

Examining the Intersectional Student Veteran and First- generation Identities

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The Center for First-generation Student Success is a key initiative of NASPA and a joint initiative with The Suder Foundation, a family operating foundation based in Plano, TX.



THE SUDER FOUNDATION

The Suder Foundation was founded from [Eric and Deborah Suders](#)' vision to design an innovative program that would dramatically increase the graduation rates of first-generation college students—those who are first in their family to attend college. For several years prior to starting the foundation, the Suders endowed scholarships at The University of Texas at Austin (UT) and West Virginia University (WVU) in order to help students with middle-range academic credentials and financial need who wanted to go to college but couldn't afford it. They naively thought that financial assistance alone would assure the students' success. They quickly learned this was not the case.

[LEARN MORE](#)

VISION

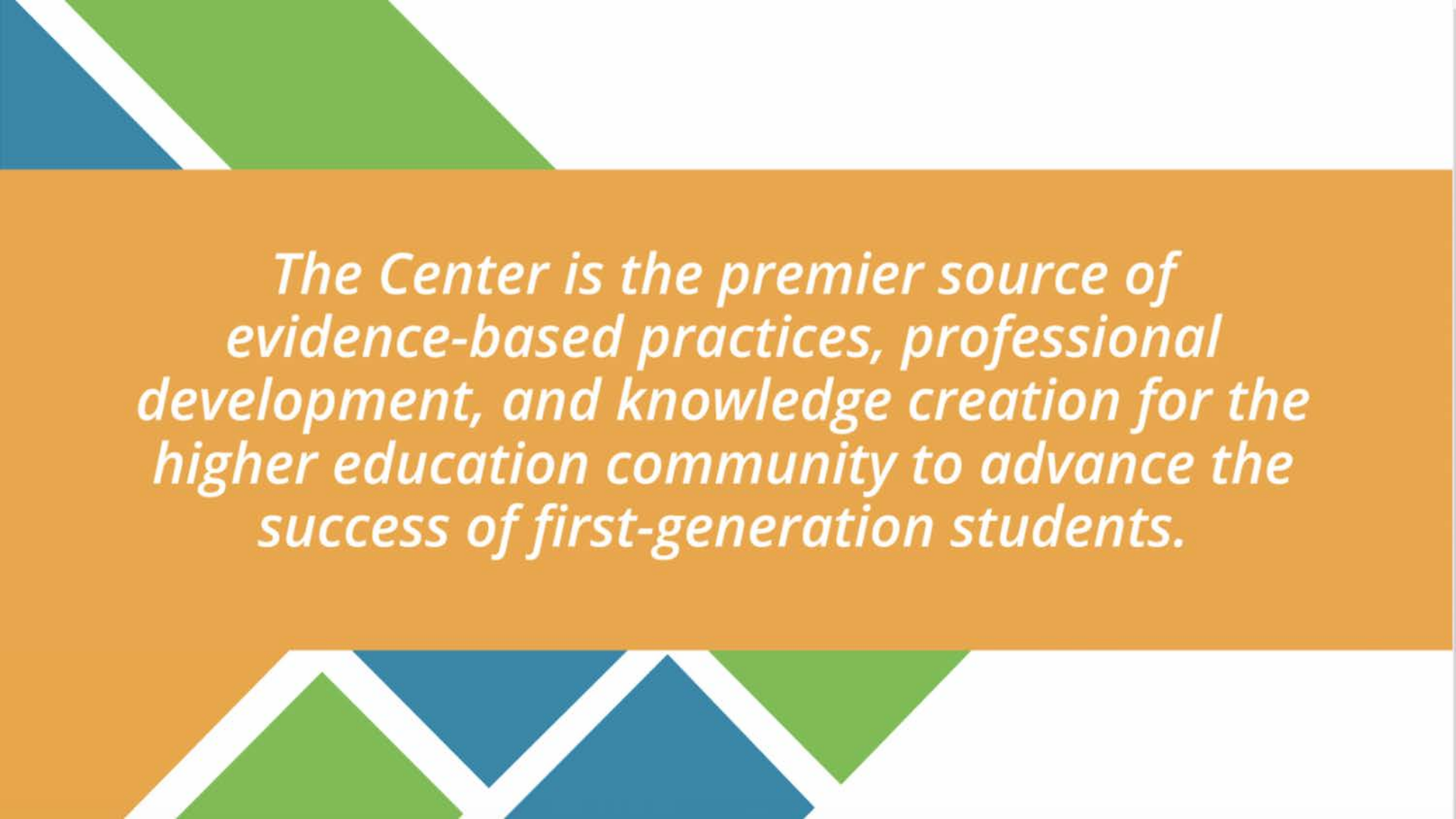
Driving higher education innovation and advocacy for first-generation student success.



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The Center is the premier source of evidence-based practices, professional development, and knowledge creation for the higher education community to advance the success of first-generation students.

Center Strategic Priorities

Connect and Recognize



Knowledge Creation & Evidence-based Practices

Innovative & Scalable Solutions



Thought Leadership & Advocacy

Our #firstgen Team



Sarah E. Whitley, Ph.D.
Senior Director



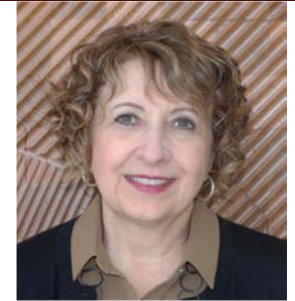
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Director, First-generation
Advocacy & Initiatives

Early 2020

**Assistant Director,
First Scholars
Initiatives**

Early 2020

**Assistant Director,
First Scholars
Initiatives**

Early 2020

**Center
Program Assistant
(DC)**



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**FIRST-GENERATION
STUDENT SUCCESS:**

A LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS OF
PROGRAMS AND SERVICES
AT FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Sarah E. Whitley, Ph.D., Grace Benson, Alexis Wesaw



*Download the free
executive summary, full
report, and resources from
bit.ly/Center4yrLandscape*



The Goal of the Landscape Study

Understand...

- how institutions are currently serving first-generation students
- what challenges they encounter in providing the most effective support
- how first-generation students perceive their institutional experience.

These findings shape the Center's ability to provide the most value driving innovation and advocacy for the success of first-generation students.

We also uncovered...

a deeply impassioned community of first-generation practitioners and advocates focused on instigating systemic change across their institutions to become more student-centric and data-informed.



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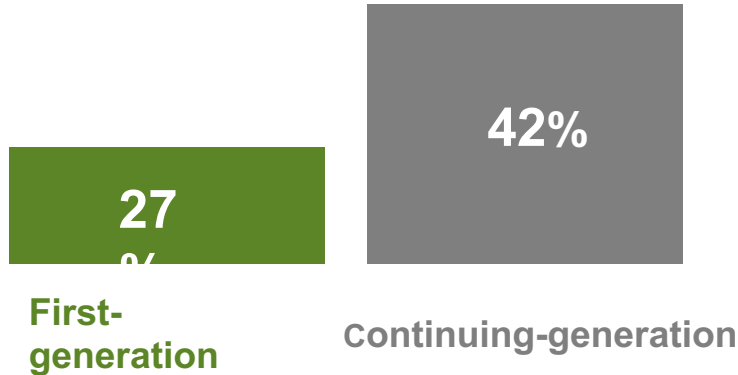
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Context and Methodology

33%

of currently enrolled undergraduates are first-generation

U.S. Department of Education, 2014



Degree Attainment in 4 years

Higher Education Research Institute, 2011; 2018



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Methodology

NASPA partnered with Entangled Solutions to achieve these goals through a two-phase research approach:



Phase 1

Interviews with **77 faculty, administrators, and leaders** knowledgeable on first-generation approaches

- Representing **45 institutions**

Interviews with **15 leaders** at 12 student success nonprofits

Interviews with **40 first-generation students** through focus groups at 8 institutions.



Phase 2

Nationwide survey of 371 total faculty, administrators, and thought leaders across 273 institutions

- 54% public and 46% private 4-year institutions
- Working across student affairs (47%), academic affairs (25%), student success (15%), enrollment management (7%), and diversity and inclusion (6%)

82%

of institutions surveyed offer programs and/or services that specifically support first-generation students*

“We are socialized into the complexity of higher education institutions, but an audit into internal processes can reveal many potential improvements to break down barriers for first-generation students.”

Leslie Pendleton, Senior Director, Machen Florida Opportunity Scholars Program,
University of Florida



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The First-generation Identity

The First- generation Identity



Defining to align, design, and
measure



Understanding, to serve students better



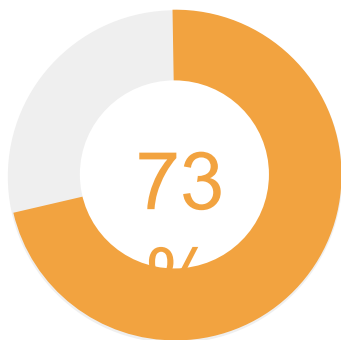
Considering intersectionality



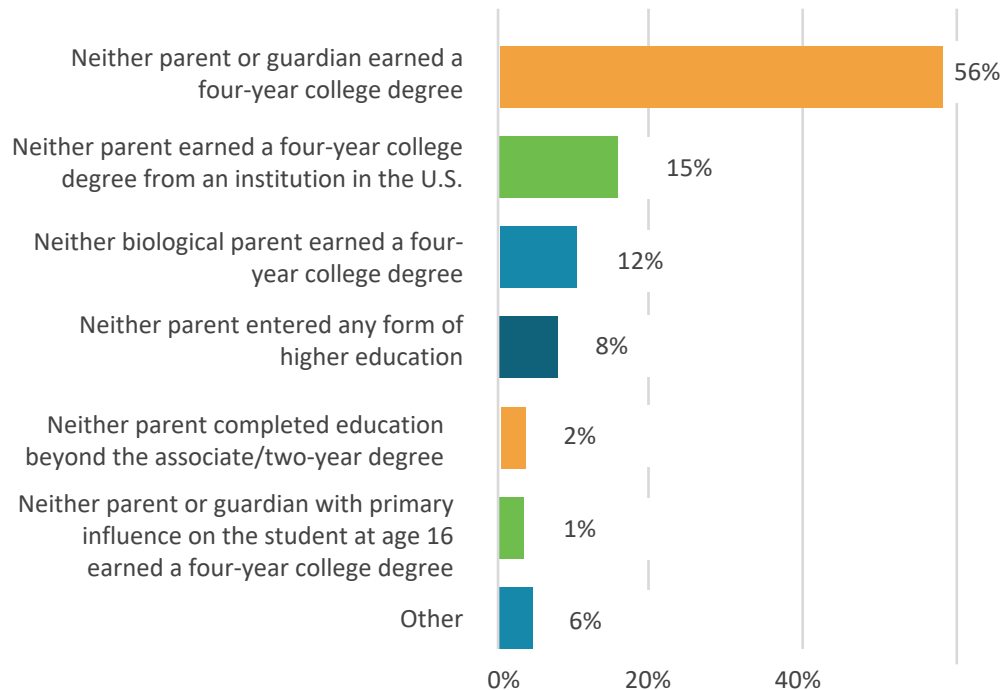
Shifting to an asset-based lens

Defining First-generation

Which most closely aligns with your institutional definition of first-generation college student?



Percentage of institutions with a formal definition of first-generation



Understanding What it Means for Students

“I have a moral responsibility that’s fallen upon me especially since I am the only child. I don’t have any other options of someone else to lean on. It falls on me. First-generation means I have to get it done.”

Anna, first-year, first-generation student,
University of Texas, Arlington

“I think when I realized I was first-gen was when I came and I moved in, in the fall, by myself. And everybody during move-in day was with their parents, and all of my suitemates had people, had carloads of stuff, and I had a suitcase”

Molly, first-year, first-generation student, Cornell
University

Intersectionality - or “First-gen Plus”

Students may be

- first-generation
- first-generation + minority
- first-generation + LGBTQI
- first-generation + low-income...

A driving factor for where support programs reside on a campus, but assumptions can lead to gaps and misconceptions

Diversity of identities within “first-generation” is a mobilizing force across institutions

- Faculty and staff who were first-generation themselves are highly engaged.
- The broad representation of the first-generation identity can serve as a powerful catalyst for greater institutional change.

Shifting from a Deficit to Asset-Based Lens

“We need to help first-generation students understand the assets they bring to the academy, their job, and society so that they can begin to see that being an outsider is an asset”

William Durden, President Emeritus, Dickinson College

- The challenges first-generation students face are too often perceived as shortcomings of the students themselves
- Programs are shifting from “shortcomings” interventions to celebrating and enhancing the unique assets of first-generation students
- Institutional culture shift - contributing to a feeling of belonging and inclusion

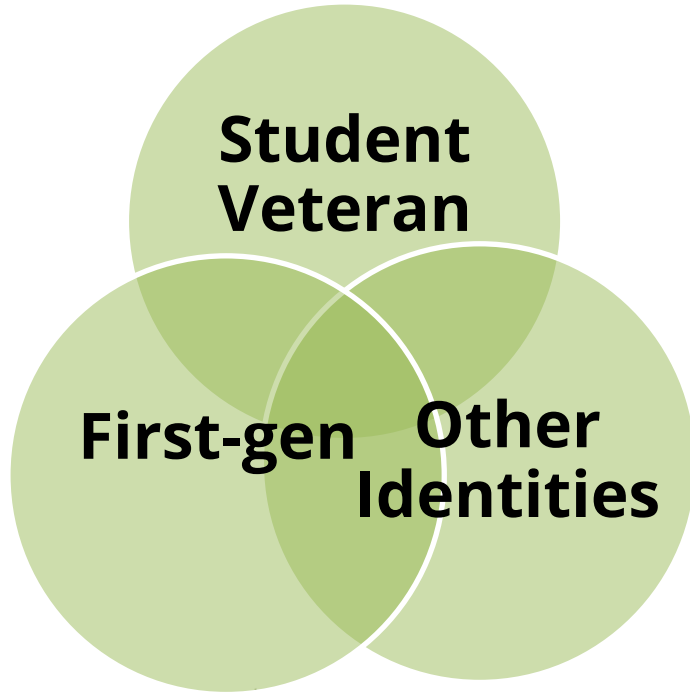


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"Intersectionality Theory"



College-students come to universities and colleges with multiple **intersecting** identities (Shields, 2008).

Percentage of Undergraduates in U.S.

**Student
Veterans**

5%

Ithaca S+R, 2019

**First-generation
College Students**

33%

U.S. Department of Education, 2014



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Representation of First-generation Student Veterans in Higher Education

Student veterans are more likely to be **first-generation** than their non-veteran peers

>60%

*National Survey of **Student** Engagement [NSSE]*



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Parallel Characteristics

STUDENT VETERANS

- Hidden Identity
- Unfamiliar with College Culture
- Unfamiliar with Student Role
- Challenges in Transition

FIRST-GEN STUDENTS

- Hidden Identity
- Unfamiliar with College Culture
- Unfamiliar with Student Role
- Challenges in Transition

Parallel Characteristics

STUDENT VETERANS

- Higher representation of Non-traditional Age
- Student of Color
- Low-income
- Working Full- or Part-time

FIRST-GEN STUDENTS

- Higher representation of Non-traditional Age
- Student of Color
- Low-income
- Working Full- or Part-time

Parallel Characteristics

STUDENT VETERANS

- Less Likely to Access Resources
- Desire for Structure

FIRST-GEN STUDENTS

- Less Likely to Access Resources
- Desire for Structure



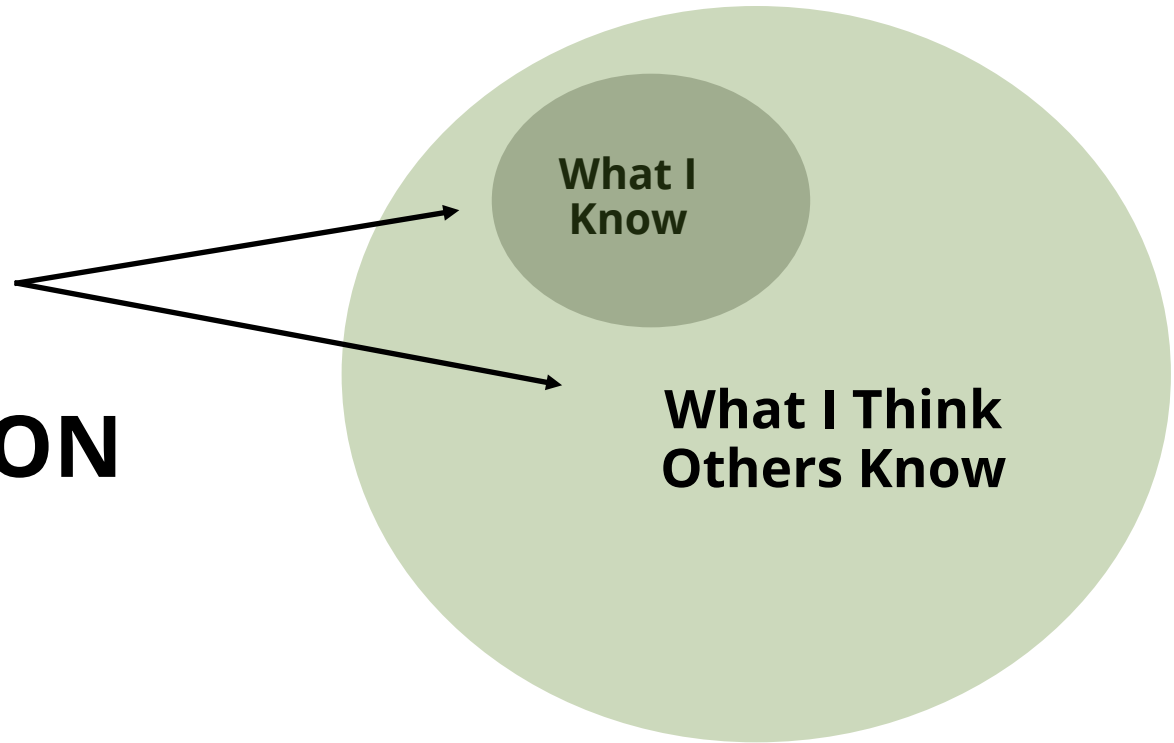
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Parallel Experiences: First-gen Students and Student Veterans

IMPOSTER PHENOMENON



Themes: First-generation Student Veterans



Community



Guidance



Academic
Success
Strategies



Connections

Desire for Community



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Understanding What it Means for First-gen Student Veterans

“Being a first-generation student veteran was challenging because we don’t necessarily identify with many of our peers. We are often older than them, and as vets we tend to keep to ourselves. As undergraduates, the veterans program on campus helped us connect with other vets and hold each other accountable academically. You meet people who share similar views and help each other navigate through the college experience.”

Jorge Hernandez, Ph.D.* (Army)
First-generation Student Veteran
Graduate Student
University of Illinois at Chicago

Understanding What it Means for First-gen Student Veterans

“I feel like the whole community is involved in my goals and committed to my success.”

Joseph (Army) First-generation Student Veteran
Graduate Student
North Central College

“I can honestly say the community here has always been great. I was initially worried about how I would fit in - with me being a veteran and having been out of school for years - but due to the small town atmosphere this campus has, I feel like I’ve always been here.”

Paul (USMC) First-generation Student Veteran
Undergraduate Student, North Central College

Desire for Guidance



- Specialized Advising
- One-on-one mentoring
- Identifying & Translating Strengths gained during the military
- Veteran Success Team

Understanding What it Means for First-gen Student Veterans

I came to NC thinking I would feel isolated in being first-gen and military-affiliated. It was reassuring to learn that there was a Student Veterans Alliance and a first-gen program. Because of these organizations, I feel connected to - and supported by - others in the NC community. Without these organizations, I may not have been able to meet and form connections with other students and faculty that are military affiliated and/or first-gen.

TaCoya H (Army reservist/ROTC cadet)
First-gen Student Veteran

Desire for Academic Success Strategies



- Time Management
- Info in VRC and Welcome Folder
 - The Writing Center
 - The Speaking Center
 - Tutoring
- University Studies for Student Veterans USSV



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Understanding What it Means for First-gen Student Veterans

The guidance provided by the veteran community and first-gen community helped guide me through the chaos of college. I needed to learn how to adjust to civilian life and to be a successful as a college student because my parents and brothers didn't go to college.

Justin S (Army)

First-gen Student Veteran

North Central College

Desire for Connections



Matthew Burden
Vice President of Information and Technology, Student Veteran Mentor and U.S. Army Veteran

[VIEW PROFILE](#)



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Understanding What it Means for First-gen Student Veterans

The staff in the Veteran & Military Student Services provided multiple networking opportunities that helped me tremendously as graduation approached..

Andrew (Air Force) First-generation Student Veteran
Graduate Student
North Central College

“I feel like the whole community is involved in my goals and committed to my success.”

Joseph (Army) First-generation Student Veteran
Graduate Student
North Central College

Questions/Comments/Discussion

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Resources

- [NASPA Veterans Knowledge Community](#)
- [Student Veterans of America](#)
- [Post-Secondary National Policy Institute](#)
- [VA Campus Toolkit](#)
- [National Veteran Education Success Tracker \(NVEST of SVA\)](#)
- [Institute for Veterans and Military Families](#)



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