

# Help First-Generation Students Thrive

## THE CHALLENGE

Provide low-income and first-generation students the support to make ends meet and feel like they belong in college.

## THE APPROACH

Develop a program that provides social and financial resources, mentorships, and career development.

## THE RESULT

The students feel supported and valued, and graduate at slightly higher than the average rate.



GEORGETOWN U.

Students participate in a team-building activity as part of the Georgetown Scholarship Program, which provides support for low-income and first-generation students.

**W**HEN CHRIS FISK was admitted to Georgetown University, he was ecstatic. A Miami native, Fisk grew up in a low-income household with his mother and grandmother, neither of whom had attended college.

The transition into his freshman year was a shock.

When he arrived at Georgetown, in 2013, Fisk found himself surrounded by peers who seemed to have much stronger social connections and finances than he did, he says.

But the Georgetown Scholarship Program, founded in 2004 to provide financial and social support, as well as career development to low-income and first-generation students, helped him close some of those gaps. A scholarship awarded at admission serves as a “passport” into the program, but its services and resources are open to anyone, says Missy Foy, the program’s director. Today it serves more than 650 undergraduates.

Though Georgetown meets all demonstrated financial need of the students it admits, the program helps them with expenses that can pop up around the margins. Its “necessity fund” provides money for groceries, a winter coat, or medical bills. It can also

pay for students to travel home and offers a place to stay if they don’t have a stable living situation.

Beyond money, the program aims to help students like Fisk feel like they belong on a campus where many classmates are more affluent. For example, if a student’s family can’t come on move-in day, local alumni will show up at the airport, clad in Georgetown apparel, to greet the student and help set up his or her dorm room. The program also matches students with alumni and peer mentors and gives them career resources.

The program is funded by the university, but several efforts, like the necessity fund, are supported solely by donations, Foy says. Many ideas come from the students themselves, she says, and Fisk describes that as the heart of the program’s success.

Fisk, who served on the program’s student board, says the program gave him the support he needed to be proud of his background and to thrive. By senior year, he was vice president of the university’s student body.

The program helps students all the way through to graduation, and 96 percent of them finish in six years, a rate slightly above that for all students.