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
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”

0 5 10 15 20

Skipped class
Went to class unprepared
Turned in an assignment late

First-gen  Non-first-gen
Academic engagement
% responding “Somewhat often-Very often”

Substantially revised a paper before submitting
62% 58%
First-gen Non-first-gen

Sought help from an instructor or tutor
46% 41%
First-gen Non-first-gen
Academic engagement
% responding “Somewhat often-Very often”

- Studied with classmates outside of class:
  - First-gen: 49%
  - Non-first-gen: 52%

- Helped a classmate better understand material:
  - First-gen: 52%
  - Non-first-gen: 58%
High Impact Practices

For credit internships
- First-gen: 19%
- Non-first-gen: 22%

Not-for-credit internships
- First-gen: 24%
- Non-first-gen: 35%

Study abroad
- First-gen: 11%
- Non-first-gen: 14%
Assisting with faculty research

19% 22%

First-gen students Non-first-gen students
Involvement in student organizations

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<th>First-gen students</th>
<th>Non-first-gen students</th>
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<td>62%</td>
<td>78%</td>
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First-gen students
Non-first-gen students
Involvement in student organizations

- First-gen students: 62% served as officers (42%)
- Non-first-gen students: 78% served as officers (51%)
Self-rated skills when starting at UCLA

% responding “Good-Excellent”

- Critical thinking
- Effective writing
- Understanding academic material
- Understanding your field +
- Quantitative skills

First-gen vs Non-first-gen
Self-rated skills when starting at UCLA

% responding “Good-Excellent”

Oral communication  Leadership +  Library/online research  Presentation +  Conduct/evaluate research +  Interpersonal skills +

First-gen  Non-first-gen
Self-rated skills at the time of survey

% responding “Good-Excellent”

Critical thinking | Effective writing | Understanding academic material | Understanding your field | Quantitative skills

First-gen | Non-first-gen
Self-rated skills at the time of survey

% responding “Good-Excellent”

- Oral communication
- Leadership
- Conduct/evaluate research
- Interpersonal skills

First-gen vs Non-first-gen
Satisfaction
% responding “Somewhat satisfied-Very satisfied”

GPA
First-gen: 52%
Non-first-gen: 63%

Overall social experience
First-gen: 72%
Non-first-gen: 79%

Overall academic experience
First-gen: 77%
Non-first-gen: 80%
“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

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**First to Go Abroad**

Thursday, Oct. 19 | 6 p.m. – 7 p.m. | Tom Bradley Hall Atrium

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 defined as a student whose parents/guardian have not received a four-year U.S. Bachelor’s degree.

You’ll learn about:
- Resources 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!

UCLA Study Abroad

Presented by:

UCLA Study Abroad
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
References


First to Go Living Learning Community. https://firsttogo.ucla.edu/Programs/First-To-Go-Living-Learning-Community.


References


