

PRACTICES EXCHANGE

NEWSLETTER

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<https://yeswemustcoalition.org>

Issue 58

Growing the Coalition If you know a school that should be a member of the Yes We Must Coalition, please connect us with them. Growing numbers make us stronger in the work we do together and the voice we raise on behalf of low-income students. Please get in touch with Gloria Nemerowicz, President, at glorianemerowicz@yeswemustcoalition.org.

YWMC MEMBER SHOWCASE: **Clafin University**



Founded in 1869, **Clafin University** is the oldest historically black university in South Carolina. Nestled in the heart of Orangeburg, South Carolina, Clafin is a cornerstone of the community and has earned a reputation for academic excellence. More recently, Clafin has been a *U.S. News & Report* Top 10 HBCU for 13 consecutive years.

Born in the crucible of the Reconstruction Era, Clafin was established with a radical vision to offer higher education to all, regardless of race or class. This commitment to equality and social justice continues to guide Clafin and resonates in our academic programs, community outreach, and the inclusive, empowering environment we cultivate. Clafin was a member of the Yes We Must Coalition from 2016 through 2021 and rejoined in 2022.

Clafin's academic programs span a wide range of disciplines, tailored to meet the evolving needs of the 21st-century job market. The School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics offers pioneering courses in biotechnology, climate change, computer science, and cybersecurity; the

School of Business is noted for its MBA program and emphasis on ethical leadership and entrepreneurship; and the School of Humanities and Social Sciences is renowned for its rigorous liberal arts programs and commitment to fostering critical thinking and social responsibility.



Home to a vibrant and diverse student body of nearly 2000, Clafin students represent 44 states and 21 countries. Uniting our students are a shared commitment to personal and professional development and a spirit of community engagement. Students benefit from the University's collaborations with local businesses, healthcare facilities, and non-profit organizations and gain real-world experience and networking opportunities as a result of these connections. In addition, Orangeburg's rich history, cultural diversity, and Southern charm enrich the college experience beyond the classroom.

All freshmen and sophomores are required to complete a service learning and community service component for graduation. Clafin's Center for Social Justice, established in 2020, serves as a hub for community engagement, providing opportunities for students to make a tangible local impact and, along with faculty and staff, to advocate against social injustices in order to create significant change locally, nationally and world-wide. As part of the Center for Social Justice and in collaboration with the South Carolina Department of Corrections, Clafin offers a Pathways from Prison Program. This program, established through the Second Chance Pell Grant Pilot Program, provides incarcerated individuals in South Carolina access to Clafin's academic programs and the opportunity to earn certificate credentials as well as bachelor degrees in criminal justice, psychology and organizational management.

Clafin University is more than just an institution; it's a family and a vibrant community committed to nurturing leaders and pioneers. Our legacy is reflected in the successful alumni we produce, the positive change we inspire, and the lasting impact we make in our community. As we look to the future, we remain committed to our founding principles of equity and social justice while at the same time embracing innovation and inclusivity.

For more information, please contact Teresa Hardee, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, at thardee@clafin.edu.

Institutional Resources/Practices

First Generation Initiative at New York Institute of Technology

First-generation students come to college with distinct, transferable skills and talents such as resilience, confidence, and independence. However, institutional support and guidance are necessary to assist these students in navigating the academic, social, and personal nuances of the higher education experience (Whitley & Tymiak, 2022). First-generation students comprise 28% of the **New York Institute of Technology** undergraduate population and are recognized, empowered, and celebrated by a First-Generation Student Initiative begun in 2019.

Researchers have found that when compared to their peers, first-generation students encounter unique and higher instances of barriers that can impact one's ability to graduate (Klonowski & Peralta, 2017). These might include lack of familial support or understanding of their degree pursuit; not understanding key academic, financial, and disciplinary terms, policies, and processes used in higher education settings; possessing socio-economic and housing concerns; and experiencing imposter syndrome. Acknowledging these challenges, New York Tech's First-Generation Student Initiative has implemented several resources and events to support first-generation students.

Components include:

- Peer Success Guides (PSGs) who are NYIT students in their sophomore, junior and senior years who reach out to first-generation students even before the start of their first semester to provide social support, guidance and information about services and resources.
- First-generation student sessions held at New Student Orientation
- Designated Financial Aid Point-of-Contact for first-generation students
- Individualized meetings to guide first-generation students through the admission process
- Personalized First-Year Advisors who provide holistic support to new incoming students tailored to their individual circumstances and needs
- The *My Guide to Success* course, which reviews several student success topics specifically tailored to teach new students the skills that will help them be successful in college
- Panels on a variety of topics that pertain to the first-generation student experience
- Creation of a First-Generation Student Club
- In-person and virtual informational and celebratory events during National First-Generation Student Day on November 8
- A description of first-generation students included on syllabi and on the NYIT website accompanied by university-offered student support resources
- NYIT's *First Generation LibGuide*, a library guide designed to assist students, faculty and staff build awareness and understanding of the first-generation student experience through books and articles recommended by students, faculty and staff
- Active social media presence (@newyorktechfirstgen on Instagram)
- Dedicated email correspondence to first-generation students from Student Engagement and Development with encouraging messaging, videos, and upcoming events, etc.

The First-Generation Initiative aligns with NYIT's institutional five-year strategic action plan that emphasizes equity as a core theme to increase student success. Within the strategic plan there are several strategies that will further support first-generation college students, as the plan calls on the NYIT community to identify and address barriers to student persistence, create enhanced and specialized orientation experiences for students, expand peer guides, develop mentorship programs and on-campus jobs, and create campus experiences and spaces that build community. These efforts, coupled with the existence of our newly established Office of Diversity, Equity and Belonging, will ensure that we continue to assess and respond to the needs and interests of our first-generation students as they work towards successful degree completion. For more information, please contact Tiffani Hinds, Associate Provost for Student Engagement and Development, at tblake@nyit.edu.

References:

Peralta, K. & Klonowski, M. (2017, May) *Examining Conceptual and Operational Definitions of "First-Generation College Student" in Research on Retention*. ProQuest.

Journal of College Student Development, 58(4) 630–636.

Go to article: <<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2008061435?parentSessionId=Bv3UhHCfgwz%2FfN2Qo%2FCOhrRm6%2BETG%2BRdrfrn3tAxxSg%3D&parentSessionId=ZqZARd1LEUwDBJ%2B8qwQ0d33UCI6DVQ%2FYWjGBNZ4ltss%3D>>

Whitley, S. & Tymiak, A. (2022, July 19). *The Support Your First-Generation Students Need to Be Successful*. Harvard Business Publishing/Education.

Go to article: <https://hbsp.harvard.edu/inspiring-minds/the-support-your-first-generation-students-need-to-be-successful/?icid=top_nav>

Submissions for Future Issues

YWMC members are encouraged to submit examples of policies, practices and/or resources that you have found to be effective in promoting student success and that you would like to share with your YWMC colleagues. We are particularly interested in examples of how members are addressing issues of social and racial justice. Send ideas for the newsletter to Barbara Kirby, Operations Manager, barbarakirby@yeswemustcoalition.org.