Common Feelings

If you are a first-generation college student, you should first know that you are not alone. Many of the feelings you experience are normal and to be expected. First-generation students often experience a range of feelings about being the first in their family to attend and complete college. What are some common feelings?

**Excitement and Anxiety** – Many students are thrilled but also somewhat frightened about being away from home at college, living on their own, and being the first in the family to attend college. These students may ask themselves, “Am I cut out to be a college student?” despite their stellar academic performance in high school.

**Responsibility** – Many first-generation students have to help pay for their education, perhaps more so than students of higher socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition to financial responsibility, these students may be pressured by family and friends to return home often, and may receive mixed messages about their changing identities (e.g., wanting to succeed, but not wanting to be different from the rest of the family or their peers).

**Pride** – These students often feel an overwhelming sense of pride about being the first in their families to attend and complete college. A college degree can provide many opportunities. This is an important accomplishment!

**Guilt** – In addition to pride, many first-generation students may feel guilt about having the opportunity to attend college while others in the family did not have that opportunity. These students may wonder if it is fair for them to be at school while their parents struggle financially at home. They may feel the need to go home to support their families. First-generation students may also feel guilty about their academic performance if it is not as good as they or their families would like.

**Embarrassment and Shame** – These students may feel embarrassment over their socioeconomic status or the level of education in their family. First-generation students may try to act like their family is more highly educated or financially advantaged than they really are. There may be embarrassment around being different from their peers at college, particularly if their peers have a long lineage of family members attending college or if they seem to know the ‘lingo’ when a first-generation student may not.

**Confusion** - First-generation students may feel ‘out of the loop’ when it comes to college processes and procedures such as application, graduation, job or graduate school searches, etc. They may not be aware of the resources available to them or of options available to them after graduation.