Pathfinder Quest: Welcome to the Trail

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Essential Question(s)

- How can understanding my interests and strengths help me choose a career path that fits me?

Summary

Pathfinder Quest: Welcome to the Trail is an introductory workshop focusing on giving students the chance to meet new peers, connect with GEAR UP staff, and discuss questions and concerns they have about post-secondary education.

Learning Goals

- Students will reflect on their feelings about transitioning to post-secondary life.
- Students will connect with their peers in a Bingo activity.
- Students will review the available mentoring resources available to them.

Attachments

- 3-2-1—Welcome to the Trail - Spanish.docx
- 3-2-1—Welcome to the Trail - Spanish.pdf
- 3-2-1—Welcome to the Trail.docx
- 3-2-1—Welcome to the Trail.pdf
- Activity Slides—Welcome to the Trail.pptx
- Bingo Cards—Welcome to the Trail - Spanish.pdf
- Bingo Cards—Welcome to the Trail.pdf

Materials

- Activity Slides (attached)
- Bingo Cards handout (attached; one per student)
- 3-2-1 handout (optional; attached; one half-sheet per student)
- Pen/pencil

10 minutes

Preparation Note

Preparing the Handouts

- Bingo Cards: There are 10 unique cards. Print one per student.
- 3-2-1: Prior to session, print and cut each half sheet.

Updating Slide Information

Add the next session's meeting information to slide 10.

20 minutes

Student Check-in

Use the **Activity Slides** to facilitate this session. Transition through **slides 2-4** to review the session title, essential question, and learning objectives. Move to **slide 5** and share the QR code and URL link to the **First Semester Check-In** Google Form. Explain to the students that this Google Form questionnaire will ask them about their feelings on transitioning to post-secondary life and how GEAR UP's Pathfinder Quest series can make them feel more confident throughout their first semester. Give students 3-5 minutes to complete the survey.

Facilitator's Note: Alternative Survey

If you are unable to access the provided Google Form, please create your own version. The form should gather insights from students about their feelings and experiences transitioning to post-secondary life. Suggested questions may include:

- How are you feeling about starting college?
- What are you most excited or nervous about?
- What support do you think you'll need in your first semester?
- Do they plan to join any clubs or work?

Keep the form brief (3–5 questions) and ensure responses are anonymous to encourage honesty.

20 minutes

Peer Connection Activity

Move to **slide 6** and introduce the Human Bingo activity. Explain that students will use a randomized **Bingo Card** filled with prompts like "Someone who has already visited the campus library" or "Find Someone who is from a different state than you." The goal is to move around the room, engage with peers, and find individuals who match each square. When a match is found, students write that person's name in the square. The goal is to have students get three boxes in a row initialed before the time runs out. Start the K20 3-minute timer.

Facilitator's Note: Alternative Ice Breaker

If you have fewer than 5 students, consider doing this alternative activity instead. Be sure to unhide **slides 7-8**.

Pass out a half-sheet of the **3-2-1** handout to every student. Display **slide 7** and introduce students to the 3-2-1 instructional strategy. Students should write:

- 3 things they're excited about in college
- 2 things they're nervous or unsure about in college
- 1 fun fact about themselves

Give students two minutes using the K20 2-minute timer on the slide to complete their responses independently. Once everyone is ready, move to **slide 8** and pair students randomly. Start the timer. During this time, partners will take turns sharing their 3-2-1 responses with each other. Encourage them to ask follow-up questions or comment on shared experiences to build connection and empathy. Restart the timer as needed.

After the timer ends, bring the group back together and invite a few pairs to share something interesting, surprising, or relatable they learned from their partner.

20 minutes

Mentoring Resources

Move to **slide 9** and discuss the mentoring resources that are available to students. These resources can either be ones at their PSI or online systems.

Move to **slide 10** to close the session with an overview of the next meeting, “Pathfinder Quest: I’m New.” Explain that the next session will have students explore their PSI’s degree sheets and relate interests to potential majors. Be sure to include the date, time, and location of the next session.

Follow-Up

Pathfinder Quest is a five-part workshop series designed to guide first-year college students through a meaningful and confident transition into college life. You have just completed part one. We recommend moving to part two "Pathfinder Quest: I'm New" next.

Research Rationale

First Generation College Students (FGCS) lack the social capital of their middle-to-upper-class peers and thus struggle in their college and career readiness experiences (Almeida, D. et al., 2019). Social capital is defined as the relationships you develop in your personal and professional life that provide support and guidance. Research indicates that FGCSs struggle to build social capital due to a lack of experience and knowledge stemming from their familial, social, and economic background. Structured programs on post-secondary institution campuses that are readily available and convenient help bridge the gap between FGCSs and their peers (Dernberger, 2025).

Social Capital

At the post-secondary level, social capital refers to the relationships and interactions that students build with peers, faculty, and professionals. These connections provide valuable resources and support, such as information about career opportunities and access to academic and extracurricular activities. Thompson et al. (2023) explain that students had better academic and career opportunities after using their campus Career Services than those who did not. However, students from lower socioeconomic families are less likely to possess valuable information about college success, leading to less access to campus resources than their higher socioeconomic peers (Dernberger, 2025; Almeida et al., 2019). Studies suggest that developing social capital between students and faculty is essential for students' development, positively impacting academic achievement and retention. (Almeida et al., 2019). Students often have difficulty with the career decision-making process, and campus resources, such as Career Services departments, help ease this process by considering the students' personality, interests, and background.

Resources

- Almeida, D., Byrne, A., Smith, R., & Ruiz, S. (2019). How relevant is grit? The importance of social capital in first-generation college students' academic success. *Journal of College Student Retention, 23*(3), 539-559. https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025119854688
- Dernberger, B. N. (2025). Inequality in the college-to-career transition: Building career-relevant cultural and social capital on campus. *Sociology Compass, 19*(3). https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.70041
- K20 Center. (2021, September 21). 2-Minute Timer. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HcEEAnwOt2c
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- K20 Center. (n.d.). 3-2-1. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/117
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Human bingo. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/3888
- Thompson, D., Dent, H., & Fine, M. (2023). Factors related to a college student's career optimism and their perception of career services. *Higher Education Quarterly*, *77*(3), 395–409. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12408