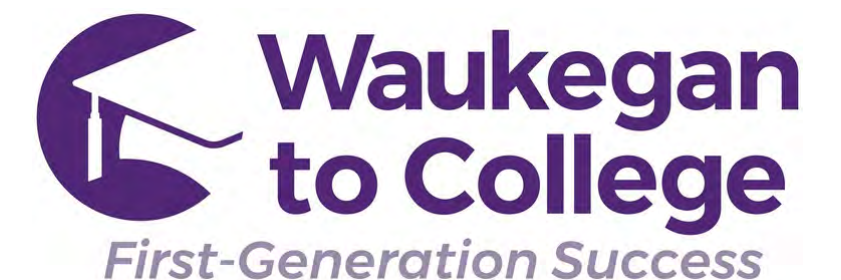# Two Steps Ahead:
Gamifying First-Year College Success

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Gamifying
First-Year College Success

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Our Mission

At Waukegan to College, our mission is to create brighter futures for first-generation students, their families, and their community by preparing students to enroll in and graduate from a four-year college or university.

Outcomes and Expectations

- Participants will expand their understanding of the nuanced experiences of first-generation college students
- Participants will explore the benefits of gamifying key lessons around college persistence for students
- Participants will embrace the importance of listening to first-generation college students' experiences to best support them

What do you hope to get from our time together?

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Ground Rules

- Respect others' opinions, experiences, and voices – be open-minded
- Challenge the thought, not the person
- Be mindful of how much you talk; allow others the chance to interact, too
- Ask questions when needed!
- Smile and have fun – *"No laughing, no learning…." Dr. Jane Vella*

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Overview

- Make the Connection

- Evidence-based Information

- Introduce *Two Steps Ahead*
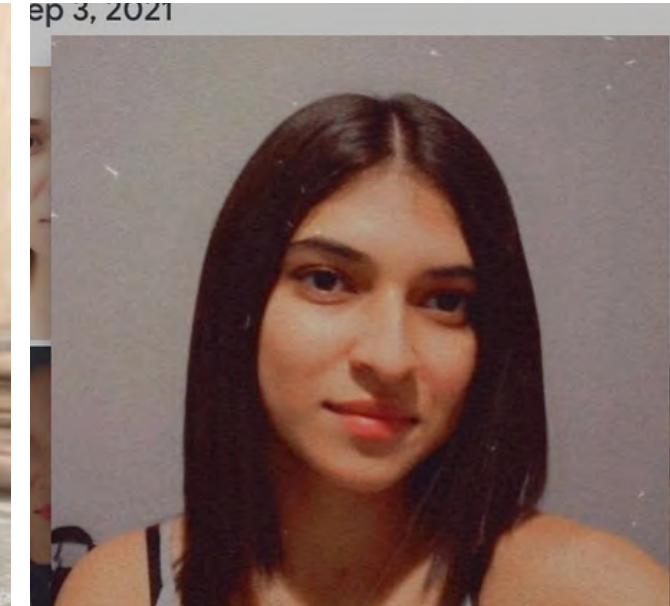
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Jasmine

is a first-year student at Vanderbilt. She is the first in her family to attend college. She was provided ample support from two college access programs, seemingly prepared for her first year on campus. Yet she had significant challenges beginning the first semester. She struggled to ask for academic and mental health support. She felt out of place and isolated in her experience. She began to inquire about transferring. "I knew I had to self-advocate, but I had no practice."

Discussion Questions

- How do you see yourself in Jasmine's experience?
- How has anyone here worked with a student with a similar story?
- What are some of the skills essential for first generation college success?
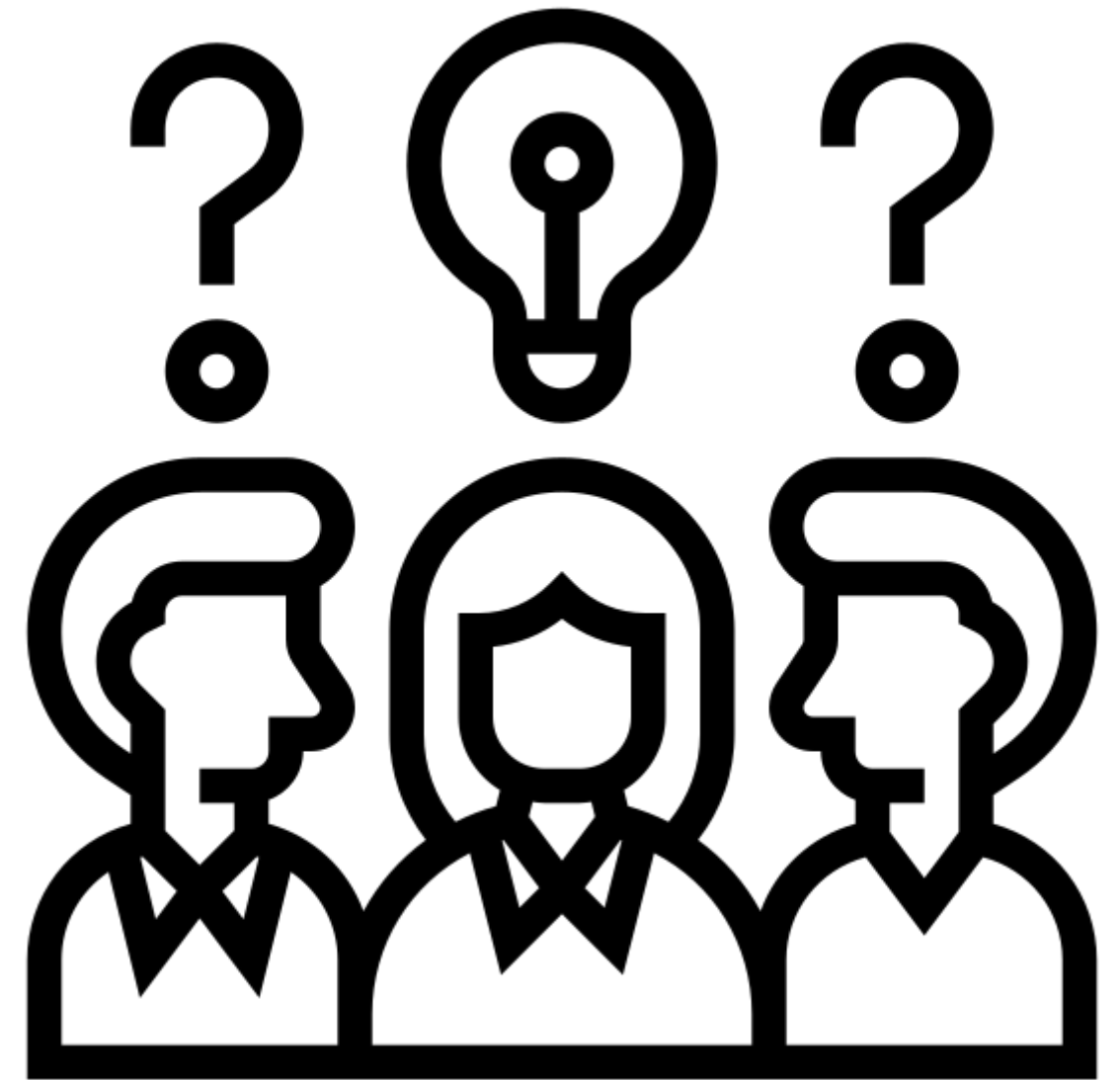
Key Considerations

First-generation students have unique challenges

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Research

We, thus, argue that it is easier for traditional students entering the university to become "role experts" due to their greater familiarity with higher education based on their family's past experiences within that institution. **In contrast, first-generation students typically possess relatively lower levels of college student expertise; they cannot rely on parental advice to help them identify and resolve role-based problems or to help them understand the university's expectations.** They come to the university with less understanding of student roles and less capacity to build their existing knowledge into genuine expertise. (1)

Key Considerations

Preparation equals equity

Research

High school counselors, college counselors, and other professionals should make a special effort to provide first-generation students with the kinds of information and experiences that allow them to envision, perceive, or even observe real opportunities for success regardless of the type of institution or the size of institution they choose to attend. **Helping students discover and understand opportunities for success in terms of the <u>academic</u>, the <u>social</u>, and the <u>financial</u> dimensions of different types of institutions are equally important and mutually reinforcing.** *(2)*

Key Considerations

Listening to students makes sense

Research

Organize a panel of juniors and seniors from different backgrounds to discuss how they adapted to college life, including how they pursued resources and people to help guide them in decisions. ***First-generation students can join the conversation and express their specific challenges in higher education. As reported in a recent study in Psychological Science, such low-key intervention has the potential to increase retention rates, helping students academically, emotionally, and socially. (3)***

Our Strategy

- **Who**: 2022 Summer Intern Team
- **Why**: 33% of first-gen students drop out within 3 years (4)
- **What**: Better equip first-year students to thrive in their first year of college
- **How**: Listening to student voices because we don't have the answers and Gamifying the first-year experience
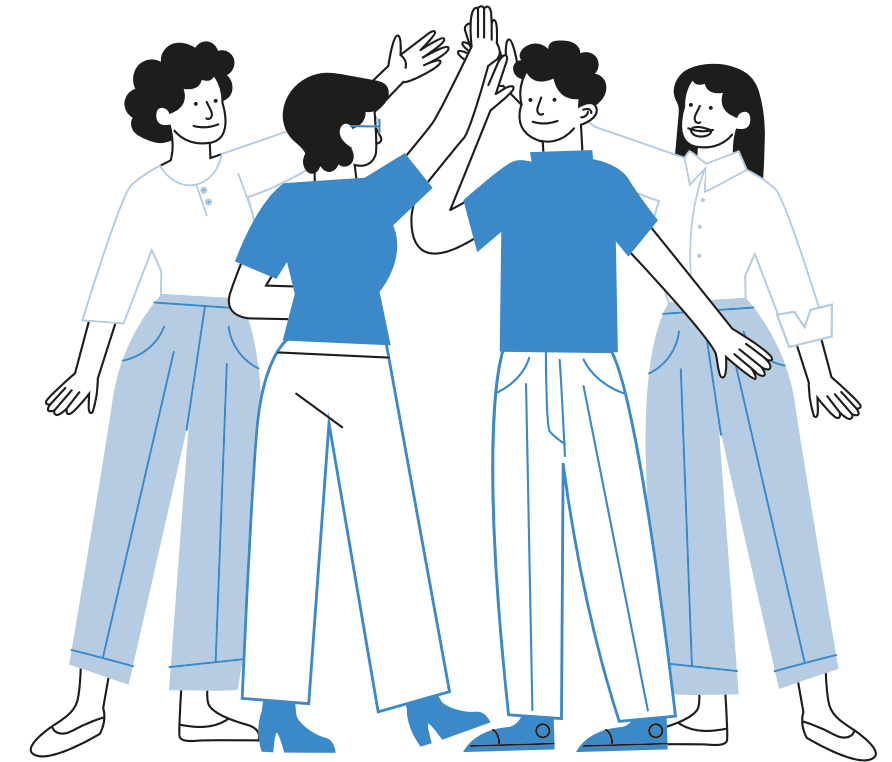
Gamification

Gamification is the process of using game elements in a non-game context. It has many advantages over traditional learning approaches, including:

- Increasing learner motivation levels
- Improving knowledge retention
- Better learner engagement through social mechanisms like badges, points, or leaderboards (4)

Development

- Developed scenarios commonly experienced by first-gen college students in their first year
- Partnered with the <u>PriSim Business War Games</u> simulation experts to gamify the first-gen first-year experience.
  - How to write effective memos that prompt discussion
  - How to account for varying priorities
  - How to depict consequences for every decision
- Ran simulation for multiple groups, including the Class of 2022

Desired Impact

- First-generation students can anticipate challenges & understand the different options they have
- Counselors/advisors/educators have a simple tool to engage students in conversation & develop their critical thinking
- Participants feel empowered knowing they are not alone in the obstacles they face as first-generation students

WIN!

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LET'S PLAY!

Set-Up

- Divide into small groups
- Each group will be given four cards
- Select one facilitator/spokesperson in your group
- Weight your priorities **as a group**
- Read the indicated scenario & make the decision
- Each group that shares will answer the following questions:
  - Why did you make that decision?
  - How could this scenario help a first-gen student be better prepared?

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Set-Up

	Weightings	1
1	Academic	
2	Social	
3	Financial	
4	Health	

|	Weightings	1
1	Academic	60%
2	Social	20%
3	Financial	5%
4	Health	15%

=100%

Visit the Two Steps Ahead Website

- **Instructions** for alternative ways to use *Two Steps Ahead* with your students can be found using the QR code.
- **Feedback Form** is available under the *Help* tab - we want to hear from you!
- You can go ahead and request a deck at the link - limited supplies are available.

Debrief Questions

- What is one idea that you want to go back & share with someone else?
- What is something that you can do to implement what you've learned today?

THANK YOU
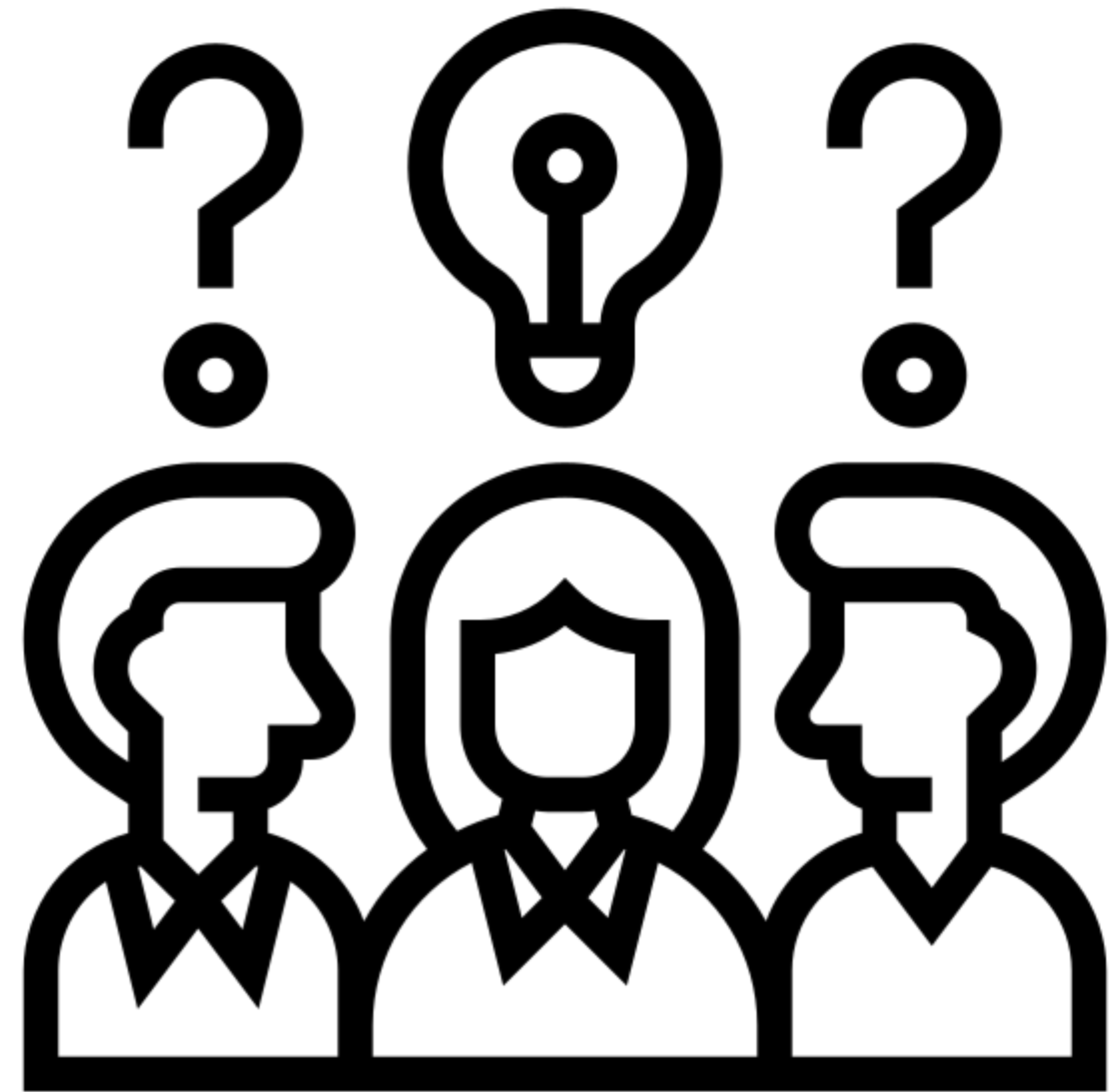
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