TRIO Celebrates National First-Gen Day

What do many faculty, staff, and students at Purdue University Fort Wayne have in common? Almost half are the first in their families to attend college. This year, TRIO SSS lead a campus-wide First-Generation Celebration to bring awareness to the strong, vibrant, first-generation students, faculty, and staff on campus. A panel of first-generation university faculty and staff members shared stories from their past including challenges, triumphs, and advice to help first-generation students relate to their own struggles. TRIO SSS student, Graciela Jimenez commented, “It’s nice to know they were once where we are now and they made it.” Panel members included Regina Gordon (CELT), Luke Rodesiler (Education), Kristina Creager (Student Affairs), Curt Hosier (Sociology), Suin Roberts (English and Linguistics), James McHann (Business), Jenna Hoppe (Student Success and Transitions), and Jeff Anderson (Mathematics and Chemistry).

The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) and the Center for First-Generation Student Success launched First-Generation College Celebration in 2017. On November 8 each year, the anniversary of the signing of the Higher Education Act, colleges are encouraged to celebrate what it means to be first-generation college student through events, education, and advocacy. The Higher Education Act of 1965 coined the term “first-generation” to refer to college students who were the first in their family to attend college. The Act also authorized the TRIO programs to assist those students in their educational pursuits.
Each year, TRIO SSS continues to grow. This year was no different. TRIO SSS welcomed its largest new student class ever! In August, over 70 first-generation students joined Purdue Fort Wayne TRIO SSS. Many degree programs and courses of study are represented in this new student group. Every new student is supported by a TRIO Peer Mentor. Peer mentors are upperclassmen in TRIO who help first-year freshmen acclimate to campus and college life. Peer mentors love to give back to students by offering help they received from their mentors when they were freshman. As a first-generation student, Johnathan Brito appreciated the connection and support from his mentor so much that he decided to become one himself, and has been mentoring for two years now. TRIO Peer Mentors are instrumental in ensuring all new students feel connected and supported.

Amber Davenport, a December 2019 graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree, started raising money for foster children three years ago. Through the organization, Together We Rise, Amber purchased and decorated duffel bags, referred to as, “Sweet Cases,” for foster children to use for their personal belongings. Foster children often have to leave quickly and travel from home to home with their items in garbage bags. Amber strongly believed each foster child should have their own duffle bag. She was only able to raise funds for 10 bags the first year, but she knew she wanted to do more! When Amber heard about the service-learning grants available through the Office of Engagement, she quickly applied and was awarded a grant. For the second and third years, Amber was able to donate an additional 110 bags. This year, TRIO students helped Amber decorate the bags for distribution to foster agencies. TRIO students gathered during TRIO Coffee Hours or used their down time to showcase their artistic abilities on the bags. TRIO Club also partnered with Student Housing one evening to involve even more of the campus community in the duffel bag decorating effort. Once finished, Together We Rise filled the decorated bags with hygiene items, a blanket, and a teddy bear. The bags were then donated to the Phoenix Institute, a non-profit agency providing therapeutic foster care to hundreds of special needs youth in the Fort Wayne area.
In October, two buses of TRIO students headed to Chicago to explore both the Shedd Aquarium and the Museum of Science and Industry as a part of the TRIO Fall Break trip. At Shedd Aquarium, students viewed and learned about various animals and plants from aquatic habitats from around the world, including oceans, lakes, rivers, and reefs. As students traveled around the aquarium, they discovered sea otters, turtles, penguins, saltwater and freshwater fish, sea lions, amphibians, reptiles, birds, beluga whales, pacific white-sided dolphins, and different species of sharks. Students even got to view an aquatic presentation, where experts worked with pacific white-sided dolphins in an exciting live setting.

Next, students visited the Museum of Science and Industry. Students were quite busy exploring the museum’s many exhibits and experiences. Some student-favorite exhibits were the U-505 Submarine, Numbers in Nature: A Mirror Maze, Genetics and the Baby Chick Hatchery, Science of Storms, Colleen Moore’s Fairy Castle, and the Henry Crown Space Center. Other crowd favorites were exhibits where students could explore and learn about the anatomy of the human body, transportation, and energy. TRIO SSS student, Carlos Rodriguez said, “There were so many things to see. I learned something different from each exhibit.”

TRIO Students Attend Leadership Event

In October, 18 TRIO SSS students traveled to Hammond, Indiana for an experience of a lifetime! Students attended the Indiana TRIO Track 2 Success Post Grad Preparation Conference. On the first day of the conference, students had the opportunity to eat at Fogo de Chao, as well as attend Hamilton: An American Musical. Fogo de Chao is a fine-dining Brazilian steakhouse, or churrascaria. Various types of meats were served nonstop directly onto students’ plates from large skewers. Students enjoyed this unique dining experience. After dinner, students visited the CIBC Theatre for a performance of Hamilton. Hamilton tells the story of America’s founding father, Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton features “a score that blends hip-hop, jazz, blues, rap, R&B, and Broadway.” TRIO student Gemssy Munoz said, “It was great to connect with TRIO students from Ivy Tech, as well as with other Purdue Fort Wayne TRIO students I had never met or spoken to before.” It was definitely a night to remember!

Day two of the conference included students participating in informational sessions on three learning tracks: graduate school, career readiness, and study abroad. Students enjoyed attending sessions led by professionals, as well as, hearing from Keynote speaker, Dr. Simon K. Shannon, a TRIO McNair program alumnus and current 3M Company Business Development Manager. Sessions included topics such as job search etiquette, discovering and publishing research, personal statements for graduate study, and study abroad scholarship applications.
TRIO Students Show Artwork

When Cassidy Merkle considered options for her senior honors project, she was naturally drawn to Zinnias Bakehouse; her downtown Fort Wayne employer throughout her college career. Cassidy chose to combine her two passions, community and art, by completing a mural in the downtown area. The city of Fort Wayne has been working to revitalize the area for quite some time and encourages the creation of murals to increase foot traffic, beautify the city, bring artists and businesses together, and encourage economic growth. Cassidy was thrilled and honored to do her part. She conducted interviews to research the mural movement and its importance to the community, and interviewed her employer, Krystal Vega, to determine the type of mural to create. Although there were challenges such as what medium to use outdoors, painting on a building verses a canvas, the weather, and frozen fingers, Cassidy grew in her artistic abilities and knowledge. Pedestrians stopped to watch her paint and offered appreciation and gratitude to her for adding beauty to the downtown area. She was thrilled to make an impact in her community that will last for years. Cassidy’s completed mural is a vibrant display of zinnia flowers and can be found downtown on the corner of Wayne and Barr Streets. Cassidy will graduate this May with a degree in Anthropology and a minor in Art.

Senior TRIO SSS student and graduating Art Education major, Miranda Hall, exhibited her artwork at the Department of Art and Design’s 2020 Bachelor of Arts and Art Education Exhibition. This exhibit was on display from January 13 to February 14 in the Visual Arts Gallery. This event is always a highlight, as students get to show off their creative pieces to the campus community, family, and friends. The highlights of Miranda’s artwork included original black and white prints, colorfully decorated pottery containers, and texturized-coral pottery pieces. Miranda is a very active participant in TRIO, and serves as the Secretary of Purdue Fort Wayne Ceramics Club.

A Very TRIO Holiday Celebration

In finest TRIO holiday fashion, students gathered to celebrate the holiday season with a traditional meal of turkey, mashed potatoes, green beans, and pie. Students enjoyed feasting, while also spending time with one another and playing games. The always favorite Winter Pictionary had everyone laughing. This year, students also decorated the “TREE-O” and ugly sweater cookies. A good time was had by all!
TRIO Alumni Spotlight: Rabia Ibrahim

Name: Rabia Ibrahim
Graduation Year: 2017
Degree: Bachelor of Arts in Spanish, Teaching Certification
Current School: New Mexico State University, Master of Arts in Spanish
Degree(s) Sought: Working towards a Master of Arts Teaching Spanish

Rabia joined TRIO SSS in 2014 as an Education major. Rabia worked throughout her time at Purdue Fort Wayne (then IPFW). She worked numerous jobs as a Spanish tutor, Burmese Translator at Amani Family Services, and teaching part-time at a charter school. Rabia loved being in the classroom and was anxious to start working with students as soon as possible. After reviewing her degree plan, Rabia discovered she could graduate early with her Bachelor’s Degree in Spanish and a TENL Certificate so that she could work while she continued taking classes to finish her Secondary Education Certification. During her studies, Rabia was offered a full-time, Spanish teaching position at New Haven High School and is currently in her third year as a teacher there.

Rabia enjoys working with students and helping them learn. In addition to working full-time at New Haven High School, she works for the TRIO Upward Bound program here at Purdue Fort Wayne as a Spanish tutor during the school year and an instructor for their Summer Academy. She also continues to give back to her community by volunteering as an English-Burmese interpreter in the community and for Upward Bound. Rabia is also in the process of pursuing a Master’s degree in Spanish instruction. She hopes to complete her graduate program by May 2021.

TRIO Family Dinner Events

Once a month, TRIO Family Dinner is held in Student Housing. This evening event allows TRIO students to share a meal and socialize with other TRIO students in a relaxed environment. Students enjoy engaging with one another in conversation and games. A crowd favorite, Uno, is always on the agenda. This year, family dinners took place on Thursday evenings once a month. TRIO provides the food and students make the friends! Due to such positive feedback, TRIO Family Dinners will continue next year.
TRIO Leaders have been busy this semester learning about leading. This year, TRIO SSS had its largest leadership group! Fifteen students were selected to attend monthly trainings that focus on first-generation student leadership development. To begin, three observers, as well as the students themselves, used a rating scale to measure their leadership skills. Then, using the book, *The Student Leadership Challenge*, by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, students learned about the five tenants of leadership—a different tenant each month. TRIO student Cristina Sanchez said, “TRIO Leaders helps you learn more about yourself. It helps me see what I need to improve on in my leadership skills.” TRIO Leaders meets on Wednesday one time per month in the TRIO Resource Center.

TRIO Wins Chili Fest Again

TRIO Student Support Services students and staff participated in the annual Chancellor’s Chili Fest and won the top prize for the second year in a row! The prized trophy and highly-coveted, “Golden Spoon” will remain in the TRIO Student Support Services office for another year. Special thanks to Jeremy Workman for the winning recipe and all our avid chili cook off student, staff, and faculty supporters!
TRIO Student Success Spotlights

TRIO SSS student and senior Business Marketing major, Alyssa Vance, participated in the Greater Fort Wayne Fellows Program for the summer 2019 session. Penske Truck Rental employed Alyssa in a project-based paid internship. She lived with other Greater Fort Wayne student interns in campus housing and attended personal development workshops, community engagement opportunities, and networking events. The experience was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that added to Alyssa’s skillsets, strengthened her understanding of the trucking business, and opened her eyes to what possibilities lay ahead for her when she graduates in May 2020. Alyssa’s courage to reach out to new opportunities and her openness to try new things was rewarded when Penske offered Alyssa continued employment upon the completion of her internship. Alyssa encourages other first-generation students to, “Take a leap of faith and always keep your eyes open. There were many times I was not sure I was going to go through with it, but I cannot be more thankful for where I am today. Be open to exploring options that might seem very different to you...because of this opportunity, I have found a wonderful place to build my skillset and gain real world work experience.”

“If I don’t do it now, when will I ever get the chance to do it?” Taylor Beavers asked her TRIO advisor when questioned on her motivation to leave her family and friends to study in New Hampshire. Taylor, a sophomore Interior Design major, chose to participate in the National Student Exchange program. As part of the program, Taylor attended Keene State College during the fall 2019 semester. She lived on campus, took classes at Keene State College, and earned credits that will count towards her degree at Purdue University Fort Wayne. Although she was far away from home, Taylor enjoyed the opportunity to study elsewhere, but also earn credits at Purdue Fort Wayne.

The National Student Exchange program allows students at Purdue Fort Wayne to study at any of a number of universities across the United States while paying Purdue Fort Wayne tuition rates and transferring those credits back to Purdue Fort Wayne.

The 2019-2020 academic year began with a lot of excitement for two TRIO SSS rising juniors, Jonathan Brito and Jordan Heckler. Through a competitive process, Jonathan and Jordan were selected as scholars for the National Science Foundation (NSF) Scholarship in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (S-STEM). Students had to meet eligibility and academic participation requirements and be majoring in engineering or computer science in order to apply. The NSF S-STEM project provides a scholarship, as well as mentorship to selected scholars for their junior and senior years of college. The project’s aim is to help students financially, academically, and socially in order to persist in college and become contributing members of the STEM workforce in Northeast Indiana. As a scholar, Jonathan and Jordan were awarded a scholarship for the 2019-2020 academic year, and will get the same scholarship for the 2020-2021 academic year. Jonathan is majoring in Electrical Engineering with a minor in Mathematics, and Jordan is a Mechanical Engineering Technology major.
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TRIO Partners with Sciences

TRIO SSS and TRIO Upward Bound embarked this year on a new partnership with Purdue Fort Wayne Sciences to host hands-on science demonstrations with area high school students. TRIO SSS student, Austin Brandenberger said, “This partnership was a lot of fun. Teaching others is rewarding and it helps you understand material to a greater degree.” Watch your email for more upcoming dates.

TRIO Cultural Conversations

TRIO students have enjoyed learning about other cultures and sharing about their own culture at TRIO Cultural Conversations. Each month, students gather to learn more about culture, identity, and ethnicity. In these conversations, students discuss current cultural issues, as well as have rich and meaningful discussion about stereotypes, bias, privilege, and identity. Students who participated also had the opportunity to find out more about themselves with Ancestry.com DNA tests! TRIO student Graciela Jimenez said, “Cultural Conversations provides an environment to freely express yourself without judgement, and to learn about others.” Cultural Conversations takes place one Wednesday each month in the TRIO Resource Center.

TRIO Contacts

Shubitha Kever
Program Director
Email: kevers@pfw.edu
Office: (260) 481-6881
Cell/Text: (260) 403-4190

Anita Watson
Assistant Director
Email: anita.watson@pfw.edu
Office: (260) 481-0221
Cell/Text: (260) 402-5828

Marissa Rittermeyer
Academic Coordinator
Email: rittermm@pfw.edu
Office: (260) 481-0223
Cell/Text: (260) 599-4277

General Office
Phone: (260) 481-0220
Fax: (260) 481-0226
Email: trio@pfw.edu
www.pfw.edu/TRIO-sss