

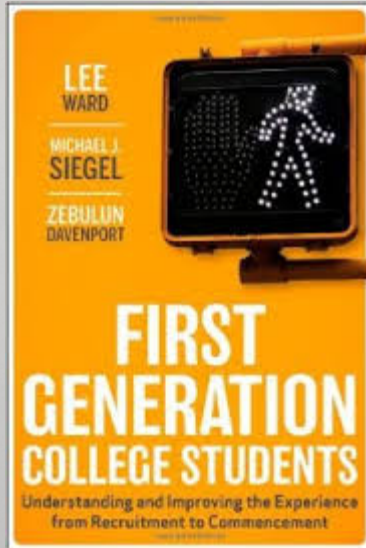


THE FIRST GENERATION
STUDENT:
BARRIERS AND STRATEGIES FOR
SUCCESS

Presented by Oscar Collins

Adapted from presentation by Melissa Selby-Theut, MSW Director, Educational Support Program

STATISTICAL OVERVIEW



❖ First-generation students:

- Comprise 34% of the population at colleges and universities nationwide. (28-30% @ Umass annually)
- Are more likely to be racial/ethnic minorities, be low-income, and have dependent children.
- Enroll in and graduate from college at significantly lower rates than their second- and third-generation peers.



❖ 85% of second- and third-generation students attempt college after high school

- 47% of first-generation students attempt college after high school

❖ 68% of second- and third-generation students graduate with a bachelor's degree within 8 years

- 26% of first-generation students graduate with a bachelor's degree within 8 years

Michelle Obama on Imposter Syndrome!

First-generation students graduate at a significantly lower rate, even when demographics, motivation, academic preparation, academic progress, grade point average, and income are accounted for!

ACADEMIC BARRIERS AND UNIVERSITY CHALLENGES

Barrier

- ❖ Report lower educational aspirations
- ❖ More likely to enter college academically underprepared
- ❖ Reading comprehension and critical thinking do not improve at as high a rate
- ❖ Earn lower GPAs and take fewer academic hours
- ❖ Avoid majors and courses in math, science, and humanities

Challenge

- ❖ Create an environment that affirms students' strengths and encourages their educational pursuits
- ❖ Provide opportunities for supplementary instruction, remedial instruction, and/or learning skill development
- ❖ Demonstrate the value of liberal education

CULTURAL BARRIERS AND UNIVERSITY CHALLENGES

Barrier

- ❖ Less likely to identify college as necessary to achieving goals
- ❖ Parents lack “college knowledge” related to navigating the college environment
- ❖ Only 50% identify their parents as supportive of their decision to attend college
- ❖ “[Live] simultaneously in two vastly different worlds while being fully accepted in neither”

Challenge

- ❖ Demonstrate the long-term benefits of a college education
- ❖ Integrate with family to create “buy-in” when possible and/or appropriate; encourage autonomy as necessary
- ❖ Assist students in recognizing and accepting their dual roles
- ❖ Provide culturally-sensitive services that address the specific needs of first-generation students



SOCIAL BARRIERS AND UNIVERSITY CHALLENGES

Barrier

- ❖ More likely to live off-campus
- ❖ Less likely to participate in on-campus organizations/events
- ❖ Identify their closest friends as full-time employees rather than college students
- ❖ Report higher rates of isolation and discrimination
- ❖ Perceive faculty as “distant” or unconcerned with them as individuals

Challenge

- ❖ Provide cost-effective housing options and/or ways to integrate with Housing programs and initiatives
- ❖ Target first-generation students when advertising organizations and events
- ❖ Foster a safe and inclusive campus community
- ❖ Create opportunities for first-generation students to form relationships with faculty

FINANCIAL BARRIERS AND UNIVERSITY CHALLENGES

Barrier

- ❖ Uninformed about financial aid – forms, processes, etc.
- ❖ More likely to have additional financial obligations
- ❖ Have fewer resources to pay for college
- ❖ Nature of and time allotted to work differ from that of second-generation students
- ❖ More likely to meet employment obligations than academic obligations

Challenge

- ❖ Supply materials about financial aid and the financial aid process that are easy to access and easy to understand
- ❖ Assist students in minimizing out-of-pocket costs
- ❖ Provide ample opportunities for on-campus employment

WHAT WORKS

❖ Outside of the classroom

- Ensuring that students are socially integrated
- Providing intensive, holistic support services
- Forming authentic relationships between students and staff
- Recognizing and celebrating diversity

❖ Within the classroom

- Ensuring that students form relationships with faculty and feel appreciated as individuals
- Recognizing the unique circumstances of first-generation students and allowing flexibility as appropriate
- Focusing on improving reading comprehension, critical thinking, and mathematical abilities

RESOURCES

❖ CMASS

- Academic Support/Coaching
 - Intentional Guided Support
 - Resource Referral
 - Connecting Identity to Academics

❖ College Academic Advising Centers – Directors of Student Success & Diversity

❖ Advisors/ Peer Advisors/ Mentors/ RA's

❖ CCPH

❖ Financial Aid Office

REFERENCES

- ❖ Billson, J., & Brooks, T. (1981). *In Search of the Silken Purse: Factors in Attrition Among First-Generation Students*. Presented to the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Colleges. Denver, CO.
- ❖ Engle, J, Bermeo, A., & O'Brien, C. (2006). *Straight from the Source: What Works for First-Generation College Students*. Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education. Washington, DC.
- ❖ Murphy, C., & Hicks, T. (2006). *Academic Characteristics Among First-Generation and Non-First-Generation College Students*. *College Quarterly*, vol. 9.
- ❖ Terenzini, P., Springer, L., Yaeger, P., Pascarella, E., & Nora, A. (1995). *First-Generation College Students: Characteristics, Experiences, and Cognitive Development*. Association for Institutional Research. Boston, MA.
- ❖ *First-Generation Students in Postsecondary Education: A Look at Their College Transcripts*. (2005). National Center for Education Statistics Descriptive Analysis Report.