**Inside MFOS: Office Buzz!**

This past semester has brought some great opportunities to support scholars. With the ease of accessibility due to the MFOS office being in the student union, we have formalized a new drop-in process for scholars to connect with us. Each day during specific timeslots, a designated MFOS team member is available for any scholar to “drop by” the office and ask any questions they may have. For the month of January, the team had 500+ scholar connections during the month with many of these being in-person meetings.

As we reach the midpoint of our strategic planning period, the team has achieved quite a bit. Grounded in a commitment to fostering holistic student development, our plan is a dynamic roadmap designed to elevate the educational experience and empower every student to thrive. Over the next five years, key initiatives include the implementation of targeted support programs, the integration of innovative technologies, and the expansion of collaborative partnerships.

**A Shared Learning Trip**

The MFOS team had the amazing opportunity to visit Florida State University’s Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement (CARE) last December. Even though the Gators and Seminoles are rivals on the field, both offices share an immense passion for supporting first-generation students.

We had the opportunity to gain insights into their programs and initiatives aimed at assisting all first-generation and limited income college students. We were greeted by enthusiastic staff members who shared their passion for helping first-gen students navigate the challenges of college life. They emphasized the importance of creating a welcoming environment where students feel supported and empowered to succeed.

One of our key takeaways during the visit was the importance of academic mentoring and tutoring. Trained mentors work closely with first-gen students to provide personalized support, including academic guidance and study skills development.

Another highlight of the visit was the center's commitment to collaboration with other campus departments and community organizations. By partnering with stakeholders across campus and beyond, the center can leverage additional resources and provide a more holistic support system for first-gen students at FSU.

Overall, our visit to the CARE Center was both informative and inspiring. We were impressed by the dedication of the staff and the range of programs and initiatives designed to empower first-gen students on their journey through college.

**New AVP**

We are thrilled to extend a warm welcome to our new Interim Associate Vice President, Ja’Net Glover, as she provides leadership to the Career and Integrative Partnership Portfolio area as of September 2023. Ja’Net brings a fresh perspective and innovative strategies to our team during a pivotal time of transformation and expansion. Her dedication to fostering collaboration and focusing on success outcomes for all learners aligns seamlessly with our team’s values and goals. As we embark on this new chapter, we are confident that under Ja’Net’s guidance, our team will continue to thrive and grow as we support first-generation students at UF.

**Director’s Fund Update**

Thanks to the generous support from the MFOS Director’s Fund, we have accomplished some new ways to share the first-generation experience near and far. As the Fall semester came to the holiday season, the MFOS team recognized that some scholars were not able to travel for the Thanksgiving holiday. In true spirit of the “MFOS family” we hosted a thanksgiving dinner for scholars to connect, celebrate, and engage over a family dinner with Dr. Bernie and Chris Machen!

To celebrate National First-generation College Student Day on November 8th, we hosted a “[First-Generation Conversations](https://youtu.be/IhxMtb6R_Yk)” corner for students, faculty, staff, and guests to have candid conversations on what it means to be first at UF. In collaboration with UF’s Center for Instructional Technology and Training, we were able to record these conversations and create a rich snapshot of these experiences that aim to highlight the voices of first-generation student and affirm our support as a campus community.

In addition to the conversation corner, we made significant updates to our MFOS Photobooth system. This new setup allows us to continue to provide tangible takeaways from our events. The photos our scholars take and keep create opportunities for them to share their college experiences with family, friends, and loved ones.

**What’s Next?**

* As we continue to scale Academic and Career Initiatives, we are piloting two new programs for Fall 2024:
  + - Pioneering program designed to empower and cultivate the leadership potential in first generation students at the University of Florida. This comprehensive initiative is aimed at providing the guidance, resources, and support first generation students need to excel in their careers and become future leaders.
    - Flash mentorship program where alumni, faculty, staff, and supporters can be paired with current students based on shared interests, career goals, or academic backgrounds. There will also be an opportunity to be listed as an advocate within the network to provide advice or support around specific topics/areas of expertise.
* This year, our theme for Peer Mentor Program Recruitment and Selection is "Lead Loud, Lead Proud." We've received 40 Leadership Team applications, and approximately 125 Peer Mentor applications so far. Our goals for this recruitment season include a 30% retention rate for current peer mentors (accomplished with a 38% retention rate), maintaining a 1:4 Mentor to Mentee ratio, and receiving 130 peer mentor applications.
* Looking ahead to Camp MFOS, we aim to build on the success of previous years. Our objectives include helping our program participants develop community and belonging among incoming first year and current MFOS scholars, identify strategies for academic, personal, and professional success.