

Subject: Demands for Enhancing Support and Funding for First-Generation College Students

Dear Pitzer College Administration,

We, the FirstGen Club at Pitzer College, **demand immediate action** to address the lack of support and funding for first-generation college students at our institution that significantly hinders our academic and personal success. By effectively addressing these critical issues, we firmly believe that we can cultivate a more inclusive and supportive environment for all first-gen students. During the recent commencement, Interim President Jill Klein highlighted the fact that 14% of Pitzer's student population consists of First Generation students; however, it is disheartening to observe the insufficient academic and institutional support provided by the First Gen Program. It is worth noting the inspiring words of our commencement speaker, Nadia Murad, who stated, "...some of the so-called authorities only saw me as a challenge to their own power. They did everything to show me that I was out of my depth. My achievements and my history meant nothing to these people.... I didn't listen. I didn't give up. I was persistent." In light of these circumstances, we issue this demand as our requests for meetings with the relevant faculty parties have been met with a lack of urgency and accountability. Within this statement, you will find the First Gen Club's frustrations with the First Gen Program, followed by our specific demands for necessary changes.

First and foremost, we were disheartened to learn that our two dedicated First Gen Program Interns, who have been an invaluable asset to our community, were recently terminated due to insufficient funding within the First Gen Program. The timing and manner of this decision, conveyed via email during finals week, have only exacerbated our collective frustration and disappointment. **We firmly believe that this incident sends a message to the first-gen student community at Pitzer College that our needs are not prioritized and that we are deemed expendable in the face of performativity.** Pitzer College uses First Gen students to enhance their reputation and make the college appear more inclusive and supportive when they win awards, fellowships, fullbrights, etc...however, when it comes to supporting the vocalized concerns of academically struggling first-generation students, there is often nothing but silence. Throughout the year, our terminated interns consistently emphasized the importance of establishing a formal budget for the First Gen Program during their biweekly meetings. However, these meetings were frequently canceled, and communication was predominantly limited to email exchanges. The interns had to continuously request meetings, making it evident that there were communication barriers and a lack of support from the program to begin with. The First Gen Interns from the previous year shared the same frustrations around the lack of transparency, no willingness to collaborate, and having little to no voice in how the program operated. **We question why a program designed to hold the institution accountable for supporting its growing first-gen population has not received substantial funding.** While we appreciate the senior gifts, including the recent class of 2023 senior gift, we seek clarity regarding additional financial contributions from the college. If the program's funding is indeed insufficient, it cannot sustainably continue to fully support first-gen students through mere donations. Therefore, we strongly urge Pitzer College to allocate more funding to the First Gen Program and ensure transparent budgeting practices.

In addition to addressing the budgetary concerns, we believe that restructuring the program is imperative to improve collaboration, communication, and support for first-gen students. We would like to acknowledge the invaluable support we have received from a dedicated OSA staff member who has

consistently championed the needs of first-gen students. Their commitment and understanding of our unique challenges has been instrumental in fostering a sense of belonging and facilitating our personal growth. In light of their outstanding contributions, **we demand for the inclusion of staff members in the First Gen program's leadership to ensure comprehensive support and guidance for first-gen students. Therefore, we propose the establishment of a solidified team that includes both first-gen interns, a faculty member and an Office of Student Affairs (OSA) staff chosen by the students.** This team will work together to enhance the program, facilitate effective communication, and ensure that the needs of first-gen students are met comprehensively.

It is important to highlight that our actions are driven by the necessity to advocate for ourselves and for the fair treatment of our interns. The FirstGen Club was established precisely because many students felt unsupported by the existing program, and it is disheartening to see that we are still grappling with the same challenges after almost a decade. Nevertheless, we take pride in the strong community we have built, providing valuable resources and personal connections to support one another on our college journey. However, **until Pitzer College and the First Gen Program restructure to prioritize the needs of first-gen students, we must regretfully announce our discontinuation of participation with the program.**

With the aim of resolving these pressing issues and continuing our partnership, we request the following actions be taken:

1. Immediately reinstate the First Gen Interns to their paid positions.
2. Remove Shelva Paulse as the current First Gen Program advisor and allow the First Gen Club President and Vice President to select the advisor(s) for the program.
3. Appoint a faculty member and an OSA staff member of our choosing to jointly oversee the First Gen Program, promoting collaboration and effective communication.
4. Provide budget transparency, including a comprehensive breakdown of funding sources such as senior gifts, donations, and allocated funds.
5. Allocate a commitment of \$10,000 annually from the college to the First Gen Program ensuring the sustainability of its support services. These funds should focus on retention, academic support, and sense of belonging for the First Gen Community by staff and faculty.

We firmly believe that implementing these requests is crucial for fostering a positive, successful and collaborative relationship between the First Gen Program and the FirstGen Club. By reinstating the First Gen Interns, involving the club in selecting advisors, and appointing both faculty and OSA staff members, we can establish a framework that values the input and experiences of first-gen students. Additionally, ensuring budget transparency and committing adequate funding demonstrates a genuine commitment to supporting our community. Only through these measures can we build a strong partnership that empowers and uplifts first-gen students, fostering an environment of trust, respect, and mutual support.

We ask that Pitzer College and the Faculty tied to the First Gen Program begin to fight with us and to fight for us. This should not be a student vs faculty issue. It's within its core a fight for the success of first-generation students. We expect a response to work on an action plan together by June 1st.

With frustration,
Pitzer College First Gen Club

