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## University of Miami Receives First Forward Designation; National Honor for Commitment to First-generation Student Success

**Miami, FL (May 2, 2019)** - The Center for First-generation Student Success, an initiative of NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education and The Suder Foundation, recently announced their inaugural cohort of First Forward Institutions. The First Forward designation recognizes institutions of higher education who have demonstrated a commitment to improving experiences and advancing outcomes of first-generation college students. Selected institutions receive professional development, community-building experiences, and a first look at the Center’s research and resources.

Empower Me First (EMF), a unit in Office of Academic Enhancement, has truly taken off in the last three years to create an environment where our first-generation and historically underrepresented students are provided with academic advocacy and support, mentorship, resource referral and programmatic outreach. In collaboration with campus partners, the University of Miami is making strides in better supporting our first-generation students in a successful collegiate and post-collegiate experience. Whitley Johnson, Senior Academic Advisor for Diversity and inclusion serves as a supplemental advisor for over 1,700 undergraduate, first-generation students.

“The Center is so pleased to welcome the University of Miami into our inaugural cohort of First Forward institutions. Through the application process, it was evident that University of Miami is not only taking steps to serve first-generation students but is prepared to make a long-term commitment and employ strategies for significant scaling and important advances in the future,” said Dr. Sarah E. Whitley, senior director of the Center for First-generation Student Success.

“It has been an honor to create and implement Empower Me First and work with colleagues university-wide to make sure our students are celebrated and that they have the support they need to maximize opportunities and experiences of their choice! Building a relationship with our students, has truly impacted me as an educator and advisor. I am so thrilled to represent the university as a part of the inaugural First Forward cohort, with my colleague, Edward Cruz, Director for Career Education at the university’s Toppel Career Center.”

As a First Forward Institution, select faculty and staff will be afforded multiple opportunities to engage with peer and aspirational institutions who are also creating environments that improve the experiences and outcomes of first-generation students. Selected institutions will send representatives to the First Forward

Workshop to be held in Orlando in June and will participate in monthly phone calls, virtual professional development, goal setting, blog development, annual reporting, and more. After two successful years in the program, institutions are eligible to apply for the Advisory leadership designation.

“First Forward is an exciting opportunity for University of Miami to join an elite community of professionals prepared to share evidence-based practices and resources, troubleshoot challenges, generate knowledge, and continue to advance the success of first-generation students across the country. We are excited to see a groundswell of activity from the First Forward cohort and know University of Miami will be a significant contributor,” offered Dr. Kevin Kruger, president of NASPA.

To learn more about first-generation efforts at University of Miami, visit <https://oae.miami.edu/units/empower-me-first>. To learn more about the Center for First-generation Student Success, visit [firstgen.naspa.org](http://firstgen.naspa.org).

*NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education is the leading association for the advancement, health, and sustainability of the student affairs profession. Its work provides high-quality professional development, advocacy, and research for 15,000 members in all 50 states, 25 countries, and 8 U.S. territories. Visit [naspa.org](http://naspa.org) for more information.*

*The Center for First-generation Student Success is the premier source of evidence-based practices, professional development, and knowledge creation for the higher education community to advance the success of first-generation students. Through four strategic priority areas, the Center drives higher education innovation and advocacy for first-generation student success.*

