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RISD Announces First-Generation to College Pre-Orientation Program

Part of RISD's ongoing Social Equity & Inclusion initiative, the program is designed to support undergraduate students whose parents did not attend or complete college



Photo courtesy Rhode Island School of Design.

PROVIDENCE, RI (March 25, 2021) – This summer, [Rhode Island School of Design \(RISD\)](#) will pilot a new, multifaceted, two-week on-campus experience designed to support undergraduate students whose parents did not attend or complete college. Supported through gifts to the Presidential Initiatives Fund, the RISD First-Generation to College Pre-Orientation Program will further the institution's [Social Equity & Inclusion initiative](#), which is dedicated not only to expanding access to RISD, but also to providing ongoing support to help students succeed at RISD.

“Research shows that first-generation students drop out of college or have less satisfactory college

experiences at a significantly higher rate than their peers,” says President [Rosanne Somerson](#). “Our goal with the RISD First-Generation to College Pre-Orientation Program is to develop the holistic and inclusive advising, support and pedagogical systems essential to the success and well-being of students who may benefit from additional programmatic support.”

While on campus for the two-week summer pre-orientation, students will spend time expanding their artistic and academic skills, gaining a deeper understanding of RISD’s critique-centered academic approach and engaging in hands-on research and writing practice. They will also receive financial literacy instruction and an introduction to on-campus resources that support health and wellness. Additionally, they will explore their social identities and build community with peers, students, faculty and staff. Participants will receive free on-campus housing and meals for the pre-orientation as well as a stipend.

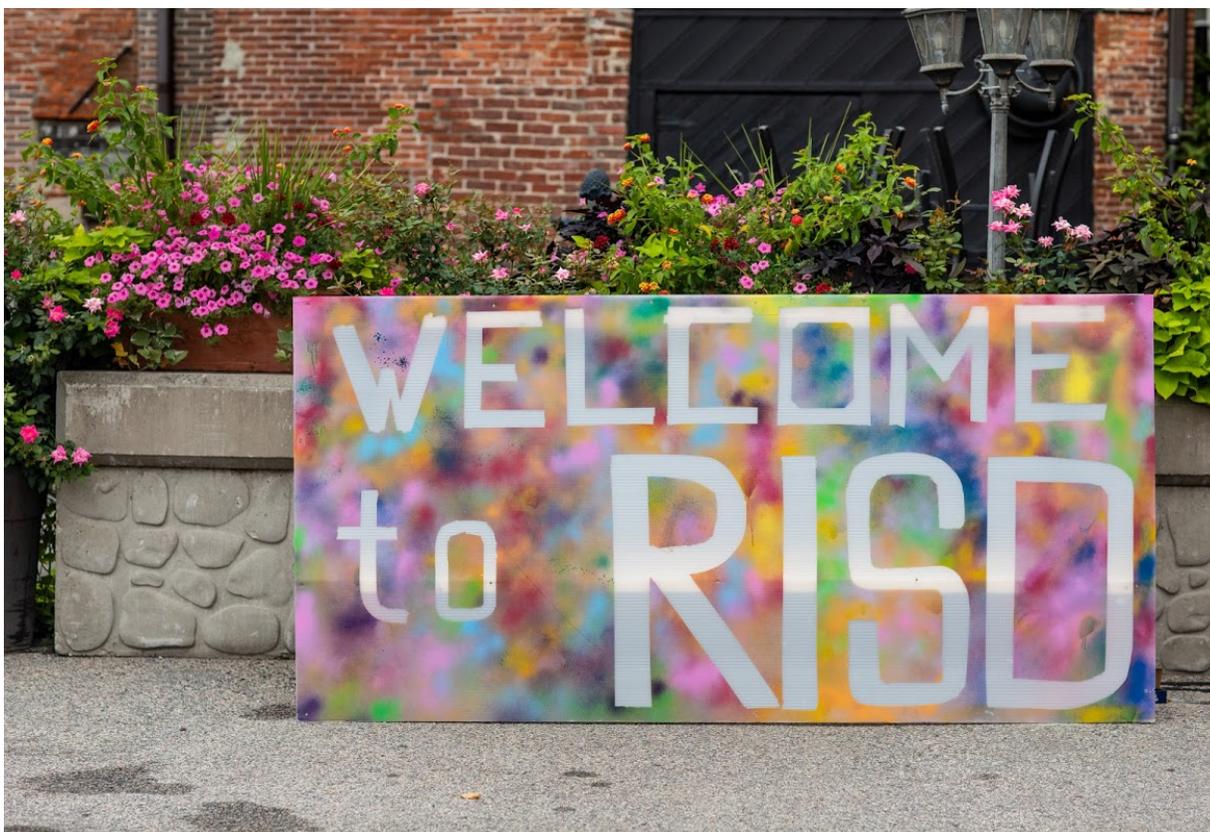


Photo courtesy Rhode Island School of Design.

“This will be an intensive two weeks,” says Intercultural Student Engagement Director [Ulli K. Ryder](#), “but until now students who were entirely new to this type of living and learning environment were expected to pick up on the many nuances of higher education and RISD while at the same time shouldering heavy course loads as well as on- and off-campus jobs. The RISD First-Generation to College Pre-Orientation Program is intended to make the transition to RISD smoother.”

Ryder and Dean of Experimental and Foundation Studies [Joanne Stryker](#) note that first-generation students

frequently arrive at college without the requisite “roadmap,” leading to emotional challenges such as a sense of not belonging. And that feeling is further exacerbated for many students when they do not see themselves or their experiences reflected in the campus community and/or curriculum, an issue that RISD academic leaders are also working to change.

“The first-year curriculum at RISD is challenging for everyone,” Stryker says, “even for students who started taking private art classes when they were very young. We hope to improve the experience of first-generation college students by acknowledging and engaging the distinct cultural backgrounds, experiences and forms of knowledge they bring to the community.”

Knowing that marginalized students are often reluctant to take advantage of existing support systems or otherwise advocate for themselves, the program leads are adopting proven strategies for anticipating their needs. They are also drawing on the input, experience and expertise of first-generation faculty and staff at RISD.

“The RISD First-Generation to College Pre-Orientation Program is intended to become an integral part of our broad social equity and inclusion commitment,” says Somerson, “and an essential component for success within the overall SEI program for a truly diverse and empowered community.”

About Rhode Island School of Design

RISD’s mission, through its college and museum, is to educate students and the public in the creation and appreciation of works of art and design, to discover and transmit knowledge and to make lasting contributions to a global society through critical thinking, scholarship and innovation. The college’s strategic plan NEXT: RISD 2020-2027 sets an ambitious vision for educating students for the future and bringing creative practices to bear on the creation of just societies, a sustainable planet and new ways of making and knowing. RISD’s immersive model of art and design education, which emphasizes critical making through studio-based learning and robust study in the liberal arts, prepares students to intervene in the critical challenges of our time. Working with exceptional faculty and in extraordinary specialized facilities, 2,225 students from more than 60 countries engage in 42 full-time bachelor’s and master’s degree programs. RISD’s 30,000 alumni worldwide testify to the impact of this model of education, exemplifying the vital role artists and designers play in today’s society. Founded in 1877, RISD (pronounced “RIZ-dee”) and the RISD Museum help make Providence, RI among the most culturally active and creative cities in the region. Find more information at risd.edu.

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