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# FLORIDA ATLANTIC

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## CREATING GENERATIONAL CHANGE

FLORIDA ATLANTIC'S  
AWARD-WINNING PROGRAMS  
ARE PREPARING STUDENTS FOR  
SCHOLASTIC AND CAREER SUCCESS



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# CLOSING THE GAPS

**Supporting  
Underserved  
Students  
and Creating  
Generational  
Change**

BY AMY HAYCOCK AND JOE MURRAY

34 | FLORIDA ATLANTIC MAGAZINE



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**A**t a time when many universities nationwide are struggling to close completion gaps between students of color, low-income students, and first-generation students, Florida Atlantic University achieved the nation's fastest jump in graduation rates while eliminating these gaps. In fact, gains have been largest among Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx and Pell-eligible students.



Florida Atlantic has developed a number of strategies to help these students overcome challenges and realize their full potential, thus delivering equitable student outcomes in achieving scholastic, and ultimately, career success. In fact, a recent study

by Ashley Brannan, M.Ed. '22, found that approximately 83 percent of low-income students who graduate from Florida Atlantic experience upward social mobility, by securing jobs with starting salaries above the low-income threshold.

This achievement earned Florida Atlantic the prestigious Degree Completion Award from the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities in November 2022. The award recognizes one institution each year for employing innovative approaches to improve degree completion while ensuring educational quality. Florida Atlantic also was a finalist for the award in 2021, which earned national media attention. NBC News and *The Root* published articles about the university's student success initiatives, including strategies to help struggling students stay in school and complete their degree programs.

"The university has a responsibility to put in place a framework to support student success," said James Capp, Ph.D., Florida Atlantic's assistant provost for academic operations and planning. "And we have delivered on the promise of moving students up income brackets."

#### SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Florida Atlantic's Office of First-Generation Student Success connects "first-gen" students to resources that assist in their development, such as advising and career services. Additionally, the first-generation advising team in University Advising Services (UAS) provides one-on-one support to help students navigate college life and achieve their goals.

Founded on the principle that higher education should be available to everyone, Florida Atlantic specializes in lifting up traditionally underserved students, including those from low-income homes. Around 39 percent of its 24,000 undergraduate students — nearly 9,400 — are designated as low-income at first enrollment.

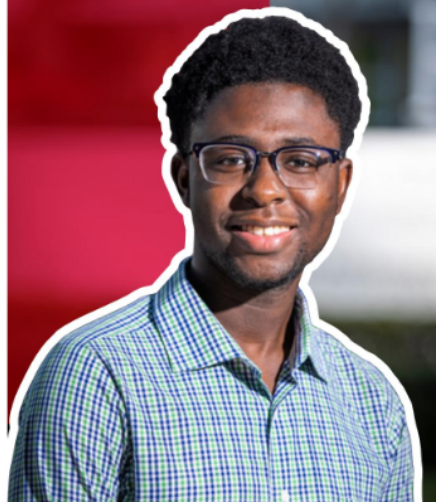
"Students are able to get the feel of a university that's twice our size, with athletics, student organizations and more, while also having a small university experience with the hands-on, one-on-one support they need," said Keven Allen Jr., Ph.D., director of development for FAU's Kelly/Strul Emerging Scholars Program. "That's the magic of Florida Atlantic."

Additionally, first-generation students — those who are the first in their families to earn a college degree — make up one-third of Florida Atlantic's student body. Many of these students also are from low-income homes, and most lack the general knowledge necessary to navigate university policies, procedures, resources and expectations, which can create a barrier to academic success. Additional challenges include a lack of support systems and adequate resources, and financial struggles — all of which contribute to higher drop-out rates.

For Christina Orelie, a neuroscience and behavior major, the Learning Strategies and Human Development course for first-generation students helped her transition into life at



Dodlee Mosilme



FAU. It taught her the importance of professors' office hours and study groups in her academic skill development. She also was encouraged to participate in student organizations such as the Caribbean Student Association, Konbit Kreyol and Owls Speak for Kids.

Academic Coaching and Career Enhancement for Student Success (ACCESS) helps first- and second-year students who are struggling get back on track. Through regular meetings, each student's academic coach identifies specific areas of skill development to focus on, and academic success plans are tailored to each student's individual needs. For those who are predicted to be at-risk for not progressing to the next semester, the ACCESS program's early intervention methods help to redirect negative behaviors and develop positive academic skill sets as habit — thus ensuring the student stays in school.

UAS and ACCESS were awarded \$100,000 to fund Peer Academic Coaches (PACs) in 2021 with the goal of academically supporting and hiring first-generation college students. PACs are fully trained undergraduate and graduate students who support their fellow Owls through regular outreach and individualized academic coaching. They also help to facilitate study, time management, and other academic skills; make personalized recommendations regarding campus resources; and encourage engagement on campus and in the community.

As an out-of-state and first-generation college student during the COVID-19 pandemic, Michelle Jaron faced many challenges, which inspired her to become a PAC. She worked with students who faced similar challenges feeling connected to the university while attending classes remotely and helped them identify student organizations and in-person campus events that might be of interest.

"Just hearing that me meeting with them, or me emailing them, kind of helped them feel better about their situation, and made them want to continue their education at FAU, really stuck with me," Jaron said.

First-generation students also have the option of applying for the Kelly/Strul Emerging Scholars Program, which was created in 2017 by University President Emeritus John Kelly and his wife, Carolyn, together with local philanthropists Aubrey and

Sally Strul. The program provides academically talented first-generation, low-income students with financial resources, academic support, and mentorship to help them graduate debt-free from Florida Atlantic in four years or less.

Kelly/Strul scholar Dodlee Mosilme is majoring in biological sciences and aspires to attend medical school. He said his parents came to the United States with very few resources and guidance.

"As a Kelly/Strul scholar, I am humbled to be part of a community that helps first-generation students achieve

their dreams. Being the son of Haitian immigrants, a Black male, and a first-generation college student is a privilege for me," Mosilme said. "To be first means embarking on a dream that future generations will use as a foundation to continue to build on. It means creating a legacy that will sustain my family, community and future generations."

#### SUCCESS FOR ALL

All first- and second-year undergraduate students, regardless of income or first-generation status, have access to the Success Network, an online communication system that connects them to a network of support. The student's academic advisor, faculty, tutors, dedicated career counselor, and additional support staff make up each student's "Success Network." The members of the network can proactively reach out if there's an indication that a student may be struggling; and conversely, students can contact their team members if they need assistance. Additionally, incoming freshmen participate in Major KnOWledge, an early exploration tool that helps them identify personal interests and their relationships to career pathways.

#### PROACTIVE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

For students who need financial assistance to finish their degrees, Florida Atlantic offers numerous opportunities. The Launch Scholarship program was developed to incentivize students to complete their degrees in four years or less. Each semester, the university identifies students who require financial support to stay on track and also targets students who may be under-enrolling because they cannot afford 30 credits per year.