

Experiences of First-Generation College Students: Integrating Research and Practice



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Presentation overview



I. Overview

- a) Brief background and literature
- b) Research questions and data sources

II. Presentation of findings

III. Discussion of practice

- a) “First to Go” program
- b) Small-group discussion
- c) Whole-group discussion



Background

Definition of first-generation student

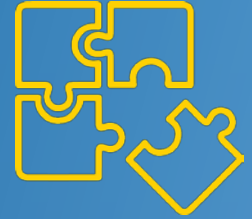


A student from a family in which neither parent has received a four-year degree

- Some definitions specify that neither parent has receive any post-secondary education
- 24–33% of US postsecondary students
- UCLA: about **30%** of undergraduates

Redford & Hoyer, 2017; Skomsvold, 2015; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007; Staklis & Chen, 2010

Challenges in higher education



- ✓ Lower rates of retention
- ✓ More difficulty succeeding academically; lower GPAs
- ✓ More likely to hold jobs
- ✓ Less likely to live on campus

Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018; Redford & Hoyer, 2017; Ishitani, 2006; Pacarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004

Student backgrounds



Many first-generation students come from backgrounds that preclude academic success:

- Low SES
- Underrepresented race/ethnicity
- Older than traditional students
- Obligations outside academics



Engle & Tinto, 2008

Cultural capital



Examples of cultural capital:

- Understanding how to communicate with professors
- Meaning or importance of office hours
- Expectations regarding syllabi



Collier & Morgan, 2008

Feelings of belonging



Lower level of cultural capital, as well as academic & social integration, may lead to lower sense of belonging

When first-gen students see themselves as **part of a community**, they experience less academic difficulty and perform at a similar level to non-first-generation students

Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012



Topics and methods

Research questions



1. What are the experiences of first-gen college students in terms of
 - Academic engagement
 - Educational experiences
 - Co-curricular experiences
 - Self-rated skills
 - Feelings of satisfaction and belonging?
2. How do these experiences compare to those of their non-first-gen peers?

Survey measure



University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES)

- Spring 2018
- Administered to all enrolled undergraduates
- 7,859 UCLA respondents

First-gen determination



Admissions Data

Of the 7,859 survey respondents...

- **2,487** first-gen (about 32%)
- **5,166** non-first-gen
- **206** unknown/missing

Analyses



1. ANCOVA

- Covariates: SES, race/ethnicity

2. Chi-square tests

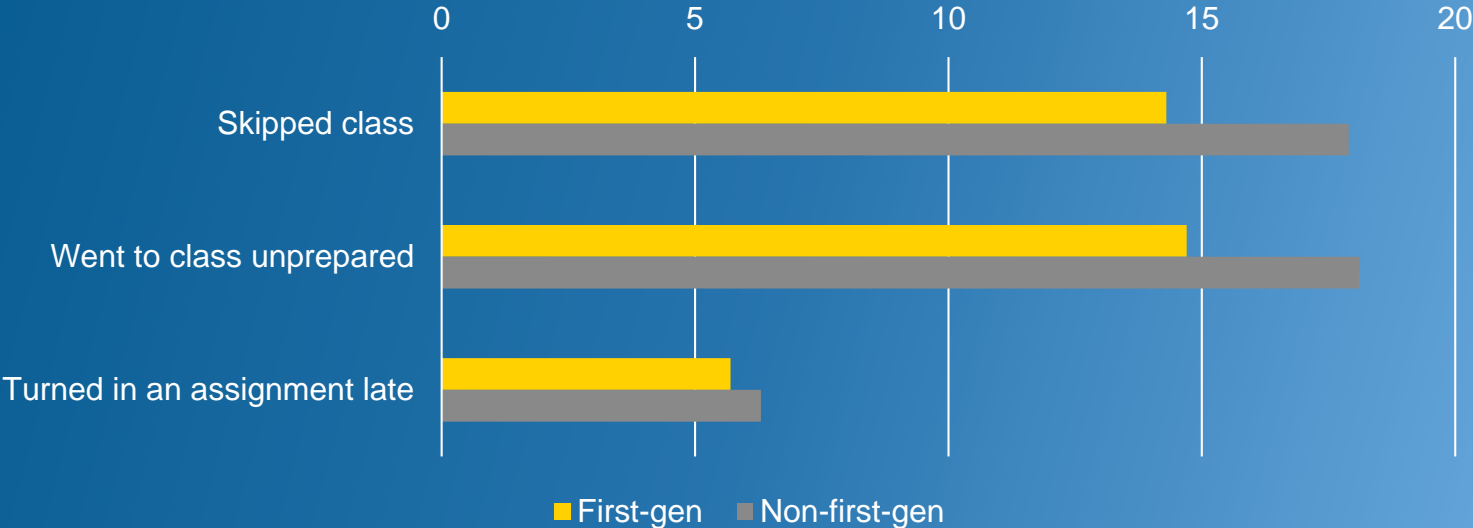


First-gen student experiences

Academic engagement



% responding “Somewhat often-Very often”

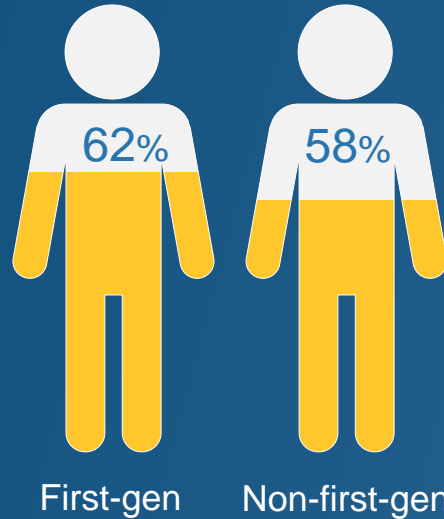


Academic engagement

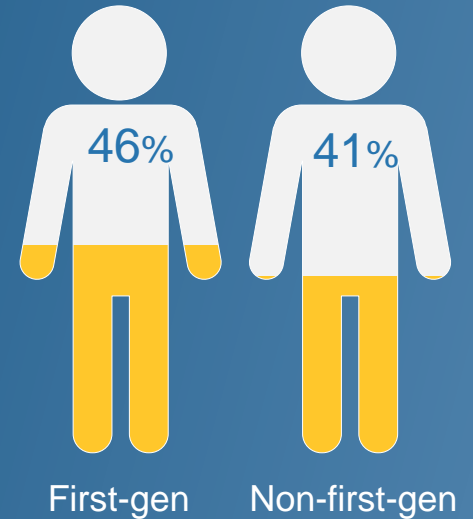
% responding “Somewhat often-Very often”



Substantially revised a paper before submitting



Sought help from an instructor or tutor

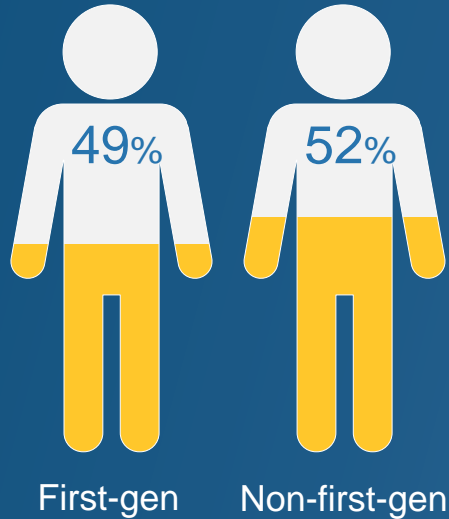


Academic engagement

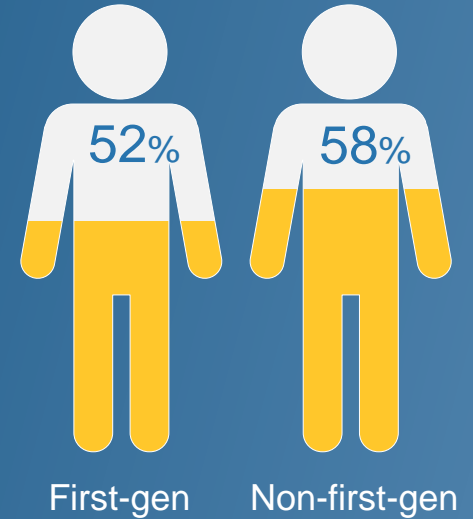
% responding "Somewhat often-Very often"



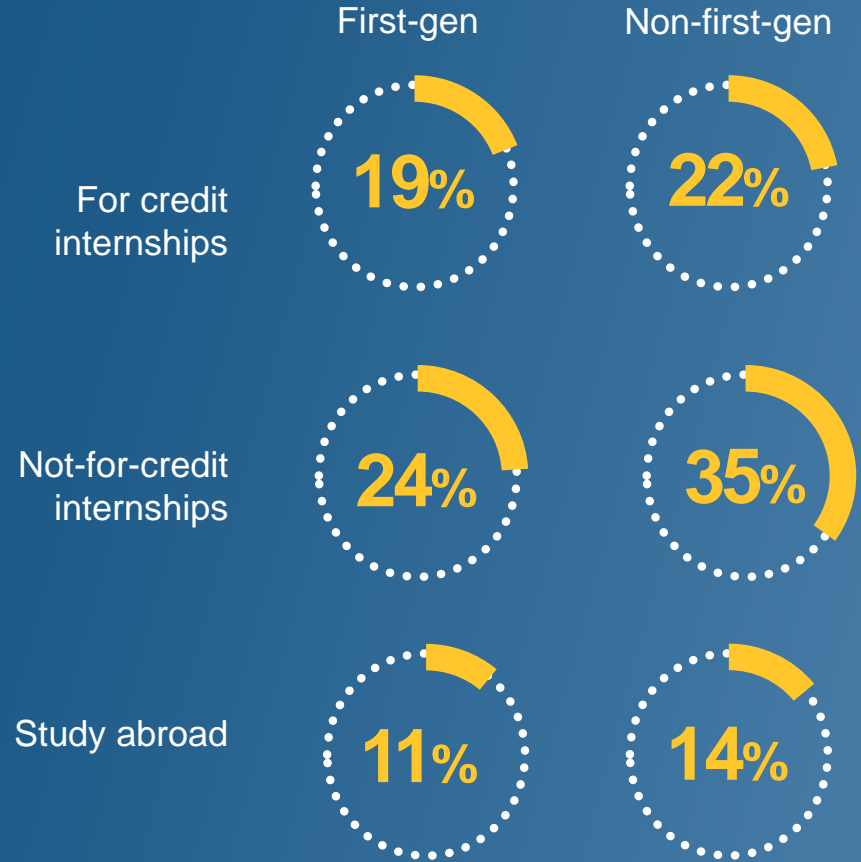
Studied with
classmates
outside of class+



Helped a classmate
better understand
material



High Impact Practices



Assisting with faculty research



19%

First-gen students

22%

Non-first-gen students

Involvement in student organizations



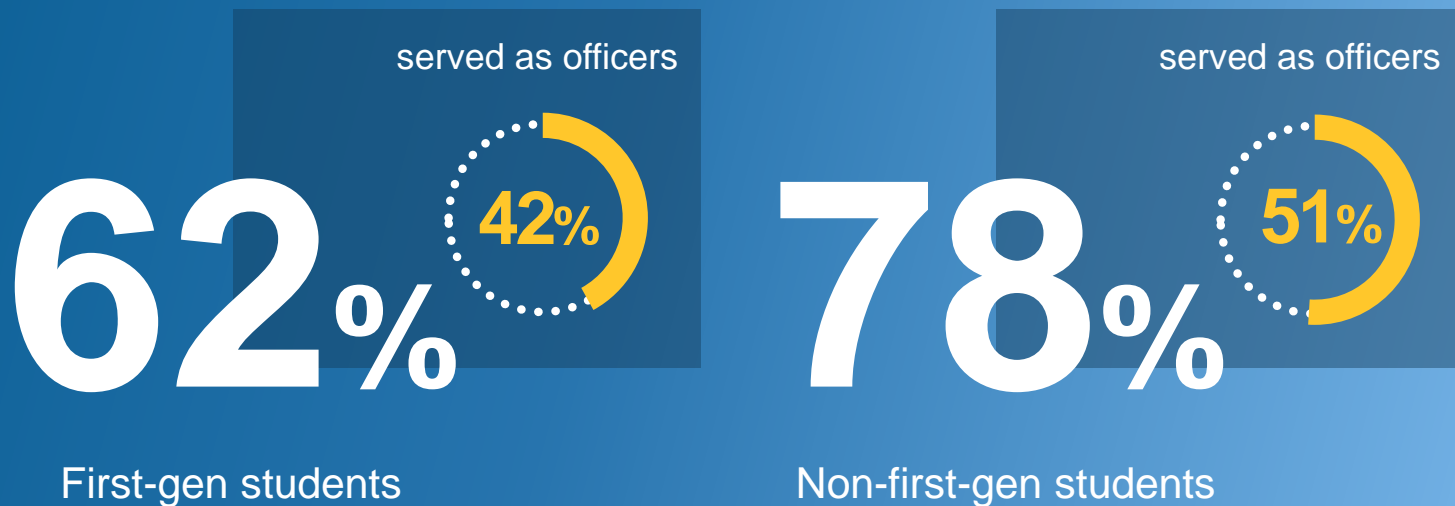
62%

First-gen students

78%

Non-first-gen students

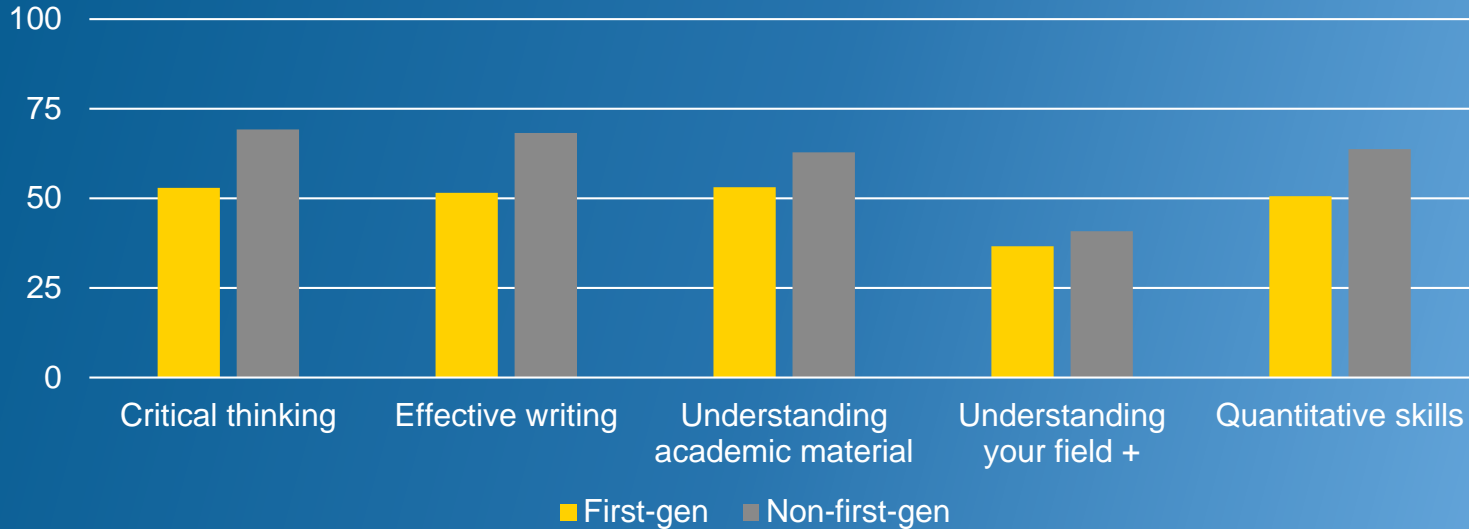
Involvement in student organizations



Self-rated skills when starting at UCLA



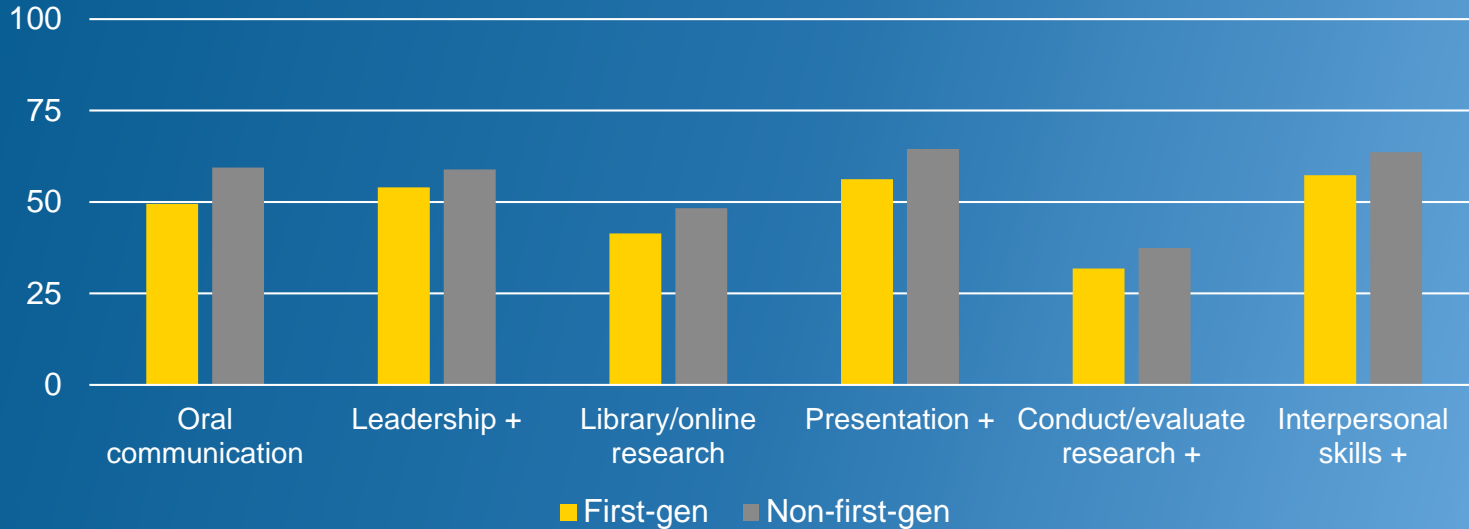
% responding “Good-Excellent”



Self-rated skills when starting at UCLA



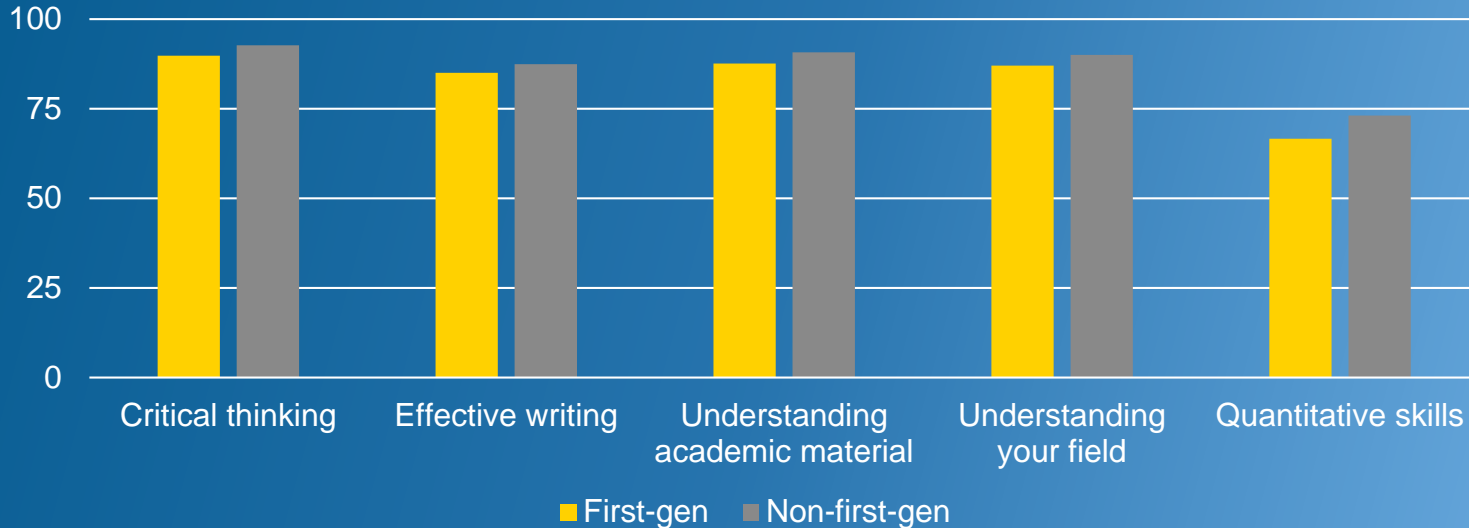
% responding “Good-Excellent”



Self-rated skills at the time of survey



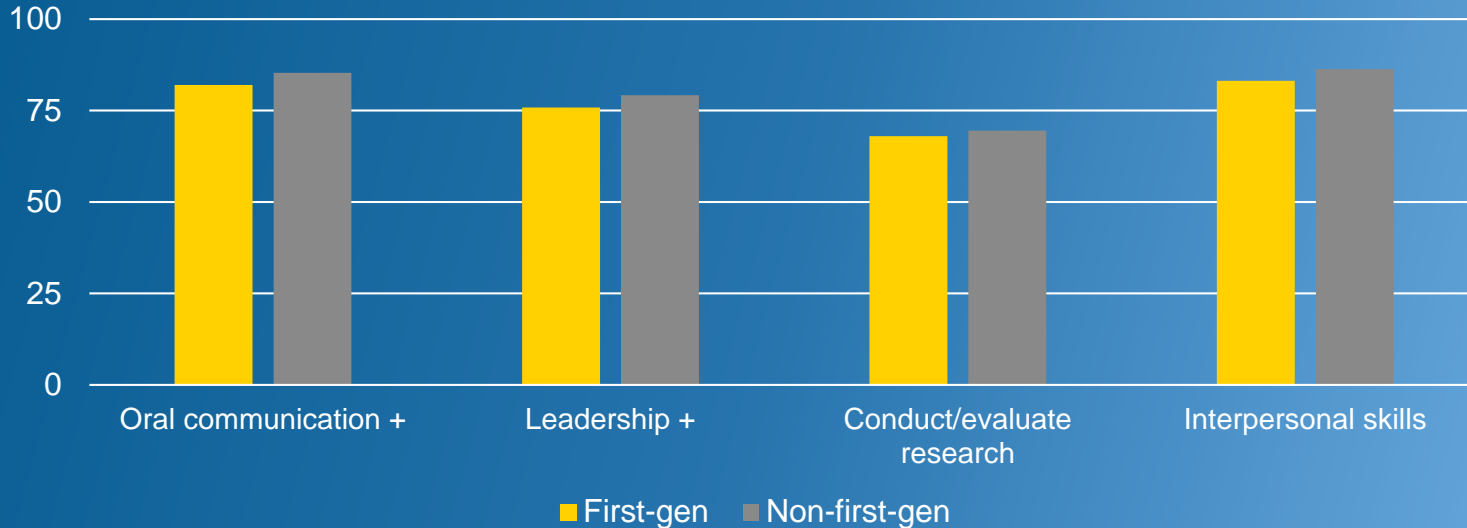
% responding “Good-Excellent”



Self-rated skills at the time of survey



% responding “Good-Excellent”

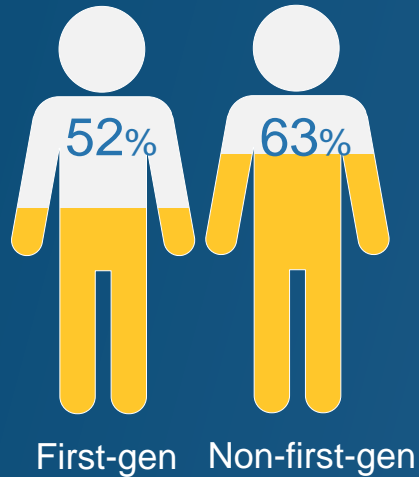


Satisfaction

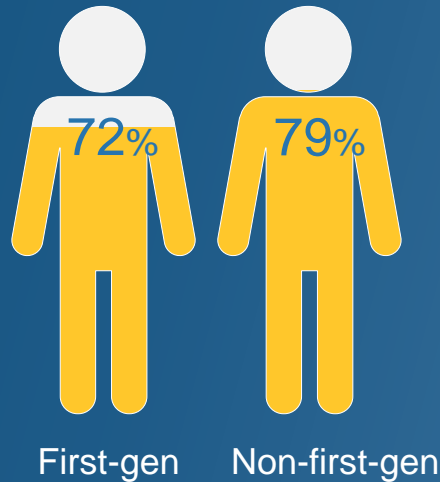
% responding “Somewhat satisfied-Very satisfied”



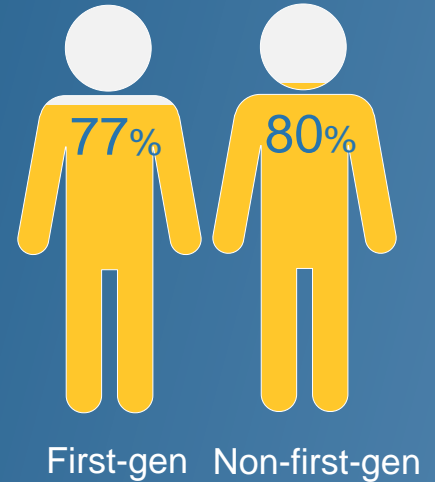
GPA



Overall social experience



Overall academic experience



“I feel like I belong at this university”

% responding “Somewhat agree-Strongly agree”



76%

First-gen students

84%

Non-first-gen students

Summary



- ✓ Academically engaged in class
- ✓ Less involvement outside of class
- ✓ Fewer internships, especially when not for credit
- ✓ Less co-curricular involvement
- ✓ Lower rating of skills
- ✓ Lower sense of belonging



Discussion of practice

UCLA's "First to Go" Program



Living Learning Community



- Residential Life initiative – residence hall, support, programming
- Began in 2017
- Approximately 90 residents



The primary focus of the First To Go Living Learning Community is to heighten visibility around the first-generation college identity and cultivate community through the common shared experiences of navigating university life.

Social and informational events



**FIRST-GEN
FRIDAY:**

COMMUNITY SOCIAL

Come hang out with all members of the first-gen community, including undergraduate students, graduate students, staff, & faculty!

FRIDAY MARCH 9TH, 11:30AM—1PM
JOHN WOODEN CENTER GAMES LOUNGE
(inside of the Wooden Center on the 2nd floor)

FOOD WILL BE PROVIDED

A small pennant logo at the bottom right of the poster that says "FIRST TO GO" with a UCLA logo.

FIRST TO GO ABROAD 2017

Thursday, Oct. 19 | 6 p.m. - 7 p.m. | Tom Bradley Hall AB

Get on board with study abroad!

This event is designed especially for first-generation students who are curious about studying abroad during their undergraduate career. Note: "first-generation college student" is identified as a student whose parent/guardian have not received a four-year U.S. bachelor's degree.

You'll learn about:

- 100+ programs available to UCLA students
- funding resources
- application processes
- how to have this conversation with your parent or guardian

Open to first-generation students only.

RSVP to confirm your attendance!
leo.ucla.edu/events/firsttogoabroad

Presented by:

The UCLA Study Abroad logo, featuring the text "UCLA STUDY ABROAD" in a blue box.A pennant logo that says "FIRST TO GO" with a UCLA logo.

Online resources and community



Facebook group

Resource page on
First to Go website



Faculty initiative



Began in 2017

Faculty who were first-generation students connect with current first-gen students at UCLA



Professional development



First-gen alumni network

Student-initiated conference – May 2019

Group discussion



What resources and programs do you currently have in place (or are in preparation)?

How do you currently assess the success of your resources and programs?

What challenges do different types of institutions face?

Group discussion



Challenges of defining “first-generation”

Implications for practice



Thank you

Future work



1. Detailed analysis of interactions of race/ethnicity, SES, etc
2. Longitudinal analysis
3. Best practices of defining “first-generation”

What was NOT significant?



How often did you...

- Find your courses so interesting that you did more work than was required
- Bring up ideas or concepts from different courses in your class discussion
- Ask an insightful question during class
- Take a small research-oriented seminar
- Work together on class projects outside of class

What was NOT significant?



Are you/have you..

- Completed writing-intensive or enriched courses
- Completed a leadership program
- Completed an independent study
- Assisted faculty with creative project

How often have you...

- (In class): Interacted with someone with different views
- (Outside of class): Appreciate the world from someone else's perspective
- (Outside of class): Discuss controversial issues

What was NOT significant?



Rate your skills in...

- (At the time of survey): Library and online research skills
- (At the time of survey): Presentation skills

Satisfaction with...

- Access to faculty outside class
- Opportunities for research or creative projects
- Value of education for the price

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