Ford Fund Launches “Ford First Gen” Initiative at Spelman College to Ensure Success for First-Generation College Students

Ford First Gen @ Spelman College is a first-of-its-kind program designed to help improve college completion rates among first-generation students.

Innovative program pairs first-generation, first-year students with juniors who will serve as peer mentors; seminars and professional development activities, as well as summer internships, all aimed at helping students excel.

Ford Fund’s partnership with Spelman College is the latest in a decades-long commitment to supporting historically Black colleges and universities and students that attend them.

ATLANTA, Aug. 14, 2018 – A long-time supporter of education, the Ford Motor Company Fund is launching a first-of-its-kind program at Spelman College to improve graduation rates among first-generation students – one of the fastest-growing populations of college attendees in the U.S.

Ford First Gen @ Spelman College is an innovative program that provides students a range of personal and professional services and support to help them succeed throughout their four years in college. The program is the latest in the Ford Fund’s decades-long commitment to supporting historically Black colleges and universities and students that attend them.

Ford First Gen will enhance Spelman’s student success efforts by pairing a cohort of 50 first-generation, first-year students with 10 rising juniors – also first-generation students – who will serve as peer mentors. Mentors will spend at least 10 hours per week with each of their assigned mentees. Additional program elements include:

- Bi-weekly seminars focused on career development, artistic engagement, healthy relationships and envisioning your future, among other topics
- Monthly excursions within and outside of metro-Atlanta to provide opportunities for students to speak directly with industry professionals
- Engagements with Spelman faculty from various disciplines
- Ford-sponsored summer internship opportunities, where solving real world problems will prepare them to meet the needs of an ever-changing world

“Spelman College counts among some of its most distinguished alumnae many first-generation graduates, including Starbucks COO and Spelman Board Chair Rosalind Brewer,” said Spelman President Mary Schmidt Campbell, Ph.D.

“Ford Motor Company’s partnership with us in the Ford First Gen program brings a comprehensive, innovative and collaborative approach that exemplifies an important part of ‘the Spelman Promise’ – ensuring that every Spelmanite graduates with a competitive edge.”

According to a 2012 study by the National Center for Education Statistics, 34 percent of the nation’s undergraduates were the first in their families to go to college. Spelman’s first-generation population is 15 percent (317 students). Research finds that first-generation students typically arrive at college with a myriad of challenges such as financial instability, lack of self-esteem, and lack of adequate family support. First-generation students are at a greater risk of dropping out if they do not receive the support needed to earn a degree. A 2011 Stanford University study revealed that students who took part in mentoring and coaching services were 10 to 15 percent more likely to advance in college.

“Ford First Gen is a unique approach to helping break down barriers to success that are sometimes faced by first-generation students,” said Pamela Alexander, director, Community Development, Ford Motor Company Fund. “We are very excited about the opportunity we have to impact students’ lives through the mentorship, education, and cultural
experiences that Ford First Gen will offer, and given Spelman’s rich legacy of success, we could not ask for a better partner for this program.”

To encourage continuous engagement and bonding between the mentees, mentors, and college faculty, the first-year cohort of Ford First Gen students will interact together in living and learning environments for their entire four years at Spelman.

Upon completion of their sophomore year, participating students will have the opportunity to become program mentors, gaining additional and valuable leadership experience as they guide a new cohort of incoming first-generation first-year students. Ford Fund provides each junior mentor with a $10,000 scholarship, as well as the opportunity to themselves be mentored by a Ford Motor Company professional.

A kick-off event for the Ford First Gen program will be held on Tuesday evening, August 14, at The Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum, located at 441 Freedom Parkway, NE, Atlanta, GA 30327.

About Ford Motor Company

Ford Motor Company is a global company based in Dearborn, Michigan. The company designs, manufactures, markets and services a full line of Ford cars, trucks, SUVs, electrified vehicles and Lincoln luxury vehicles, provides financial services through Ford Motor Credit Company and is pursuing leadership positions in electrification, autonomous vehicles and mobility solutions. Ford employs approximately 199,000 people worldwide. For more information regarding Ford, its products and Ford Motor Credit Company, please visit www.corporate.ford.com.

About Ford Motor Company Fund

Ford Motor Company Fund is the philanthropic arm of Ford Motor Company. Established in 1949, Ford Fund invests in transformational programs that advance innovation, empower people, promote social mobility and improve community prosperity. Ford Fund works with local and global partners to create opportunities in education, encourage safe driving, enlist employee volunteers and enrich community life. For more information, visit http://community.ford.com, or join us on Facebook and Twitter.

About Spelman College

Founded in 1881, Spelman College is a leading liberal arts college widely recognized as the global leader in the education of women of African descent. Located in Atlanta, the College’s picturesque campus is home to 2,100 students. Spelman is the country’s leading producer of Black women who complete Ph.D.s in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). The College’s status is confirmed by U.S. News and World Report, which ranked Spelman No. 61 among all liberal arts colleges and No. 1 among historically Black colleges and universities. The Wall Street Journal ranked the College No. 3, nationally, in terms of student satisfaction. Outstanding alumnae include Children’s Defense Fund Founder Marian Wright Edelman, Starbucks Group President and COORosalind Brewer, former Acting Surgeon General and Spelman’s first alumna PresidentAudrey Forbes Manley, global bioinformatics geneticistJanina Jeffand authorPearl Cleage. For more information, visit www.spelman.edu.