

FIRST IN FLIGHT *Spring* 2026 IN REVIEW



I Am First Gen

@wtccpathways



PATHWAYS SUCCESS SCHOLARS

WHAT IS **FIRST IN FLIGHT?**



FIRST IN FLIGHT (FIF) helps students navigate the hidden curriculum of higher education, the unwritten expectations and insider knowledge often assumed but rarely taught.

THIS INCLUDES:

- Communicating with professors
- Utilizing office hours and campus resources
- Understanding academic policies
- Building networks and planning for careers or transfer

Through connections with trained faculty, staff, alumni, or peer mentors, First In Flight fosters confidence, clarity and community.

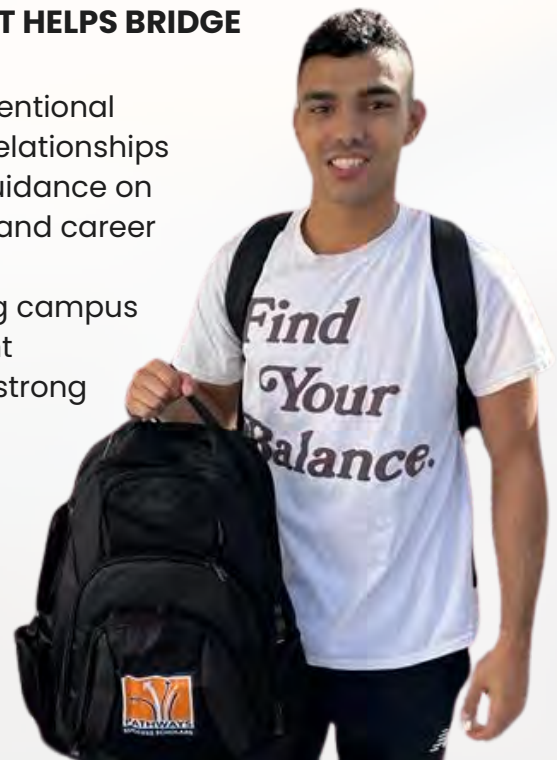
First-generation students often face unique challenges in navigating college systems.

FIRST IN FLIGHT HELPS BRIDGE THAT GAP BY:

- Creating intentional mentoring relationships
- Providing guidance on academics and career planning
- Encouraging campus engagement
- Fostering a strong sense of belonging

THE RESULT:

Students who feel supported, informed, and empowered to thrive.



WHY IT IT MATTERS

- About **29%** of community college students are parents.
- Nearly **70%** work while enrolled.
- Many attend part-time while balancing family responsibilities

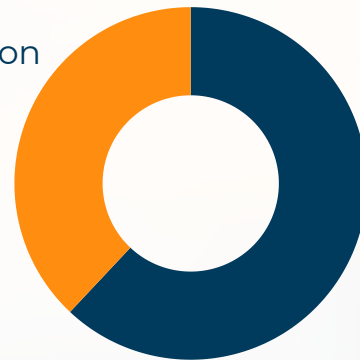


"While raising a family, you never stopped pursuing your dreams. That's a legacy worth celebrating."



Undergrad Students by Generation Status

First-Generation
38%



Continuing-
Generation
62%

National Center for
Education Statistics, 2025

- **38%** of undergraduate students are first-generation.
- **62%** are continuing-generation students.

"More than one-third of today's college students are the first in their families to pursue higher education."



WE ARE **FIRST GEN**



#GRAD



CONGRATULATIONS SPRING 2026 FIRST-GENERATION GRADUATES!

Your resilience, determination, and achievements inspire those who follow in your footsteps. We proudly celebrate this milestone and encourage you to showcase your accomplishment by wearing your first-gen honor cord.



**"You are not
behind; you are
the beginning of
something
powerful"**

FIRST-GEN GRADS: CLASS OF 2026–27:

Watch for upcoming information about First-Generation graduation cords!

PEER

MENTOR OUTREACH

Peer mentors played a vital role this semester by engaging students through intentional outreach, check-ins, and campus connections.

Their support helped first-gen students stay engaged, navigate challenges, and build a stronger sense of belonging within the Pathways community.



GET INVOLVED ↓



HOW CONNECTING WITH A PATHWAYS PEER MENTOR HELPS

- Increased confidence and self-esteem
- Ease of navigating campus, resources and programs
- Enhanced self-motivation and goal setting
- Gain fresh perspective and insight
- Leadership development
- Skill development

FOR STUDENTS:

- Connect with First In Flight through the Pathways Success Scholars webpage
- Get matched with a mentor who understands the first-gen experience
- Participate in mentoring sessions, workshops, and community events
- Build skills in goal-setting, self-advocacy, and career exploration

FOR FACULTY & STAFF:

- Learn more about our upcoming Champion Network and ways to serve as a mentor
- Stay tuned for professional learning opportunities



FIRST-GEN SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

MEET MADELINE GANDIAGA

Madeline is a proud first-generation college student and a fifth-semester radiography student at Wake Technical Community College. As she prepares to transfer to a university to pursue her bachelor's degree, she remains focused on her goal of becoming a licensed radiologic technologist.

Madeline's journey has been shaped by resilience and determination. After completing her prerequisites, she was waitlisted for the highly competitive radiography program—a moment that left her feeling discouraged and uncertain about her path. However, inspired by stories of perseverance, she found the motivation to try again. Reapplying to the program became a turning point, reinforcing her belief that setbacks can lead to new opportunities.

Her drive is deeply rooted in the support of her family. As the first in her family to pursue higher education, Madeline is motivated by her parents, who have always encouraged her to step outside of her comfort zone and reach for more, even without having had the same opportunities themselves. Their encouragement continues to fuel her ambition and commitment to succeed.

Today, Madeline is grateful for the path she chose to continue and the community she has found along the way. With her strong work ethic, passion for healthcare, and dedication to growth, she looks forward to the next chapter of her academic and professional journey.



Never underestimate the power you have to take your life in a new direction.

— Madeline Gandiaga



REALITY OF MONEY



Through the Reality of Money simulation with the State Employees Credit Union, students explored real-world financial decision-making by navigating career choices, debt, family obligations, budgeting, and other everyday responsibilities.



FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT SERIES

This spring, our Financial Empowerment Series equipped first-generation students with practical tools for managing money, understanding financial aid, and preparing for life after graduation.

Sessions included guidance on budgeting, Wake Tech Foundation Scholarship application information, and long-term financial planning. Students left feeling more confident and informed in their financial decision-making.



SPRING 2026

EVENTS



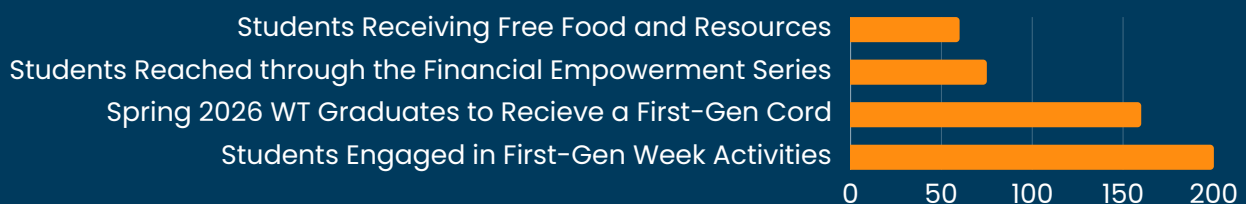
FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

This semester, we connected with students through Pop-Up Resource Tables, providing information about campus resources and support services. Our Financial Empowerment Series equipped students with valuable tools for budgeting, financial

planning, and building financial confidence. We also had the honor of celebrating our graduating first-generation students by distributing First-Generation Honor Cords, recognizing their hard work, perseverance, and achievements.



FIRST-GEN STUDENT ENGAGEMENT



FIRST-GEN ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

MEET YOUNGGRAN PHILLIPS

Program/Major: Business Administration – Marketing
Wake Tech Graduation Year: 2026

For Younggran Phillips, being a first-generation college student is about more than earning a degree, it's about setting an example for her teenage son. She believes that age is just a number and that it is never too late to return to the classroom, pursue a new career path, and invest in your future. Through her journey, she hopes to demonstrate the value of perseverance, determination, and lifelong learning. Like many students, Younggran faced challenges along the way. One of the biggest was finding the right academic path.

After participating in a year-long mentorship program through Career Services, she explored different interests before discovering her passion for social media marketing and coding. The experience helped her gain clarity about her goals and the career she wants to pursue.

Balancing college with personal responsibilities also required resilience. As a parent of a child with special needs, Younggran often had to coordinate coursework around therapy sessions and medical appointments. She credits Wake Tech's flexible learning options for helping her successfully manage both her education and family commitments.

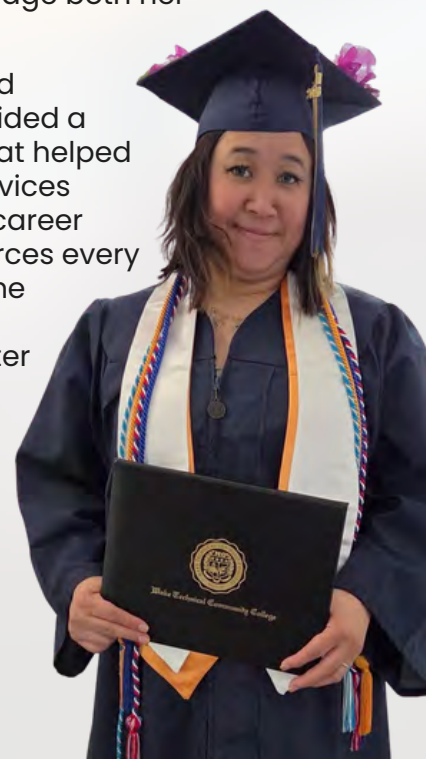
Younggran says Wake Tech has provided more than just an education; it has provided a roadmap for her future. From courses that helped define her career direction to Career Services support with resume development and career planning, she has found valuable resources every step of the way. She is also grateful for the opportunity to use her military benefits, which have helped make this next chapter of her life possible.

Her advice to other first-generation students is simple: ask questions. No matter how small or specific a question may seem, there are people who want to help. She encourages students to take advantage of available resources, seek support when needed, and remember that they do not have to navigate their college journey alone.



I'm living proof that age is just a number and that it's never too late to return to the classroom and pursue a new career path.

— Younggran Phillips



TIPS FROM YOUR FIF

SPRING 2026 PEER MENTORS



SANAI

McCoey

Advice for Students:
Write down your goals to remind yourself of what you're working toward. Use a planner to track deadlines and organize your schedule; having a plan can make everything feel more manageable.

- Sanai



ALAN

Morales-Lopez

Advice for Students: Do not hesitate to reach out for some help, as you should always take care of your mental health. From personal experience, what worked for me when I was overwhelmed is writing down all my thoughts and responsibilities and prioritizing what needed to be done in order to stay organized.

-Alan



LAURA

Orellana-Machuca

Advice for Students: Take things one step at a time and remember that progress is built in small, consistent steps. You don't have to have everything figured out right now. Ask for help, use your resources, and give yourself grace. You belong here, even on the days you doubt it.

-Laura



Pathwaysmentoring@waketech.edu



Wake Technical Community College - Across Campuses

STAY CONNECTED

Want to stay up to date with First In Flight events, student highlights, resources, and opportunities? Follow us on social media! Don't miss out on what's happening in the First In Flight community, join us online and be part of the conversation.

SPRING 2026 SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

5.4K

Content Views

1.6K

Accounts Reached

300+

Profile Visits



**WTCC FIRST IN FLIGHT
FACEBOOK**



@WTCCPATHWAYS



FIRST-GEN SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT: Share Your Story

We want to celebrate YOU!
The First-Gen Spotlight highlights the journeys, achievements, and voices of our amazing first-generation students.

FIRST-GEN ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: Share Your Story

We're looking for first-generation Wake Tech alumni to share their journey from college to career! Your story can inspire current students and celebrate the impact of the first-gen community.



pathways.waketech.edu



Interested in being featured?
Scan the QR code below to submit your spotlight form!

<https://linktr.ee/wtccpathways>

