



TRIO, COE, AND FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE CELEBRATION DAY

Did You Know...

The TRIO community introduced the concept of the “first-generation college student.” In the late 1970s, as Congress prepared to reauthorize the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA), TRIO leaders from across the country sought to unify the admission criteria for the programs. (Until that time, each program had different eligibility criteria, ranging from “rurally isolated” to “culturally disadvantaged.”) A working group called the National Coordinating Council of Educational Opportunity Associations – the pre-cursor to the Council for Opportunity in Education – introduced the idea of the “first-generation college student” as a universal criterion for admission to the TRIO programs during the hearings leading up to 1980 HEA reauthorization.

The term “first-generation college student” was first codified into law in the TRIO section of the Higher Education Act. Following the recommendations of TRIO leaders, the 1980 HEA reauthorization included language in the TRIO section defining a “first-generation college student” as “an individual... whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree.” (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1070a-11(h)(3) (The definition goes on to state that, “[i]n the case of an individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent, an individual whose only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree.” *Id.*)

COE partnered with NASPA’s Center for First-generation Success in 2017 to launch the first National First-Generation College Celebration. In an effort to amplify the experience and the accomplishments of first-generation college students on campus, COE joined with NASPA’s Center for First-generation Success to launch National First-Generation College Celebration Day. Since 2017, campuses across the country mark this event on November 8, the anniversary of the signing of the Higher Education Act of 1965. In recent years, this event has grown to include weeklong celebrations that include not only first-generation undergraduates but first-generation graduate students as well.

Additional Resource:

Jehangir, R. R., & Romasanta, L. (2021). [How TRIO Sparked the Fire That Fuels the First-Generation Movement: An Interview With Arnold Mitchem and Maureen Hoyler](#). *Journal of First-generation Student Success*, 1(1), 3-19.