	78.72%	80.25%	83.12%	74.11%
Fine and Performing Arts	62.96%	71.74%	72.00%	73.81%
Journalism and Mass Communications	70.00%	47.22%	70.97%	72.50%
Explore Center	57.14%	50.00%	49.67%	51.64%

*First-year, first-generation students from fall 2018-2021 by college earning any 30 credits by beginning of year two*



*Peer mentors for first-year orientation programs led by the Center for Academic Success and Transition.*

<sup>1</sup> This metric is not applicable to all degree programs. Some degree plans recommend 28 credit hours for students in their first year and then require 16 credit hours each semester in year two. Also, this metric includes all credits earned and does not distinguish between credits that count for degree programs and those which do not.

This report was produced in summer 2023 so the fall 2022 first-year cohort data is unofficial because it does not yet include students' completion of summer 2023 courses. Without these summer courses included, 66.31% of all first-year, first-generation students in the fall 2022 cohort earned 15 or more credits by the end of term one and 62.56% earned at least 30 credits by the end of term two.

The below table shows the unofficial percentages for the fall 2022 first-year, first-generation students by college who earned at least 15 credits for term one and 30 credits by term two in the 2022-2023 academic year.

College/Unit	Fall 2022 Term One	Fall 2022 Number	Spring 2023 Term Two	Spring 2023 Number
Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources	64.96%	89/137	64.23%	79/123
Architecture	62.50%	20/32	65.63%	21/32
Arts and Sciences	70.41%	119/169	66.45%	103/155
Business	65.58%	101/154	64.34%	92/143
Education and Human Sciences	60.55%	66/109	59.38%	57/96
Engineering	71.43%	120/168	67.10%	104/155
Fine and Performing Arts	63.27%	31/49	52.17%	24/46
Journalism and Mass Communications	80.00%	28/35	60.61%	20/33
Explore Center	63.04%	162/257	58.04%	130/224

***Fall 2022 first-year, first-generation student cohort by college who earned 15 credits by end of term one and 30 credits by end of term two<sup>2</sup>***

UNL first-year, first-generation students lag behind their non-first-generation peers in earning at least 30 credits by the beginning of year two. The below table shows the percentage of first-generation students in the fall 2021 first-year cohort by college who earned any 30 credits by the beginning of year two compared to non-first-generation students. The far-right column reflects the percentage difference or “gap” between the two groups of students.

College/Unit	Non-First Gen	Percentage	First-Gen	Percentage	Gap
Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources	252	84.56%	75	74.76%	-9.8%
Architecture	70	97.22%	25	83.33%	-13.89%
Arts and Sciences	446	83.83%	146	79.35%	-4.48%
Business	468	78.92%	91	68.42%	-10.5%
Education and Human Sciences	282	83.19%	75	77.32%	-5.87%
Engineering	443	84.06%	83	74.11%	-9.95%
Fine and Performing Arts	96	74.42%	31	73.81%	-0.61%
Journalism and Mass Communications	114	76.51%	29	72.50%	-4.01%
Explore Center	209	66.14%	63	51.64%	-14.5%

***Percentage gap between non-first-generation students and first-generation students by college in fall 2021 cohort who earned 30 credits by year two***

## Grades of "D" and "F" and Withdrawal Rates

The Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor has developed tools to help academic leaders monitor and understand the impact of DFW rates<sup>3</sup> for degree completion and equity outcomes. Disaggregated DFW rates can help faculty see how the curriculum is being experienced by different groups of students. Sharing such data can encourage reflection and inquiry into what underpins these inequities and help instructors to identify and implement strategies to address them.

From 2018-2023, UNL participated in the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities "Powered by Publics initiative" designed to increase degree completion and close equity gaps across 100+ institutions. UNL collaborated with seven other Big Ten institutions<sup>4</sup> to examine DFW rates in 25 courses at the 100 and 200-level that typically enroll more than 500 students annually. This data was disaggregated for demographics such as gender, ethnicity, and income-level.

A key insight gained from this collaboration was understanding the impact that a D or F grade in a student's first semester can have on a student's overall degree completion. Across the eight institutions, students who earned a D or F in one course were significantly less likely to retain or complete their degrees than those who did not. For instance, in UNL's fall 2014 first-year cohort, students who earned one D or F in their first semester graduated in four years in 2018 at 34.1% compared to 56.4% for those without a D or F in their first semester, a difference of 22.3%. UNL's 2014 cohort's six-year graduation rate in 2020 for those who earned a D or F in the first semester was 60.4% compared to 80.8% for those who did not, representing a gap of 21.6%.

The Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor provides tools for monitoring both subject and course level DFW rates. The subject level refers to aggregated DFW rates across all courses taught under a particular subject heading. For instance, the DFW rate for the subject of English includes the percentages of DFWs earned across all English courses offered at all undergraduate levels for one or more semesters. The course level refers to aggregated DFW rates for all sections of a particular course. For example, the DFW rate for English 150 is comprised only of sections of English 150 and does not include other English courses.

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<sup>2</sup> After census date in September 2023, these figures will be adjusted to include the summer 2023 courses.

<sup>3</sup> The DFW numerator consists of the graded or pass/fail course enrollments whose outcomes were either a grade of D+, D, D-, or F or who received a no pass, unsatisfactory, no credit, or withdrew from the course. The DFW denominator consists of graded or pass/fail course enrollments whose outcome was recorded. This includes non-graded courses, audited courses, or course whose outcomes were not available (for example, still in progress, incomplete, or no grade recorded).

<sup>4</sup> The Big Ten Cluster included the University of Illinois, Indiana University, the University of Iowa, the University of Minnesota, Pennsylvania State University, Rutgers University-New Brunswick, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

In 2022-2023, the overall university average for first-generation students' DFW rates was 12.2% compared to 7.1% for non-first-generation students, reflecting an equity gap of 5.1%. The below table shows the percentage of DFW's earned by first generation and non-first-generation students for courses collectively rolled up to the subject level<sup>5</sup> that have an equity gap of 6.0% or higher.

Subject	First Gen DFW rate	Number	Not First Gen DFW rate	Number	Equity Gap
Accounting	17.8%	141/792	9.8%	306/3,110	8.0%
Agronomy	8.0%	2/25	1.5%	2/133	6.5%
Art History	29.2%	81/277	21.4%	173/810	7.9%
Biochemistry	15.5%	58/373	8.9%	119/1,339	6.7%
Biological Sciences	14.7%	180/1,227	8.6%	376/4,397	6.1%
Ceramics	16.7%	7/42	4.6%	6/131	12.1%
Chemistry	21.1%	451/2,134	11.8%	821/6,983	9.4%
Chemical Engineering	12.2%	14/115	3.5%	23/648	8.6%
Classics	14.9%	69/464	8.0%	110/1,380	6.9%
Communications	18.1%	137/758	9.5%	237/2,489	8.6%
Computer Science & Comp Engineering	15.9%	177/1,115	9.9%	374/3,789	6.0%
Construction Engineering	14.3%	26/182	6.9%	51/737	7.4%
Dance	7.5%	6/80	1.4%	4/282	6.1%
Design	12.4%	44/355	5.1%	45/877	7.3%
Economics	22.3%	244/1,095	11.6%	466/4,029	10.7%
Electrical & Comp Engineering	18.1%	57/315	11.4%	248/2,182	6.7%
English	12.7%	204/1,603	6.7%	326/4,888	6.1%
Entrepreneurship	10.4%	10/96	3.6%	12/338	6.9%
Environmental Studies	9.7%	7/72	2.0%	5/251	7.7%
Finance	13.0%	84/646	6.8%	204/3,005	6.2%
Forestry	16.5%	31/188	8.0%	38/476	8.5%
History	19.2%	156/811	10.0%	285/2,843	9.2%
Intensive English Program	25.0%	4/16	8.8%	9/102	16.2%
Journalism-General	19.9%	43/216	10.3%	71/688	9.6%
Life Sciences	19.4%	240/1,240	8.7%	291/3,327	10.6%
Mathematics	28.2%	612/2,170	16.2%	1,013/6,238	12.0%
Philosophy	20.8%	93/447	9.9%	133/1,344	10.9%
Photography	19.2%	5/26	6.0%	5/83	13.2%
Physics	19.7%	123/623	11.4%	259/2,276	8.4%
Russian	29.0%	9/31	9.5%	9/95	19.6%
Software Engineering	13.0%	14/108	5.1%	21/413	7.9%
Spanish	17.8%	104/583	9.6%	149/1,545	8.2%
Statistics	16.1%	83/516	9.9%	164/1,649	6.1%
Theatre	10.2%	48/472	3.6%	50/1,374	6.5%
Textiles, Manufacturing, & Fashion Design	12.6%	34/269	6.5%	47/723	6.1%

**Subject DFW rates and equity gap for 2022-2023 by first-generation and non-first-generation students**

The chart below consists of the 20 UNL courses with enrollments of more than 50 students that comprise the largest equity gaps between first generation and non-first-generation students based on DFW rates. These courses were pooled across sections from fall 2018 through spring 2023 in the fall and spring semesters.<sup>6</sup>

Subject	Course Number	Average Enrollment	DFW First-Gen	DFW Not First-Gen	Gap Mean
Mechanical Engineering	321	63.1	28.9%	10.6%	18.3%
Mechanical Engineering	200	77.3	30.1%	12.3%	17.8%
History	121	55.0	27.8%	10.0%	17.8%
Textiles, Manufacturing & Fashion Design	213	57.0	21.0%	3.8%	17.1%
Photography	161	56.3	22.7%	6.7%	15.9%
Classics	116	159.4	23.7%	8.0%	15.7%
Chemistry	261	57.8	27.1%	12.0%	15.1%
Music	165	57.1	36.8%	21.9%	14.9%
Chemistry	113	69.6	22.1%	7.3%	14.8%
Chemistry	109A	831.5	35.1%	20.6%	14.5%
Agricultural Economics	225	50.2	20.5%	6.3%	14.2%
Psychology	368	99.6	24.3%	10.2%	14.1%
Japanese	101	66.4	31.2%	17.1%	14.0%
History	208	51.9	31.1%	17.1%	13.9%
Biological Sciences	214	218.4	37.5%	23.6%	13.9%
Biological Sciences	101L	185.8	31.6%	17.9%	13.6%
Textiles, Manufacturing & Fashion Design	144	55.0	37.4%	23.9%	13.6%
Physics	211	253.6	33.5%	20.0%	13.5%
Mathematics	221	211.3	25.3%	11.9%	13.4%
Biological Sciences	101	186.9	39.6%	26.5%	13.1%

***Course DFW rates and gap mean for first-generation and non-first-generation students***

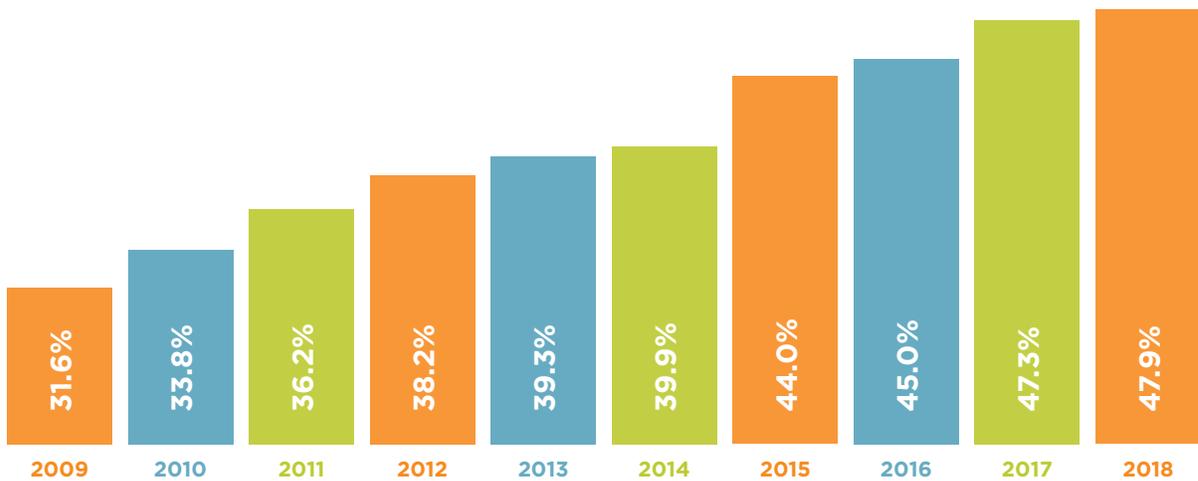
<sup>5</sup> Subjects with less than 100 students enrolled overall were excluded.

<sup>6</sup> This chart only includes courses that were taught for at least half of the semesters or more between fall 2018 through spring 2023. Cross-listed courses, if any, are labelled by the first alphabetical subject, not the lead or primary subject.

## FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATES

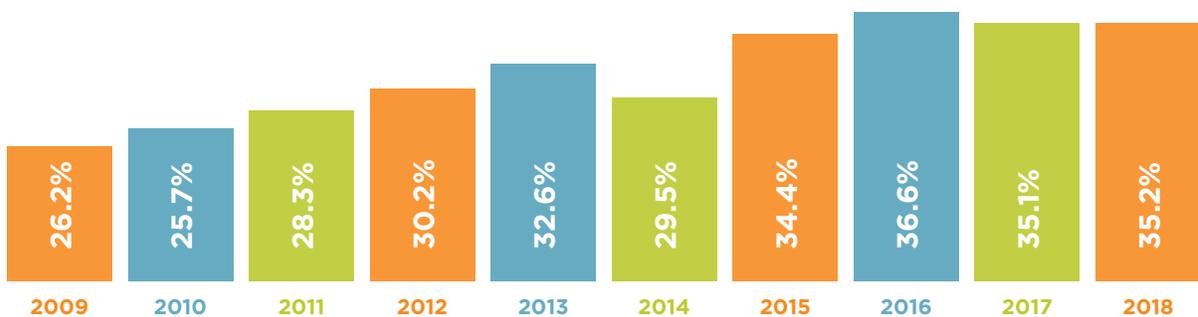
UNL's primary mission is to support students in their pursuit of educational degrees. Thus, it is especially critical to examine how the current culture is failing to ensure equitable rates of degree completion for its first-generation students. These students are particularly vulnerable because they often take out loans to pay for their education. When they do not complete their degrees, they and their families are doubly burdened with financial debt and lack of job prospects. With one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country, the state of Nebraska is already struggling to hire qualified workers to address workforce and community needs. Increasing degree completion of UNL's first-generation students is a significant imperative for the campus and the state.

Over the past decade, UNL has increased its overall four-year graduation rate each and every year.



*UNL-only four-year graduation rate for fall 2009-2018 cohorts (2013-2022 graduation years respectively)*

The ten-year trend in four-year graduation rates for UNL's first-generation students also shows significant gains, increasing from 26.2% for the fall 2009 cohort to 35.2% for the 2018 cohort.



*First-generation four-year graduation rates for 2009-2018 cohorts (2013-2022 graduation years respectively)*

The below table shows four-year graduation rates for first-generation students by college for the first-year cohorts of 2014-2018.

College/Unit	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources	46.2%	48.5%	56.0%	53.6%	49.6%
Architecture	26.9%	50.0%	46.4%	60.0%	42.9%
Arts and Sciences	29.8%	36.1%	34.6%	35.0%	36.7%
Business	32.6%	47.9%	43.6%	41.4%	40.4%
Education and Human Sciences	24.4%	33.9%	39.4%	32.1%	34.8%
Engineering	22.3%	26.4%	31.1%	35.0%	37.5%
Fine and Performing Arts	24.1%	35.9%	35.7%	39.5%	48.5%
Journalism and Mass Communications	39.5%	51.2%	45.0%	26.3%	45.5%
Explore Center	21.3%	22.8%	27.1%	24.4%	22.3%

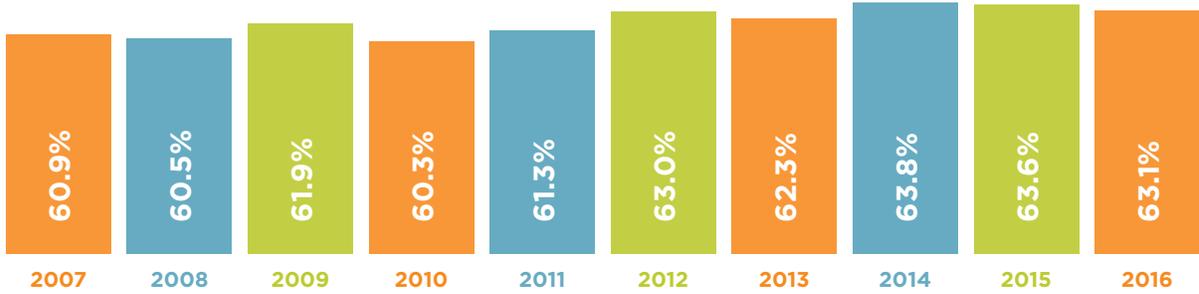
*First-generation four-year graduation rates by college for 2014-2018 cohorts (2018-2022 graduation years respectively)*



*First-generation graduate La'Rae Pickens-Bonebright with her sons Amarien and JJ.*

**SIX-YEAR GRADUATION RATES**

While increasing numbers of UNL students are graduating in four years, the overall percentage of students graduating within six years has increased by only 2.2% in the past decade. The chart below shows UNL-only six-year graduation rates from the 2007-2016 cohorts.



*UNL-only six-year graduation rates from 2007-2016 cohorts (2013-2022 graduation years respectively)*

Six-year graduation rates for UNL first-generation students also have remained relatively flat.



*First-generation six-year graduation rates from 2007-2016 cohorts (2013-2022 graduation years respectively)*

The below table shows the six-year graduation rates for first-generation students by college for the 2012-2016 cohorts.

College/Unit	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources	62.5%	59.6%	63.6%	61.0%	67.9%
Architecture	64.7%	66.7%	53.8%	65.4%	64.3%
Arts and Sciences	44.1%	49.6%	48.5%	57.3%	51.5%
Business	64.8%	62.2%	61.8%	65.0%	58.4%
Education and Human Sciences	57.7%	56.6%	52.6%	52.9%	54.9%
Engineering	60.4%	54.9%	46.6%	50.0%	52.9%
Fine and Performing Arts	54.5%	43.8%	55.2%	51.3%	53.6%
Journalism and Mass Communications	50.0%	76.0%	58.1%	63.4%	60.0%
Explore Center	50.5%	48.4%	50.2%	41.8%	42.0%

**Six-year graduation rates for first-generation students by college for 2012-2016 cohorts (2018-2022 graduation years respectively)**

The equity gap in graduation rates between first-generation and non-first-generation students has remained persistent. The below table shows the gap in four- and six-year graduation rates between first generation and non-first-generation students from the 2018 and 2016 cohorts who graduated in 2022.

	Number of 4-year graduates 2018 cohort	4-year graduation rate	Gap	Number of 6-year graduates 2016 cohort	6-year graduation rate	Gap
Non-First Generation	1,919	51.6%	19.1%	2,301	67.6%	15.3%
First Generation	383	32.5%		750	52.3%	

**Gap between four- and six-year graduation rates of first-generation and non-first-generation students for 2018 and 2016 cohorts who graduated in 2022**

**HUSKER STUDENT POWER SURVEY**

Since 2019, the Husker Student POWER survey has been administered during the fourth week of fall and spring semesters to all new first-year and transfer students. This survey consists of statements regarding academic, financial, social and emotional wellbeing. If a student’s response raises a concern, campus teams reach out by email, phone, and text to offer support and resources. The Husker Student POWER survey results have proven to be useful leading indicators for identifying first-year students who may be struggling with their transition to college.

In fall 2022, 3,033 students took the Husker Student POWER survey for an overall response rate of 57.6%. The below table shows that first-generation students have higher levels of concern for every survey statement compared to new students who are not first generation. The largest gap is represented in the statement regarding financial distress, with a 14.6% gap between first-generation and non-first-generation students.

Statement	Non-First-Gen	First-Gen	Gap
<b>Number of students</b>	<b>2170</b>	<b>863</b>	
I am struggling in one or more classes.	25.1%	29.7%	+4.6%
I am experiencing financial distress.	18.9%	33.5%	+14.6%
I want assistance in becoming involved in campus life.	18.1%	23.1%	+5.0%
I would like some support for my emotional wellbeing.	17.9%	23.5%	+5.6%
I have questions but I do not know who to ask for answers.	13.1%	17.8%	+4.7%
I have found a friend or a group of friends at UNL.	9.1%	13.4%	+4.3%
I have the course materials I need for all my classes.	7.1%	10.2%	+3.1%
Someone at the university cares about me.	6.9%	7.6%	+0.7%
I sometimes feel alone or isolated because of my racial, ethnic, or cultural identity.	3.9%	9.0%	+5.1%
I am having technological difficulties completing my coursework.	4.7%	7.1%	+2.4%
I am considering not returning to UNL next semester.	6.4%	4.9%	-1.5%
I sometimes feel alone or isolated because of my sexual orientation and/or gender identity.	4.5%	4.2%	-0.3%
I am attending all of my classes (in-person and/or remotely) regularly.	3.9%	3.0%	-0.9%

**Fall 2022 concerns raised in Husker Student POWER Survey by first-gen and non-first-gen students**

**GRADUATING SENIOR SURVEY**

Another survey used to solicit student feedback on their educational experiences is the graduating senior survey. This survey asks about students’ experiences with academic program guidance, advising, academic support, and career and skill preparation. Students take this survey the semester in which they file their intent to graduate. The below table shows the May 2023 graduating students’ responses by college regarding their overall university experience.

College	Number	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources	343	48.1%	42.3%	7.6%	2.0%
Architecture	87	36.8%	54.0%	8.0%	1.1%
Arts and Sciences	560	43.4%	45.2%	10.0%	1.4%
Business	537	49.9%	40.6%	7.4%	2.0%
Education and Human Sciences	391	47.6%	43.2%	7.7%	1.5%
Engineering	284	31.0%	55.3%	12.3%	1.4%
Fine and Performing Arts	89	38.2%	46.1%	14.6%	1.1%
Journalism and Mass Communications	126	55.6%	36.5%	6.3%	1.6%

*May 2023 graduating seniors’ responses to overall university experience by college*



*Students at photo booth during national first-generation student celebration day.*

The below table shows responses from the May 2023 graduating senior survey disaggregated by the 551 first-generation and the 1,929 non-first-generation graduating students who completed it.

Question		Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	
Overall experience	First Gen	41.4%	47.2%	9.8%	1.6%	
	Not First Gen	45.5%	43.9%	8.9%	1.8%	
Quality of academic advising	First Gen	37.7%	31.2%	21.8%	9.3%	
	Not First Gen	35.0%	35.5%	20.8%	8.7%	
Quality of academic support resources	First Gen	32.5%	47.9%	17.6%	2.0%	
	Not First Gen	30.4%	50.5%	16.8%	2.3%	
Quality of course instruction	First Gen	31.2%	54.1%	12.5%	2.2%	
	Not First Gen	30.1%	53.7%	14.0%	2.2%	
		<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree/Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Prepared me for future career or graduate school	First Gen	32.4%	47.3%	14.3%	4.7%	1.3%
	Not First Gen	38.3%	44.6%	11.6%	4.2%	1.3%
Provided me guidance on academic program & plans	First Gen	30.4%	47.5%	12.0%	7.8%	2.4%
	Not First Gen	33.2%	48.1%	11.2%	5.3%	2.2%

***May 2023 graduating senior survey results disaggregated by first-generation and non-first-generation students.***

UNL first-generation graduating students rated their experiences with advising, academic support resources, and quality of instruction slightly higher in the "Excellent" category than non-first-generation students, and slightly lower in the areas of academic and career guidance. First-generation students rated their overall university experience as lower in the "Excellent" category than non-first-generation students.



*New first-generation students get to know one another during orientation week.*



*Faculty and staff show their first-generation spirit at photo booth.*

### FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS' VOICES

Perhaps the most important data to attend to are the voices of UNL's first-generation students. The following excerpts are from current and recently graduated first-generation students reflecting on their UNL experiences and, in some cases, giving advice to other first-generation students on how to succeed. These students' voices amplify how the academic, social, financial, and wellbeing data represented throughout this report impact their experiences as first-generation students.

*"Coming into college I was incredibly confused. I have dealt with imposter syndrome quite often, and it took me awhile to truly feel at home at UNL. As a result of being First Gen, I felt insecure within the major I picked. I had no guidance, and I felt so pushed to pick a major that I chose too quickly and without a ton of consideration. I thought, 'Interior Design seems fun, let's do that!' but there were many times first semester where I looked back and thought 'I wish I would've come to college undecided.' Money has also been a big deal for me and my family. My dad was really pushing me to get a job first semester, and it took a lot of convincing that I did not have time to get a job before he stopped nagging me. I feel that my parents are sometimes harder to deal with than college actually is because they do not understand what I'm going through."*



*Students enjoy a First Generation Nebraska "share a meal" with faculty and staff.*

*"Being a first-generation college student has affected my college experience in a few ways. I think my biggest obstacle was not knowing how to study because I never had to in high school and my parents never completed higher education so they didn't have any advice or tips for me either. Additionally, being a first-gen student has impacted me by placing a stigma on my name. First-generation students often have the stigma surrounding them that they are not able to compete academically at a four-year university. This stigma others see in addition to my own imposter syndrome caused some problems during my first semester."*

*"Being a first-generation student affected me in a way that I wouldn't change because it made me who I am today. I had to learn everything by myself, the tips and tricks for college. At the same time, I made it harder for myself by not asking for help. It is the biggest mistake that I made coming into college."*

*"When I first came to UNL, I was nervous about the course load of college classes. Both of my parents dropped out of college before earning their degrees, and I was worried I wouldn't be able to keep up with my classes and would end up doing the same. Because of this, I decided to take my first semester to focus almost entirely on my studies. I didn't put much time into trying to get involved in activities/service organizations or find employment. Looking back, I regret making this choice because, although I was able to successfully stay on top of my classes and maintain good grades, I had trouble finding a sense of belonging."*

*"Personally, being a first-generation college student has affected my college experience as I was so afraid that I wouldn't figure out how things worked fast enough. I thought I would take a long time to adjust to the routine here, as it's something completely new to me. In the past, I've been familiar with everything I've encountered or at least had an idea of it, but with college, I had no idea what I was walking into."*

*"As a first-generation college student, I did not feel like I belonged on campus when I first got here. It felt like everyone else knew what they were doing while I was lucky just to make it through a week. The advice that I would give to another first-gen student would be to jump right in, even if it doesn't feel right. Try out everything and talk to everyone and you will find your place. Everyone here is trying to find themselves, and you belong here even when it doesn't feel like it."*

As these first-generation students' voices suggest, navigating the transition to the university can be especially challenging without guidance and support. Fortunately, several university programs and resources are specifically designed to support first-generation students' success. The Center for Academic Success and Transition offers First Husker, which provides an early move-in orientation, peer mentoring, networking, and a fall academic seminar specifically designed to build on the strengths and assets of first-year, first-generation students. UNL's federally funded TRIO/SSS program supports students who are income-qualified, first-generation, and/or have a documented disability with tutoring and academic support, community building and research opportunities. The Office of Academic Success and Intercultural Services also provides first-year academic support, social engagement, and leadership programs to meet the needs of historically underrepresented populations, including first-generation, low-income, DACA, and other students with diverse identities. And the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor supports First Generation Nebraska, an initiative designed to connect first-generation students with UNL faculty and staff who were first-generation college students themselves to help them make the most of their college experience. As Cordell, now a senior and president of the first-generation student organization, describes, these programs can play a critical difference:

*"As a First-Gen student, I was really nervous about starting college. I had so many questions about classes, financial aid, and getting involved on campus, and no one in my family could help me out. The First Husker 4-Day was an amazing crash course that helped answer the questions I had about college and made me feel comfortable enough to be able to ask for help from my peer mentors and coaches. I know that without the First Husker program my college experience would not be as fulfilling as it is now."*

Through the launch of First Scholars, UNL faculty and staff are collaboratively and collectively establishing vision and strategy for continuing to improve educational outcomes for our first-generation students. The data in this report points to numerous opportunities to do so, including enhancing first-generation students' sense of belonging and mattering on our campus, closing equity gaps in course performance, and increasing timely degree completion. Throughout the 2023-2024 academic year, UNL's First Scholars steering committee and working groups will be engaged in continuous improvement plan cycles to identify and address these and other actionable priorities and collaborate with other campus groups and stakeholders invested in the success of UNL's first generation students.

## **FIRST SCHOLARS STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

Ryan Caldwell, Associate Director, Institutional Effectiveness and Analytics

Lydia Coulson, Communications Specialist, Undergraduate Education and Student Success

Amy Goodburn, Senior Associate Vice Chancellor and Dean of Undergraduate Education (Co-Chair of First Scholars Steering Committee)

Jordan Foreman-Black, Director, Assessment and Learning Outcomes, Student Affairs

Steven Jara, NFS Deputy Director, co-chair of First Generation Nebraska

Ryan Lahne, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs (Co-Chair of First Scholars Steering Committee)

Jennifer PeekMease, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Inclusive Leadership and Learning

Cameron Woodard, Director, TRIO Programs



*UNL first-generation alumni who participated in First Husker as students and peer mentors: Jessica Van Buskirk, Andrew Burke-O'Kane, Jarrett Austin, and Madison Miller and CAST director Lori Romano*



Learn more about UNL's student retention initiatives at [go.unl.edu/fallreport](https://go.unl.edu/fallreport).

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