

**College Trailblazers**

Are you the first in your family to attend a 4 year college?   
Did you know that there is an increasingly visible movement to advocate for students who are among the first in their family to attend and graduate from college?

There is even a hashtag devoted to supporting College Trailblazers - [#firstgen](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23firstgen&src=typd).  
There is also a documentary on the topic - [First Generation](http://www.firstgenerationfilm.com/). <http://www.firstgenerationfilm.com/>

So who are Loyola Academy’s College Trailblazers, or first generation college students?  
First Generation college students are those students whose parents did not graduate from a four year institution. Since the college admission process seems to grow more complex and challenging every year, it is important to clearly identify these students, whose parents did not graduate from a four year institution in the Unites States. When a student is the first in their family to apply to college, certain tasks that are necessary to the process become overwhelming, especially without parents who have been through it before.

Which is why we need to expand the definition beyond simply "students whose parents didn't attend college" to include:

* Students whose parents didn't finish college.
* Students whose "parents" may have attended or finished college, but are being raised by family members who didn't attend, or who even so far as completed college, but well over 40 years ago when the process was entirely different from how it works now.
* Students who are under the care of institutional systems, and therefore whose adult supervision is often too inconsistent to give daily support and guidance throughout the process, not to mention the added challenge of needing to defer to bureaucracy when having forms co-signed and paying for things like transportation and college visits.
* Students whose parents may have attended college, but did so in other countries, where the admissions process is entirely different - some international college admissions processes are as simple as using one test score to dictate whether - and where - a student attends college. The American system is so nuanced that it is often overwhelming to parents who emigrated to the United States.

So what do all of these College Trailblazers have in common? Drive. Determination. Tenacity. Pride. School counselors, college counselors and admissions committees are there to advocate for our College Trailblazers. These groups of professionals understand the obstacles facing these students, and keep looking for ways to support them through the process.  
  
So if you are a College Trailblazer or first generation student (by any definition), the first and most critical thing to do is to identify yourself accordingly. Meet with your school counselor or college counselor and discuss the challenges you face. When you interact with admissions counselors on college visits or information sessions at school, ask them what their college does to support first generation college students. Find ways on your application and essay to remind them of how being first generation shapes both your dreams and your experiences chasing those dreams.  
  
Then, follow these steps to college attendance, in their simplest form:

* Do your best in high school classes that suit both your interests and skills.
* Attend the Loyola Academy First to College Program.
* Study for the ACT and/or SAT. Register before the deadline in spring of junior year.
* Visit colleges in sophomore year to get a sense of what you like and dislike about college campuses, then meet with your school counselor to process those priorities.
* Meet with your college counselor during junior year to evaluate your transcript and make a plan for visiting college campuses that meet your priorities and academic needs.
* Prepare your essay during the summer prior to senior year.
* Apply to 6-8 colleges that you and your college counselor agree are a good fit for your interests and needs.
* Ensure that your applications (including high school transcript, letters of recommendation, and SAT/ACT scores) arrive to the colleges to which you are applying arrive by the stated deadlines.
* In December, request your PIN from [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov) and do the same with whichever parent you have lived with for the majority of that calendar year.
* In January, complete the FAFSA at [www.fafsa.gov](http://www.fafsa.gov/) using your income and the income of the parent who requested their PIN as early in January as possible.
* Aid letters should go out by the end of March, and commit to the college of your choice by May 1 by sending your deposit.
* Perhaps one of the greatest challenges through all this is the misconception that you are alone. Once you own your #firstgen status, you can begin to identify and associate with others who share your experience. Then, it's just a matter of finding mentors and peers who support you.
* Tips for First Generation College Students: <http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/2011/12/28/tips-for-first-generation-college-students>