The Finish Line Project at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) is designed to ensure more first-generation college students (FGCS) access, persist, and complete postsecondary study through the implementation and investigation of multifaceted programs and supports. The project is funded by an over 3 million dollars grant awarded through the U.S. Department of Education’s competitive program called The First in the World. This program provides grants to higher education institutions to spur the development of innovations that improve educational outcomes and make college more affordable for students and families, and to develop an evidence base of effective practices.

On average, 3,000 undergraduate First-Generation College Students (FGCS) enroll in UNC-CH each year. FGCS contribute to the great cultural and intellectual life of our vibrant and diverse undergraduate community. The Finish Line Project is dedicated to making UNC-CH a place where FGCS thrive. The Finish Line Project will serve as a model to be replicated at other institutions of higher education.

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RESEARCH AND PRACTICE TO HELP FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS SUCCEED

INITIATIVES TO HELP FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

1 Connect And Communicate With First-Generation Students

- SELF-ASSESSMENTS: Strengths-based assessments to enhance college knowledge and expectations.

- COMMUNITY BUILDING: Cohort models to foster communication and share common experiences among underrepresented males.

- PARTNERSHIPS: Partner with American Indian tribes to help support Native American students attending UNC.

- NEW PROGRAMS: Develop programs and support to assist rural student access and transition to college.

2 Enhance Curriculum Through Active Learning

- TRANSITION COURSES: Offer multiple courses to help students navigate critical transitions.

- GATEWAY COURSES: Review and redesign gateway STEM courses.

- LEARNING COMMUNITIES: Create faculty learning communities to support active learning.

- COMMUNITY COLLEGES: Map STEM curriculum on campus and at local community college.

3 Advise And Support First-Generation Students

- COORDINATION: Coordinate efforts for Carolina Firsts across campus.

- ADVISING: Offer academic advising specifically to meet the needs of first-generation college students.

- COACHING: Train academic coaches to support any undergraduates.

THE CAROLINA FIRSTS EXPERIENCE

- Efforts begin prior to enrollment to build college knowledge, set helpful expectations, and build resources for success.

- Students connect with supportive communities of students with similar backgrounds and experiences.

- Students enroll in newly designed transition and gateway courses to aid their progress in STEM and other fields of study.

- Faculty, advisors, and academic coaches help students navigate the research university.

- Students fulfill degree completion requirements and move on to graduate school and career opportunities.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- MEASURE
  - Academic and psychosocial factors among FGCS
  - College knowledge and expectations
  - Changes in student learning patterns, attitudes, and behaviors
  - The acquisition of knowledge or skills as a result of interventions
  - Changes in faculty instructional techniques, attitudes, and behaviors

- DESCRIBE
  - Academic success among FGCS overall and by subgroups
  - Micro-aggressions and micro-affirmations among FGCS
  - Pathways to degree completion in the sciences
  - Faculty motives for course redesign
  - Perspectives and behaviors among FGCS regarding applying to graduate school

- ASSESS
  - Strategies for enhancing college knowledge and expectations
  - Models for academic coaching
  - Strategies for promoting self-regulated learning
  - Strategies for course redesign