

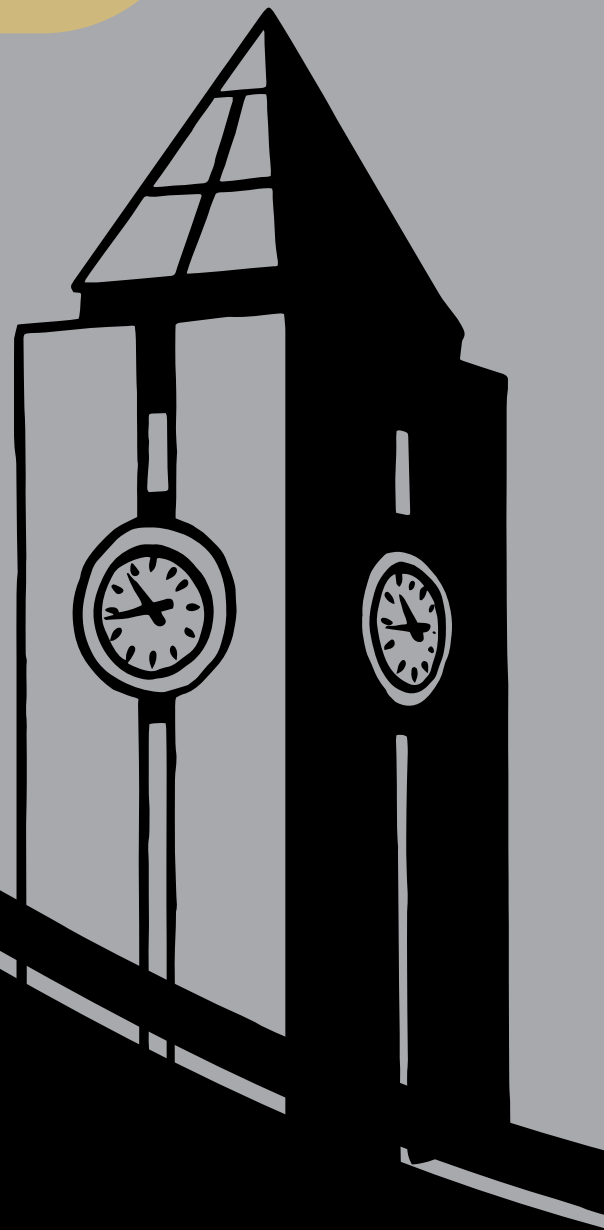
First2Go Survival Guide:

Your Guide for First- Generation College Student Success at UCCS

**Created by Ashley Johnston and Cherry Ann Bice,
Practicum Students Class of 2026**

**in collaboration with Victoria Caruso-Griffie,
First2Go Program Coordinator**

YOU BELONG HERE.



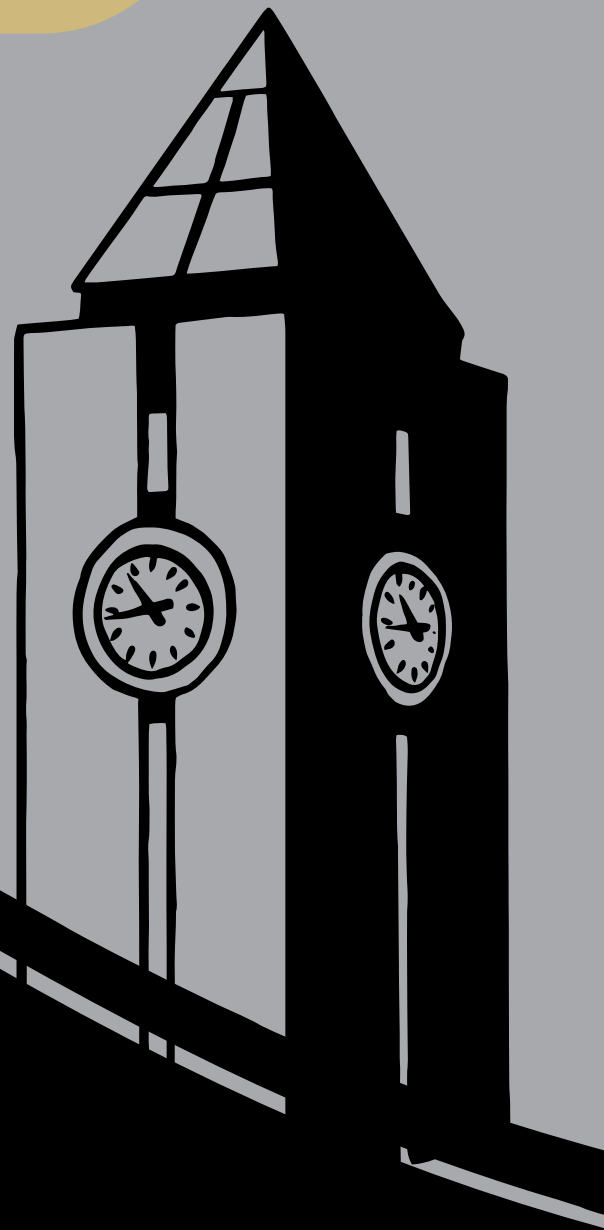
First2Go Survival Guide:

Your Guide for First- Generation College Student Success at UCCS

**Created by Ashley Johnston and Cherry Ann Bice,
Practicum Students Class of 2026**

**in collaboration with Victoria Caruso-Griffie,
First2Go Program Coordinator**

YOU BELONG HERE.



First2Go

FIRST GENERATION AT UCCS

Hey, First2Go Family!

We made this Survival Guide just for you. Being a first-generation college student is something worth celebrating and something that comes with challenges. You are not supposed to have it all figured out. Nobody does!

This guide is for you for finding support, taking care of yourself, and knowing that there is an entire community at UCCS cheering you on during your journey.

You are not alone. You are not behind. You are exactly where you are supposed to be.

First-Generation Student: A student whose parents or guardians did not complete a four-year college degree in the United States.¹



Table of Contents

- I. Campus Resource Directory
- II. Research on Student Experiences
- III. Wellness Tips & Exercises
- IV. Stress Relieving Activities
- V. Reflection Journal Prompts
- VI. First-Generation College Student Success Stories

Black boxes highlight key terms and definitions to help you understand what each resource is referencing.

Gold boxes highlight data gathered from the UCCS Spring 2026 First-Generation Student Survey, created by First2Go Practicum Students Ashley and Cherry.²

I. CAMPUS RESOURCE DIRECTORY



KEY CAMPUS OFFICES

Academic Advising

Advisors help you choose classes, stay on track for graduation, transfer credits, and change majors. You should meet with them every semester before registering.

advising@uccs.edu - (719) 255-3260 - Main Hall 208

Registrar's Office

Manages course schedules, academic records, and important academic deadlines. Contact the registrar's office to find forms required to get exemptions or residency changes and figure out holds on your account.

registrar@uccs.edu - (719) 255-3361 - Main Hall 108

Bursar/Student Financial Services

Handles tuition bills, payment plans, refunds, and questions about your student account.

bursar@uccs.edu - (719) 255-3391 - Main Hall Second Floor

Financial Aid, Scholarships, & Student Employment

Helps you understand financial aid awards, apply for scholarships, and find on-campus jobs

finaidse@uccs.edu - scholarships@uccs.edu - stuemp@uccs.edu - (719) 255 3460 - Cragmor Hall 201

Disability Services

Provides accommodations like extra test time, note-taking support, and accessible course materials

dservice@uccs.edu - (719) 255-3354 - Main Hall 324

Over 40% of first-generation students say they want support with financial and academic navigation. These resources are a great place to start!²

CAMPUS RESOURCE DIRECTORY

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Multicultural Office for Student Access, Inclusiveness, and Community (MOSAIC)

Supports students from historically marginalized communities through leadership programs, cultural events and mentoring. MOSAIC houses First2Go, LGBTQ+ Resource Center, International Student & Scholar Services, and Education Abroad.
MOSAIC@uccs.edu - (719) 255-3319 - University Center 110

First2Go Program

Supports first-generation students through resources, mentorship, events, and professional development opportunities.
first2go@uccs.edu - (719) 255-3547 - Copper House 9202

Veteran & Military Affairs

Supports military-affiliated students with benefits, advising, and community.
military@uccs.edu - (719) 255-3253 - McCord-Herbst Student Veteran Center in Gateway Hall
Gateway Hall is inside of the Gateway Parking Garage



GETTING INVOLVED ON CAMPUS

Residence Life & Housing

Supports students living on campus through housing, community events, and conflict mediation.
housing@uccs.edu - (719) 255-4042 - La Plata Front Desk - Monarch Front Desk

Department of Student Life & Leadership

Helps students get involved on campus by connecting them with clubs, organizations, leadership opportunities, events, and volunteer experiences.
studlife@uccs.edu - (719) 255-3470 - University Center 102

Student Government Association (SGA)

Represents student interests and offers leadership opportunities.
sga@uccs.edu - (719) 255-3550 - University Center 104

Only 27% of first-generation students have used MOSAIC or First2Go resources. Reaching out to these organizations and attending events can help you feel more connected to the UCCS community.²

CAMPUS RESOURCE DIRECTORY



FINANCIAL AND NEEDS SUPPORT

Clyde's Cupboard

Free food pantry and toiletries for all UCCS students regardless of need.

cupboard@uccs.edu - University Center 102

Clyde's Closet

Provides free professional clothing for interviews and internships.

careers@uccs.edu - (719) 255-3340 - University Center 114

Single Stop

Helps connect students to resources like SNAP, Medicaid, and financial assistance programs.

Find access to this platform at: <https://app.singlestop.org/uccs/main>

CAREER & EMPLOYMENT

T. Rowe Price Career Center

Offers resume reviews, mock interviews, career fairs, and internship/job listings through Handshake.

careers@uccs.edu - (719) 255-3340 - University Center 114

SEANS (Student Employment)

Platform where students can go to apply for on-campus and off-campus hourly jobs or work-study positions.

Find access to this platform at: <https://seans.uccs.edu/>

Career resources are especially important for first-generation students, helping to navigate uncertainty and build connections. As one student shared, "I am unsure of my exact plan for turning these degrees into a career, and I do not have professional connections".²

CAMPUS RESOURCE DIRECTORY

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Wellness Center

Provides medical care, mental health services, nutrition counseling, and crisis support.
wellness@uccs.edu - (719) 255-4444 - UCCS Gallogly Recreation and Wellness Center

Recreation Center

Offers fitness facilities, intramurals, group fitness classes, outdoor gear rentals, and more.
rec@uccs.edu - (719) 255-7515 - UCCS Gallogly Recreation and Wellness Center

24/7 Mental Health Support - TELLUS Health

UCCS students get free, confidential mental health and wellbeing support. This includes virtual, chat, and call options to connect students with counseling services, anytime, anywhere.

Download TELLUS Health Student Support app on Android or iOS to access these resources

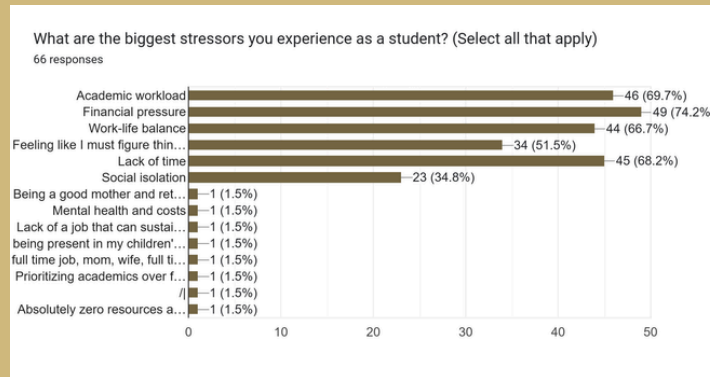
Suicide and Crisis Help Line (Call 988)

Contact this number for 24/7 access to trained counselors who can help people experiencing thoughts of suicide, substance use crisis or any other sort of mental or emotional distress.



More than 25% of first-generation students don't know where to access wellness and mental health resources on campus. Connecting with these services can be essential in times of need — and even help prevent reaching that point.²

II. Research on Student Experiences

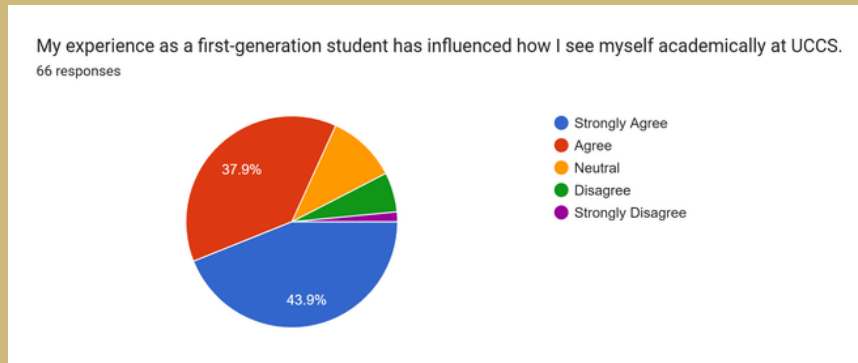


Challenges of Being a First-Generation Student²

If you've ever felt like you're figuring out college as you go, you're not alone. Research shows many first-gen students have to navigate college systems without the same guidance or "insider knowledge" as others. Bettencourt et al. (2020) found that students often don't even realize they're first-gen until institutions label them that way, and that's when differences in resources and knowledge become more visible.³ Feeling out of place isn't a personal failure. It reflects larger structural gaps, not your ability. Below are quotes on UCCS First-Gen Students about their personal challenges:

- "Navigating through new, unknown things and having to figure things out on my own"
- "Feeling alone is often my biggest challenge. Most steps my peers received help with, I completed on my own"
- "The pressure of doing everything right – I'm afraid if I don't, I may disappoint my family"

Research on Student Experiences

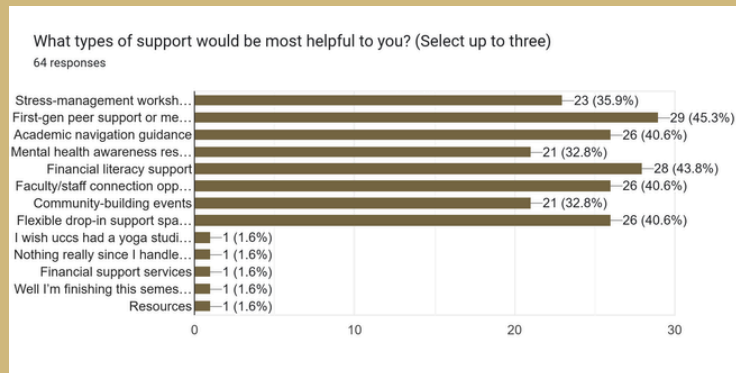


Self-Esteem and Imposter Syndrome²

If you've ever felt like you don't belong or might be "found out", that's imposter syndrome (and it's very common). Holden et al. (2021) describes it as the fear of being exposed as a fraud despite your achievements.⁴ For first-gen students, these feelings can hit harder due to limited support systems, but they're not a sign you don't belong. Instead, they're a normal response to being in a new and unfamiliar environment. Below are quotes from UCCS First-Gen Students about their experiences with imposter syndrome and their overall self-esteem:

- "Sometimes I struggle to feel like I'm made for this... I feel like I have to push twice as hard since I didn't get a leg up"
- "Being the first in my family to pursue higher education motivates me to work hard and take advantage of opportunities that those before me did not have"
- "Every step I have taken on my own has reminded me that my worth is not defined by where I started, but by my determination and perseverance"

Research on Student Experiences



Support for UCCS First-Generation Students²

You are not starting from zero. Yosso (2005) explains that first-gen students bring “community cultural wealth”, including resilience, adaptability, and strong community ties.⁵ These strengths come from your lived experiences and are just as valuable as traditional forms of knowledge. As First2Go continues growing, we hope to begin offering more services such as the one’s UCCS First-Gen students have asked for through our research. Below are quotes of what some UCCS First-Gen Students think would help them navigate their college years:

- “More personalized, ongoing support ... consistent support can help reduce emotional and academic pressure”**
- “Expanding access to resources tailored for non-traditional and first-generation students balancing significant responsibilities outside of school”**
- “Students would benefit from a peer mentor program who are of the same ethnicity, helping them find community and connect with someone who truly understands”**

III. WELLNESS ACTIVITIES



Name It To Tame It

When you're feeling overwhelmed, pause and name the emotion out loud or in writing. Just saying 'I feel anxious right now' activates the thinking part of your brain and helps dial down the intensity.

The 5-Minute Rule

If a task feels impossible, tell yourself you will only do it for 5 minutes. You can stop after 5 minutes, but most of the time you will keep going because starting a task is often the hardest part to complete.

Phone-Free Wind-Down

In the 30 minutes before sleep, put your phone face down. Scrolling raises cortisol (your stress hormone) right before bed. Your sleep quality and your mood the next day will improve.

Move Your Body

Even a 10-minute walk outside can shift your nervous system from stressed to calmer. You do not need a gym membership when you have access to the outdoors.

Reach Out, Not In

When things get hard, instinct is often to pull away. Try the opposite. Text a friend. Drop by MOSAIC. Send an email to your advisor. Connection is one of the most powerful stress buffers there is.

Tiny Wins Matter

First-generation students often only notice what they haven't done yet. Try writing down 3 things you accomplished today, no matter how small. Attended class? Win. Ate a meal? Win. Asked a question? Big win.

Remember This

Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of self-awareness and strength. First-generation students who use campus resources are more likely to persist and graduate. You earned your place here. Now use everything UCCS has to offer.

Mindfulness – The practice of being fully present and aware of where you are and what you're doing, without feeling overwhelmed or overly reactive to what's going on around you.⁶

Over 65% of first-generation students report that their overall well-being is only "average" or lower. Using strategies like these can help reframe your mindset and improve your overall well-being.²



WELLNESS ACTIVITIES



Box Breathing - 4 Minutes to Calm

Step 1 - Inhale Breathe IN slowly for 4 counts	Step 2 - Hold Hold your breath for 4 counts
Step 3 - Exhale Breathe OUT slowly for 4 counts	Step 4 - Hold Hold for 4 counts. Repeat 3-4 times

5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1 Grounding

5 Things You Can See	Look around you. Name 5 things you can see right now.
4 Things You Can Touch	Feel 4 things around you. What textures do you notice?
3 Things You Can Hear	Listen to your environment. Name 3 sounds, near or far.
2 Things You Can Smell	Notice 2 smells, even faint ones.
1 Thing You Can Taste	What do you taste right now?

Grounding – Simple physical or mental exercises used to "re-center" your brain during moments of high stress, anxiety, or overwhelm.⁷

With over 35% of first-generation students requesting stress-management strategies through the First2Go program, simple breathing exercises like these can be an effective first step.²



WELLNESS ACTIVITIES

2 Minutes	Close your eyes and breathe slowly. Inhale for 4, exhale for 6. Repeat as needed.
5 Minutes	Step outside. Walk around the building. Let your mind wander.
5 Minutes	Write a brain dump. Dump everything on your mind, no filter, no editing.
5 Minutes	Text or call one person who makes you feel good about yourself.
10 Minutes	Make a simple to-do list. Pick only 3 things for today. Do the smallest one first.
10 Minutes	Do the UCCS free online mental health screening at screeningformentalhealth.org

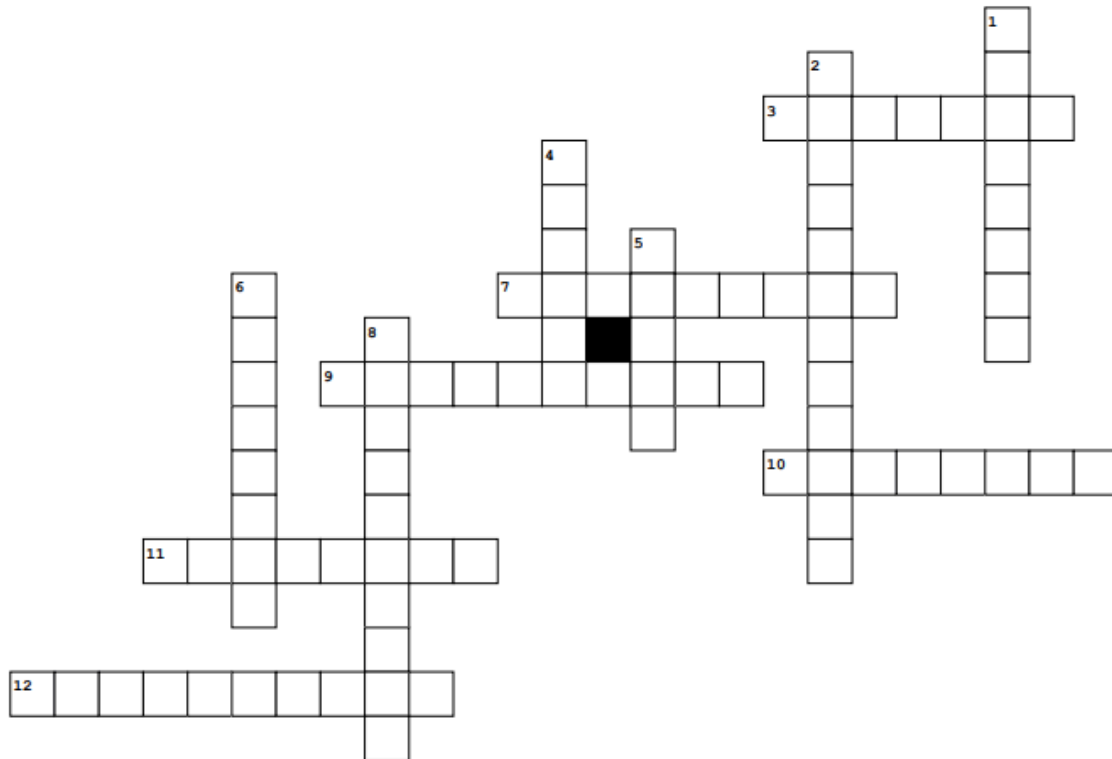
Cognitive Reframing – A technique used to identify and dispute irrational or negative thoughts and "reframe" them into more positive or realistic ones.⁸

Half of first-generation students report that time constraints prevent them from using mental health resources. By incorporating these brief activities, UCCS students can easily include wellness exercises in their daily routines.²

IV. STRESS-RELIEVING ACTIVITIES

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

First-Gen Crossword Puzzle



Across

3. Resources or people that help students succeed
7. The feeling of being accepted and included
9. Your overall sense of self-worth
10. A student whose parents did not complete a four-year college degree
11. Your sense of self shaped by experiences, values, and relationships.
12. Belief in your ability to succeed

Down

1. Obstacles that make college access or success more difficult
2. Acting in a way that is true to your real self and values
4. A mental or emotional strain often linked to pressure
5. The different positions you hold (ex: student, friend, or child)
6. Feeling like a fraud despite your accomplishments
8. The ability to keep going despite challenges

Over 75% of first-generation students consider their first-gen status an important part of their identity, and more than 80% say it has significantly shaped how they feel about themselves as students at UCCS.²

STRESS-RELIEVING ACTIVITIES

WORD SEARCH

First-Gen Word Search

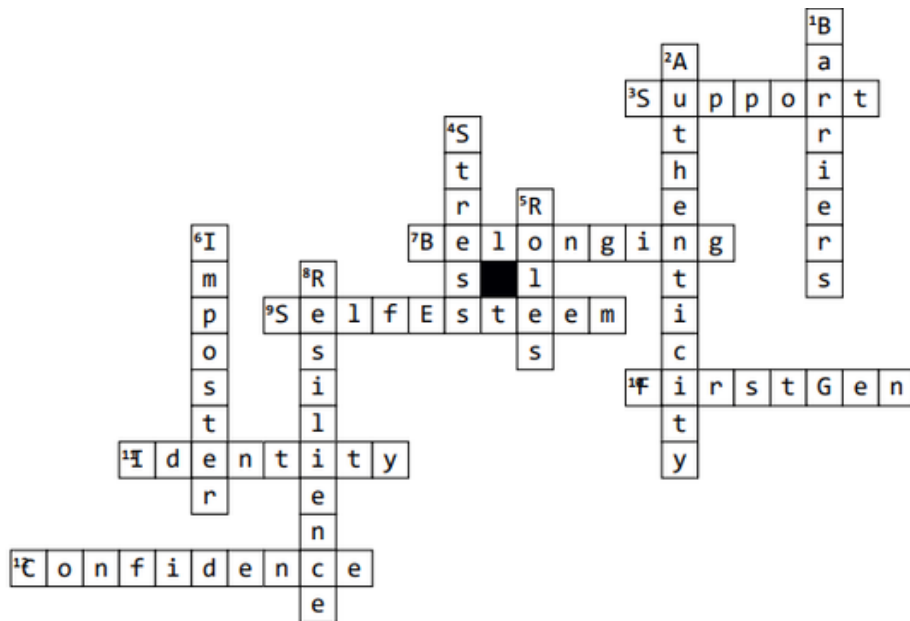
K C P E N A J C X F F X K L I F K O P K
T K F U H X C T W J K M U Q B F K X U B
U U Y T I C I T N E H T U A D K S B R L
D B F G P N L T R O P P U S B A B P P P
D C M S E L O R I B F Y Z U S R S O O E
T I D E N T I T Y A Q L Y K E Z E T S R
D K X C W Y T I N U M M O C L N L E E F
R X B N P N J B B D T R K L F E F N I E
T V P E E C A Y Q E W Q F R W G E T R C
A A Q I V D T V Z V L V R V O T S I N T
S U Y L H B J V I R I O E P R S T A D I
D N K I A P G A R G V M N L T R E L W O
R U R S U P U S I A A Q P G H I E N F N
C Y B E S F Q B B C N T A O I F M G W I
I P L R H T W O R G I W I Y S N T U P S
B N N G A X V S E U L A V O X T G X Q M
G V W T E F Y M S D M S B R N Y E P F G
I V L Y N T N C N H A B A R R I E R S B
T I U V Q N E C N E D I F N O C S W L M
E V W O M D U S E L F D O U B T E G P I

1. Identity 2. Authenticity 3. Values 4. Purpose 5. Roles 6. Belonging 7. FirstGen
8. Barriers 9. Navigation 10. Support 11. Community 12. SelfEsteem 13. Confidence
14. SelfWorth 15. Resilience 16. Growth 17. Potential 18. Imposter 19. SelfDoubt
20. Perfectionism

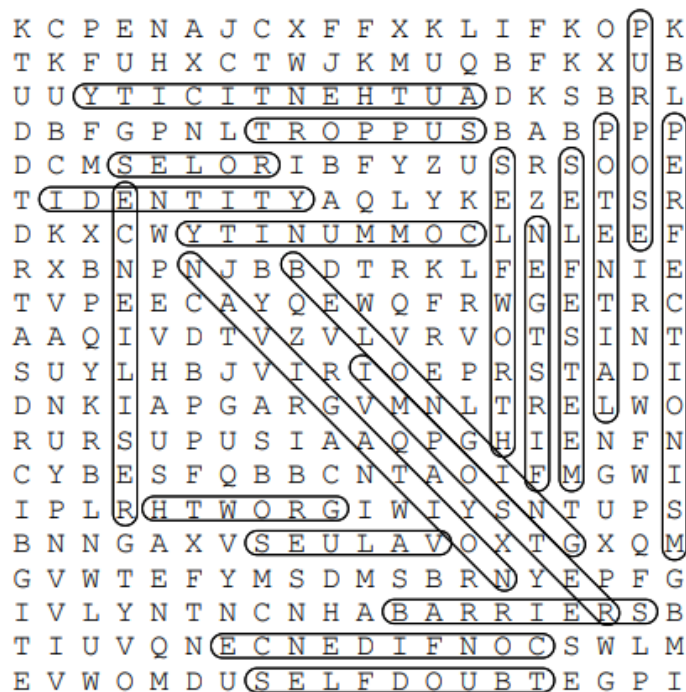
More than 68% of first-generation students at UCCS report feeling pressure to perform well as the first in their family to attend college, and 45% worry that others will eventually see them as less capable than they appear.²

PUZZLE ANSWERS

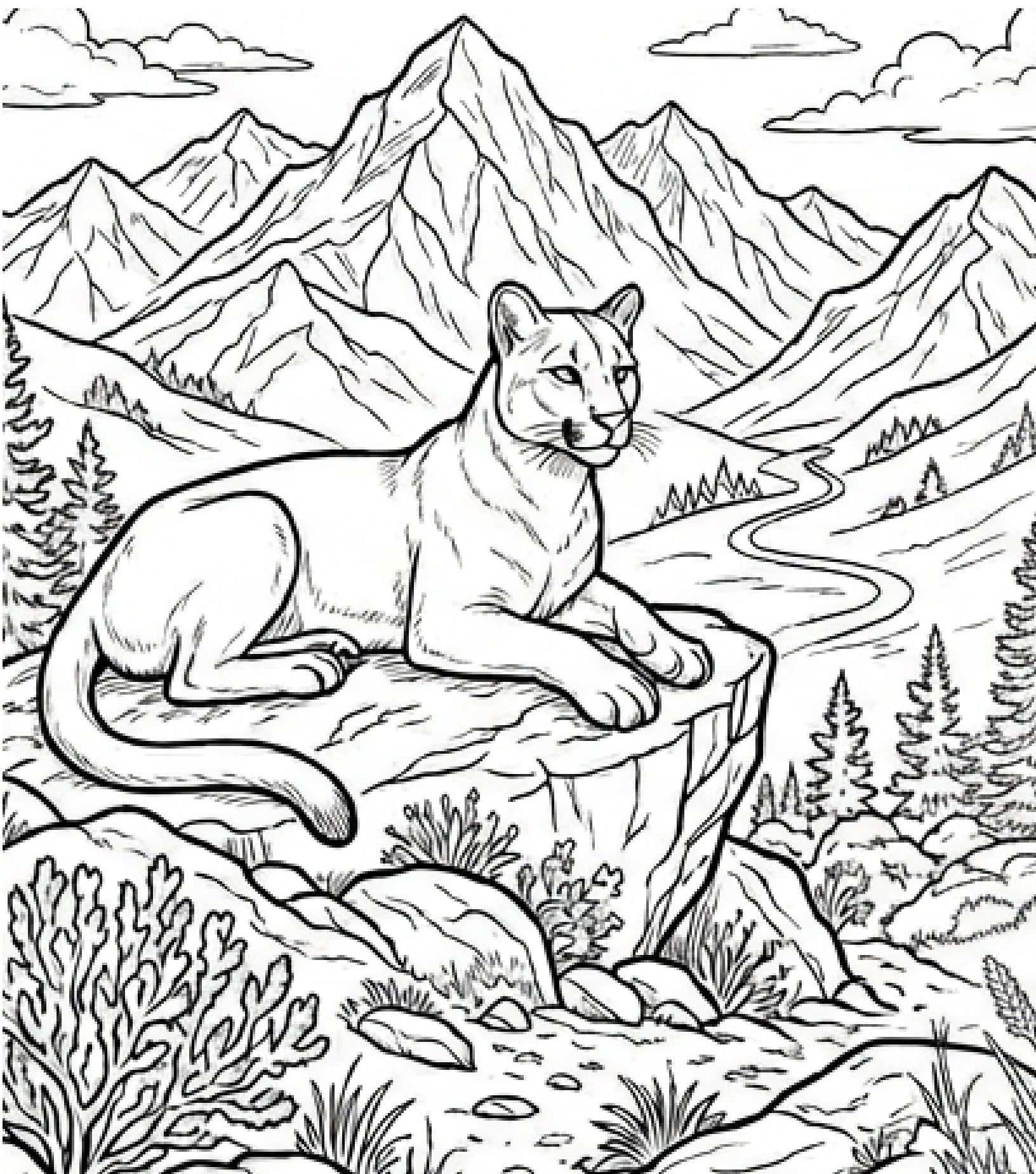
CROSSWORD PUZZLE ANSWERS



WORD SEARCH ANSWERS



STRESS-RELIEVING ACTIVITIES



STRESS-RELIEVING ACTIVITIES



STRESS-RELIEVING ACTIVITIES



WOULD YOU RATHER?

Study in a cozy, quiet room?	OR	Outside in the sunshine?
Listen to music while studying?	OR	Enjoy complete silence?
Finish your work early and relax?	OR	Take breaks while working at your own pace?
Celebrate small wins every day?	OR	One big win at the end of the week?
Have a super organized plan?	OR	Go with the flow and see how things unfold?

V. JOURNAL PROMPTS

These prompts are for you. There are no right answers. You don't have to share these with anyone. Think of this as a private check-in with yourself. A chance to slow down, reflect, and get to know what you need.

First-generation students often have strengths others don't - resilience, adaptability, perspective. What are 3 strengths YOU bring to campus?

Why are you here? What do you want your college experience to give you - not just academically or professionally, but personally?

*"You are blazing a trail for your family and future generations. Embrace your unique journey and remember that your hard work and dedication are changing the course of your family's history."
- UCCS FirstGen Story*

Self-Efficacy – Your "I can do it" muscle. It is the belief in your own ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a difficult task.⁹

JOURNAL PROMPTS

These prompts are for you. There are no right answers. You don't have to share these with anyone. Think of this as a private check-in with yourself. A chance to slow down, reflect, and get to know what you need.

What is one thing that has felt hard this semester? What has helped you cope with it, even just a little bit?

Is there something you've been needing but haven't asked for yet? What has been holding you back? What would it feel like to ask?

"You don't have to have it all figured out to move forward. Just take the next step."

- UCCS FirstGen Story

Burnout – A state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed and unable to meet constant demands.¹⁰

JOURNAL PROMPTS

These prompts are for you. There are no right answers. You don't have to share these with anyone. Think of this as a private check-in with yourself. A chance to slow down, reflect, and get to know what you need.

What is one thing (no matter how small) that you are proud of yourself for?

If you could write a letter to yourself at the beginning of college, what would you say? What do you wish you had known?

***"You can rattle the stars. You can do anything, if only you dare to try."
- UCCS FirstGen Story***

Authenticity – The process of being "true" to yourself while exploring new hobbies, career paths, and social circles. It's about finding what fits you.¹¹

VI. First-Generation College Student Success Stories

"I grew up in Hawai'i and come from a single-parent Mexican-American household. Being my mom's only child, I do feel a lot of pressure to complete and succeed in college. This pressure doesn't discourage me, as I do take pride in being my mom's kid and being a first-generation student! ... My ultimate goal is to get a good enough job to not only help me be financially stable, but to help my mom be and hopefully I can also give back to my communities financially!" - Kane, Class of 2025

"I never thought college was in the cards for me. As a first-generation student and a medical assistant for over 10 years, the idea of stepping into a classroom felt intimidating. I was scared, scared of failure, scared of not knowing how to study, and scared of being surrounded by peers half my age. For a long time, I believed that higher education wasn't something I was good enough to achieve" - Laura, Class of 2026



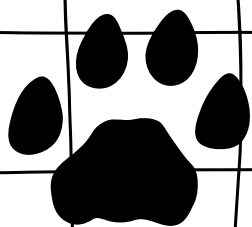
"I am the first one in my entire family, including all of my extended family, to ever graduate college! This has been a huge accomplishment that I would have never been able to accomplish without my loved ones... This has been a tough journey, especially when I needed advice and no-one in my family could give me any due to their lack of experience. I'm so grateful to have made it through these last four years and to be graduating with two bachelor degrees. Me and my future kiddos can now have opportunities that no-one else in my family has ever had." - Celyn, Class of 2025



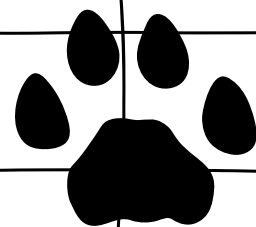
"Becoming the first person in my extended family to attain anything higher than a high school diploma has been an emotional and challenging journey, one that has brought me to the brink of giving up on numerous occasions. My mother, with unwavering determination, was able to obtain her GED, but my father's education was cut short at a mere sixth-grade level. Their sacrifices and the hardships they faced, having immigrated from Mexico to the United States, make me a first-generation American." - Maria, Class of 2026

"You are blazing a trail for your family and future generations. Embrace your unique journey and remember that your hard work and dedication are changing the course of your family's history."

"The more you feel out of place and the more people make you feel that way is where you are meant to be because you are not just opening doors for yourself, you are opening for others like you."



I am UCCS



"You're going to struggle, but it's okay. Ask for help when you need it, and give yourself grace. It's hard!"

"There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure."



REFERENCES



1. Who Are First-Generation Students? Definitions and Implications | ASCCC. (2024). Asccc.org. <https://asccc.org/content/who-are-first-generation-students-definitions-and-implications>
2. Johnston, A., & Bice, C. (2026). UCCS Spring 2026 First-Generation Student Survey [Unpublished survey].
3. Bettencourt, G. M., Mansour, K. E., Hedayet, M., Feraud-King, P. T., Stephens, K. J., Tejada, M. M., & Kimball, E. (2020). Is First-Gen an Identity? How First-Generation College Students Make Meaning of Institutional and Familial Constructions of Self. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 24(2), 271-289. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025120913302>
4. Holden, C. L., Wright, L. E., Herring, A. M., & Sims, P. L. (2021). Imposter Syndrome Among First- and Continuing-Generation College Students: The Roles of Perfectionism and Stress. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 25(4), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15210251211019379>
5. Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006>
6. Mindful Staff. (2020, July 8). What is Mindfulness? Mindful. <https://www.mindful.org/what-is-mindfulness/>
7. University of New Hampshire. (2021, March 19). What is grounding. Psychological & Counseling Services. <https://www.unh.edu/pacs/what-grounding>
8. Morin, A. (2024, December 5). How cognitive reframing works. Verywell Mind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/reframing-defined-2610419>
9. Carey, M. P., & Forsyth, A. D. (2009). Self-Efficacy Teaching Tip Sheet. American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/pi/aids/resources/education/self-efficacy>
10. American Psychological Association. (2018, April 19). APA Dictionary of Psychology. Dictionary.apa.org. <https://dictionary.apa.org/burnout>
11. Psychology Today. (2020). Authenticity. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/authenticity>

THANK YOU!

Thank you for being part of the First2Go community and letting us be part of your journey. This Survival Guide was created for you, but it's your strength and determination that truly bring it to life.

We're proud of you for showing up and pushing through challenges. Remember, you don't have to do this alone. There's a whole community here to support you.

You Are Already a First2Go Success Story!

Your journey matters, and it can inspire others more than you know. Look at the First2Go Instagram to find stories of other first-generation students. Consider sharing your own story to be featured through MOSAIC or First2Go.



UCCS MOSAIC Website



**First-Gen Survival
Guide Online Version**



**UCCS First2Go
Instagram**



CONTACT US

UC Room 110 & Copper House 9202
first2go@uccs.edu
(719) 255-3457

**"I can be the first to truly elevate my family -- financially,
academically, and emotionally" - UCCS First-Gen Student**