



I AM FIRST MENTOR HANDBOOK



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Welcome Letter

Dear Mentors,

On behalf of the I Am First Program; we would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to you for participating in our mentorship program. Your willingness to share your experiences, knowledge, and guidance will make a big difference in our students' lives. As a mentor, you will play a crucial role in helping them navigate the challenges of higher education, develop their academic and professional skills, and build a strong sense of belonging on campus.

Our program is designed to provide first-generation students with the support they need to thrive academically and personally. By connecting with you, they will gain access to a wealth of experience and insight and have a trusted advisor to turn to for support and encouragement.

The I Am First program is rooted in the Cal Poly Pomona philosophy of “Become by Doing.” Just as our university’s polytechnic approach emphasizes hands-on learning, this program emphasizes action, mentorship, and lived experience. By guiding and encouraging first-generation students, you help transform knowledge and foster confidence, resilience, and community.

This handbook summarizes the goals of the I Am First program and highlights key campus resources to guide you as you embark on this mentorship journey. We are excited to have you on board and look forward to seeing the positive impact you will have.

Go Broncos!

Sincerely,

Dr. Dora Lee

Assistant Vice President of Academic Engagement & Success
Office of Student Success



Program Contact Information

Professional Staff:



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Office Location & Hours:

Student Services Building (SSB) Bldg. 121, East, 1st Floor Orange Counter

Website:

<https://www.cpp.edu/studentsuccess/oss/i-am-first/index.shtml>

Social Media:

Instagram: @iamfirstcpp

About the Program

Overview:

The I Am First program at Cal Poly Pomona celebrates and supports our first-generation community of students, faculty, and staff. What began as a visibility campaign has grown into a comprehensive program that fosters connection, mentorship, and belonging. At its core, I Am First empowers first-generation Broncos to navigate college with confidence, build meaningful relationships, and pursue their academic and career goals while knowing they are not alone.

Mission:

The I Am First program at Cal Poly Pomona celebrates and empowers first-generation Broncos by fostering belonging, visibility, and success. Through mentorship, community, and shared experiences, we provide guidance and support that help students navigate college with confidence and pursue their academic, personal, and career goals.

Vision:

We envision a campus where first-generation students, faculty, and staff are visible, valued, and thriving. I Am First seeks to build a culture of connection and opportunity in which every first-generation Bronco feels proud of their identity and inspired to achieve and to pave the way for future generations.

Program Process:

Prospective mentors and mentees are recruited early in the fall semester by submitting an Interest Form. After completing the application, the I Am First staff carefully reviews submissions and pairs mentors and mentees based on shared experiences, interests, and goals.

Once matched, both mentors and mentees participate in mandatory onboarding and training sessions to ensure a strong start. Upon completion of training, mentors commit to supporting their assigned mentee(s) throughout the academic year (October 2025 – May 2026).

Throughout the year, the program provides workshops and events designed for mentors and mentees to attend together. These opportunities strengthen relationships, build skills, and foster a supportive community rooted in the Cal Poly Pomona philosophy of “Become by Doing.”

Important Program Dates:

Fall 2025

- I Am First Mentor Onboarding (Mandatory to attend one)
 - Monday, September 29, 2025 (Noon-1PM)
 - Location: Student Services Building (SSB) 121-MPR1967
 - Thursday, October 30, 2025 (Noon-1PM)
 - Location: Student Services Building (SSB) 121-MPR1967 and Online
- CPP First-Gen Week: November 3-7, 2025
 - Kick-Off Celebration: Tuesday, November 4, 2025 (11AM-2PM)
 - Location: University Park
 - First-Gen on Tap: Wednesday, November 5, 2025 (5-7 PM)
 - Location: Innovation Brew Works
 - Fireside Chat with Smart Girl Author La'Tonya Rease Miles: Thursday, November 6, 2025 (Noon-1 PM)
 - Location: Ursa Minor

Spring 2026

- Spring First-Gen on Tap: Wednesday, April 5, 2026 (5-7 PM)
 - Location: Innovation Brew Works
- End-Of-Program Celebration: Monday, April 28, 2025 (Noon-1 PM)
 - Location: TBD

Mentor Support

Benefits of Being a Mentor:

Mentorship is a rewarding experience that allows you to make a lasting impact by sharing your knowledge and guiding a student's growth. It is also a reciprocal process: while mentees gain confidence, skills, and belonging, mentors also benefit by strengthening their leadership, expanding their own perspectives, and giving back to the campus community.

At Cal Poly Pomona, mentorship reflects our philosophy of "Become by Doing." By engaging directly with first-generation students, mentors help transform learning into action, fostering resilience, confidence, and a culture of care across our campus.

Your Role as a Mentor:

As a mentor, you provide more than advice! You create opportunities, open doors, and build relationships that matter. Some of the ways mentors support mentees include:

- Expanding students' professional networks
- Exploring career paths with an understanding guide
- Offering dedicated advocacy for students' college journeys
- Building trusted, lasting relationships
- Providing personalized guidance from the lens of experience, especially as a first-generation graduate

Commitment:

Mentors commit to supporting their mentees throughout the academic year. This commitment means being consistent, approachable, and proactive, and showing up not just as a guide, but as a partner in growth.

Ways to Support and Engage Your Mentee:

Here are some meaningful areas where mentors can support their mentees, along with suggested activities to foster growth and connection:

Academic & Career Development

- Explore career paths and review resumes/CVs or cover letters together
- Facilitate a job shadow day or discuss internship opportunities
- Attend a professional workshop or campus career event together
- Reflect on academic progress and challenges, including classes, labs, or internships

Navigating College Life

- Help balance the demands of school, work, and family
- Discuss strategies for stress and time management
- Talk through family expectations and how they intersect with college life
- Provide emotional and social support through regular check-ins

Building Connection & Confidence

- Share your own first-gen story to foster connection
- Establish trust and rapport by meeting consistently and being present
- Create a vision board or goal-setting plan together

Referring a Student of Concern:

As a mentor, you play an essential role in recognizing when a student may need additional support. Students may experience academic, personal, or financial challenges that impact their well-being and success. The Broncos Care Center provides a confidential referral process that allows mentors, faculty, and staff to connect students with appropriate resources and professional support.

When to Refer a Student

- Clear signs of distress
- Violent or aggressive behavior
- Financial or housing insecurity
- Observed self-injurious behavior
- Erratic, disruptive, or self-harming behaviors.
- Communications (written or verbal) that convey clear intentions to harm self or others

How to Submit a Referral

If you are concerned about a student, you can complete a confidential referral form through the Broncos Care Center. Once submitted, trained staff will review the concern, reach out to the student, and provide the appropriate support. This process ensures students receive timely, compassionate, and holistic care.

To submit a referral, visit the Broncos Care Center Refer-a-Student page:

<https://www.cpp.edu/bronscarecenter/refer-a-student.shtml>

Closing Thought:

Being a mentor means leading by example and learning alongside your mentee. Together, you not only help shape their path at Cal Poly Pomona, but you also strengthen your own ability to lead, inspire, and create impact embodying the spirit of “Become by Doing.”

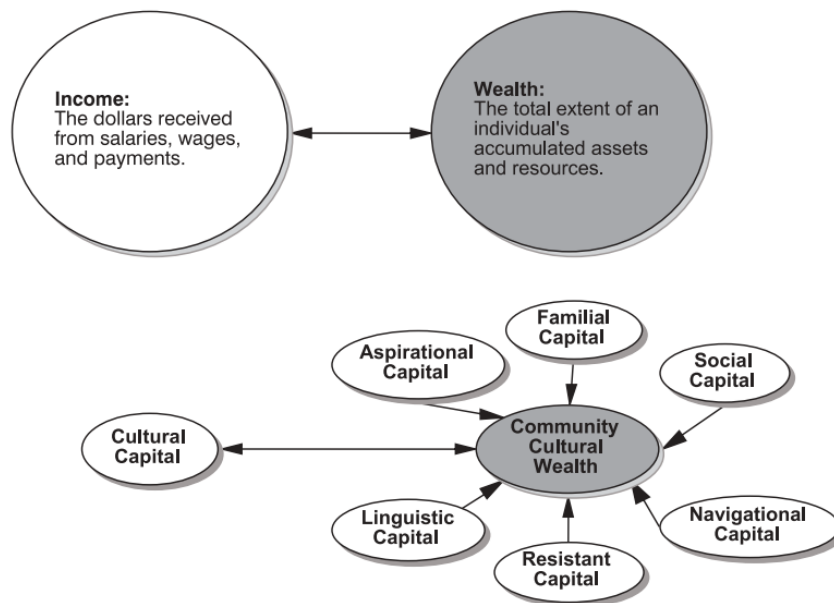
If you and your mentee do not share a career path, focus on the shared first-generation experience, using Community Cultural Wealth to highlight the strengths and resilience students bring to navigating higher education.

Cultural Wealth, Belonging, and Navigating Challenges in College

Community Cultural Wealth:

First-generation college students possess a range of intersecting identities along with skills that are not always recognized or valued by traditional norms and ideologies. At Cal Poly Pomona, we acknowledge the unique strengths and skills that first-generation students bring to our community. One framework that helps us to understand is Tara J. Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Model, which identifies the following unique forms of capital that students possess:

- Social Capital
- Familial Capital
- Cultural Capital
- Linguistic Capital
- Resistance Capital
- Aspirational Capital
- Navigational Capital



The Community Cultural Wealth Model offers an asset-based perspective, emphasizing the rich cultural knowledge that first-generation college students bring to their educational experience. Our role is to validate these contributions and provide additional support to help them advance to the next stage of their lives.

Imposter Syndrome/Phenomenon:

Due to traditional norms and stereotypes, many students (including those who are first-generation) may struggle to feel seen or that they truly belong on a college campus. This experience can manifest as Imposter Syndrome (also referred to as the Imposter Phenomenon), a psychological pattern in which individuals doubt their own worth and

accomplishments. Students experiencing imposter syndrome often attribute their success to external factors such as luck, timing, or charm rather than their abilities (Bernard et al., 2017; Holden et al., 2021; Wright-Mair et al., 2023).

For first-generation college students in particular, the challenges of navigating multiple identities and adapting to unfamiliar college norms can intensify feelings of imposter syndrome. This can sometimes result in harmful behaviors or overcompensation as they attempt to prove their place in higher education (Wright-Mair et al., 2023).

Sense of Belonging:

The I Am First Program is committed to fostering a strong sense of belonging and community at Cal Poly Pomona by creating an environment that is inclusive, supportive, and safe for all students, especially first-generation college students. Research highlights that a sense of belonging is one of the strongest predictors of student persistence and academic success (Marrun, 2018). Belonging can be cultivated through both formal and informal interactions that validate students' experiences inside and outside the classroom, easing their transition to college.

By connecting students with faculty or staff mentors who have navigated the four-year college journey themselves, the program validates students' higher education paths while also providing critical guidance and support. This mentorship helps students overcome challenges, build confidence, and feel part of a community — factors that significantly enhance their academic performance and overall college experience.

Support for First-Generation Students

FERPA & Confidentiality:

As a mentor, you will develop relationships of trust with students, and they may feel comfortable sharing personal information with you that they would not disclose to others. It is essential to be mindful of your responsibilities as a mandated reporter and to understand both the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and mandated reporter policies. These regulations ensure that student information is handled appropriately and ethically. College students have the right to control the disclosure of their education records, to review those records, and to request amendments if needed. Familiarity with these policies will help you protect student privacy while fulfilling your professional obligations.

Guidelines and Resources for Managing and De-escalating Emotional Student Interactions:

In a higher education setting, it is important to recognize the emotional and physical states students may bring to a conversation. Depending on their circumstances, students may appear stressed, impatient, irritable, or even hostile. Understanding how to respond with patience and professionalism can foster trust and create a supportive environment. Resources and training are available to help mentors manage and de-escalate challenging interactions while maintaining student dignity and safety.

Reporting a Problem:

Supporting a diverse student population can bring complex challenges, and the best course of action is not always clear. Using the proper campus resources and reporting channels ensures concerns are addressed quickly and effectively, with a resource guide available to connect you to the right offices.

Using the HALT Framework

The HALT acronym is a practical tool for mentors to use during challenging student interactions. It serves as a reminder that unmet basic needs can strongly influence behavior, focus, and well-being. By pausing and reflecting on HALT, mentors can respond with greater empathy and guide students in recognizing and addressing these needs.

H – Hungry: Unmet nutritional needs can affect mood, concentration, and energy levels.

A – Angry: Feelings of frustration or unresolved conflict may influence reactions.

L – Lonely: A lack of connection or support can lead to isolation and disengagement.

T – Tired: Fatigue can impair clear thinking, patience, and decision-making.

Encouraging students to reflect on HALT can help identify underlying needs, improve communication, and create more positive and productive mentoring interactions.

First Meeting Checklist for Mentors

Preparing to Meet Your Mentee

- Send a brief email introducing yourself.
- Reflect on your own experiences and strengths and how they may contribute to the relationship.
- Consider what you would like to gain from the mentoring relationship. Remember, mentoring is a two-way exchange.

During Your First Meeting

- Establish parameters:
 - How often will you meet?
 - What platform will you use? (in-person, Zoom, etc.)
- Share your “why” for mentoring and invite your mentee to share theirs.
- Ask open-ended questions to encourage reflection and dialogue. *Examples include:*
 - What habits have helped you succeed?
 - What habits hinder your growth?
 - What are your strengths, and how do you apply them at school or work?
 - What are your five-year goals? Why are these important to you?
 - Describe a time you faced a challenge. How did you navigate it?
 - What is something you enjoy doing but do not consider yourself good at? Why do you still enjoy it?
 - How do you prefer to give and receive feedback?
 - What are you hoping to learn from this mentorship experience?

After Your First Meeting

- Ask your mentee for feedback on the meeting.
- Collaboratively manage and plan your mentoring relationship by:
 - Setting goals and expectations.
 - Agree on how you will share information and set boundaries.
 - Establishing a clear structure and objectives for the relationship.
- Actively listen and ask thoughtful questions to deepen understanding.
- Share your own stories and experiences to build trust and connection.
- Plan and schedule future meetings (both formal and informal).
- Support your mentee in developing a plan for their time in college and establish how you will follow up on progress together.

Learning Opportunity: Supporting Students Who Do Not Engage

If your mentee is not showing up or responding, send a friendly check-in and offer support. If the issue continues, contact the I Am First Coordinator for guidance.

Campus Resources

Our campus partners provide resources designed to support first-generation students while understanding their unique experiences. Connecting mentees to these offices helps foster belonging and promotes student success.

Academic Support:

Bronco Advising Center (BAC)

The Bronco Advising Center (BAC) at Cal Poly Pomona serves as the university's central academic advising center, accessible to all students. It provides comprehensive support, including guidance on using academic planning tools, answering general advising questions, assisting with registration, and offering advice on financial aid and student account services. Think of it as your go-to resource for all advising needs.

Location: Building 121, Floor 1 (Blue Counter)

Website: <https://www.cpp.edu/studentsuccess/bronco-advising-center/>

Email: bac@cpp.edu

Phone Number: (909) 869-2600

The McNair Scholars Program

The McNair Scholars Program is dedicated to preparing eligible undergraduate students for successful doctoral studies by providing a robust framework of support and development. The program fosters student achievement through a variety of initiatives, including hands-on research opportunities, personalized faculty mentorship, and a diverse array of skill-building workshops. With a primary focus on increasing the representation of first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students in PhD programs, the McNair Scholars Program aims to broaden access to advanced academic careers. By cultivating a diverse pipeline of future scholars, the program plays a vital role in enriching the academic community and enhancing diversity among faculty at higher education institutions across the nation.

Location: Building 8, Room 306

Website: <https://www.cpp.edu/mcnair/>

Email: mcnair@cpp.edu

Phone Number: (909) 869 – 3381

Male Success initiatives (MSI)

The Male Success Initiative Program (MSI) is designed to support and empower male students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds. The program offers a range of resources and services aimed at enhancing academic achievement, personal development, and overall success. Key components include mentorship opportunities, academic support, career planning, and workshops focused on leadership and personal growth. By addressing the unique challenges faced by male students and providing tailored support, the program aims to improve retention rates and foster a more inclusive and successful educational experience.

Location: Building 95, Room 409
Website: <https://www.cpp.edu/msi/>
Email: msi@cpp.edu
Phone Number: N/A

Maximizing Engineering Potential (MEP)/ Women in Science and Engineering Program (WiSE)

The Maximizing Engineering Potential (MEP) program was created to support underrepresented minority, women, low-income, and first-generation engineering students for successful careers and leadership roles. By providing targeted support and resources, MEP equips students with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate lifelong intellectual, socio-ethical, and career challenges. MEP's mission is to cultivate a diverse cohort of engineers who are not only capable professionals but also visionary leaders ready to make a meaningful impact in their fields and communities.

Location: Building 9, Room 153
Website: <https://www.cpp.edu/engineering/mep/>
Email: mep@cpp.edu
Phone Number: (909) 869-2482

Renaissance Scholars (RS)

The Renaissance Scholars (RS) program supports the success of current and former foster youth at Cal Poly Pomona, across both undergraduate and graduate levels. The program provides a comprehensive range of services designed to foster academic and personal growth. These include enrichment activities, workshops, mentoring, tutoring, academic advising and coaching, success seminars, priority registration, and year-round housing. Additionally, RS offers financial assistance and community-building activities to create a supportive network. Through these extensive resources, the Renaissance Scholars program aims to ensure that foster youth have the tools and support needed to thrive academically and personally.

Location: Building 94, Floor 121
Website: <https://www.cpp.edu/ssep/renaissance-scholars/>
Email: renscholars@cpp.edu
Phone Number: (909) 869-3169

Reading, Advising, & Mentoring Program (RAMP)

The Reading, Advising, & Mentoring Program (RAMP) provides comprehensive academic and personal support to students, ensuring their success at Cal Poly Pomona and facilitating timely graduation. RAMP's core services encompass targeted reading tutorials, personalized academic and career advising, and peer mentoring. These services are designed to enhance students' reading and study strategies, foster personal development, and build professional skills. By offering tailored support and guidance, RAMP empowers students to overcome

challenges, achieve their academic goals, and prepare for their future careers, thereby contributing to their overall success and satisfaction at the university.

Location: Building 15 (Library), Room 2919

Website: <https://www.cpp.edu/ramp/>

Email: ramp@cpp.edu

Phone Number(s): (909)-869-4349

Career Services:

Career Center

The Career Center is an invaluable resource for students, offering career exploration and professional development to enhance college-to-career readiness. Notably, the Career Center features a dedicated affinity page for first-generation students. This page provides tailored resources designed to support and advise first-generation students, including information on career-related organizations, career advice, on-campus resources, and general student support. You'll find a range of materials such as website links, videos, resources, and blogs to help guide your journey.

Location: Build 97, Room 128

Website: <https://careercenter.cpp.edu/channels/first-generation/>

Email: career@cpp.edu

Phone Number: (909) 869-2342

Wellness & Health:

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

The mission of Counseling and Psychological Services at Cal Poly Pomona is to advance student success by promoting community wellness, removing psychological barriers, facilitating self-awareness, and cultivating the personal strengths of Cal Poly Pomona students through culturally relevant mental health services designed to transform their personal, social, and academic lives. Counseling and Psychological Services is accredited by the International Accreditation of Counseling Services.

Location: Building 66, Floor 1, Room 116

Website: <https://www.cpp.edu/caps/>

Email: caps@cpp.edu

Phone Number: (909) 869-3220

CARE Center

The Care Center serves as the cornerstone of support for students experiencing distress or facing significant challenges. It plays a crucial role in connecting students with a comprehensive network of resources, both within the campus and in the surrounding community. In addition to offering immediate assistance during crises, the Care Center provides compassionate advocacy to navigate complex situations and ensures that students' basic needs are met through its dedicated services.

Location: Building 9, Floor 1
Website: <https://www.cpp.edu/bronscarecenter/>
Email: carecenter@cpp.edu
Phone Number: (909) 869-5071