

FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

EVAN BONELLO & JENNIFER ARGUMEDO

OVERVIEW

- The first-generation label experiences broad application, often appearing within discussions of disadvantaged, at-risk, and nontraditional students (Ilett, 2019).
- TRiO programs determine that first-generation indicates that the student's biological parents did not complete a four-year college degree, often regarded as a baccalaureate (RTI International, 2019) while the Higher Education Act of 1965 contends that in addition, FGCS are the first in the family to attend college (Ilett, 2019)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- Jan. 10, 1944: Congress passed the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 and signed the GI Bill of Rights on June 22nd, 1944
- Open Admissions: any New York City high school graduate to enroll in a City University of New York institution 1969.
- Federal TRIO programs with the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964: increases in the diversity of student populations on US college campuses.

Trends/ Statistics

- Compared to continuing-education students, FGCS are 71% more likely to drop out of college in their first year (Pratt et al., 2019 as cited by Glass, L. E., 2022).
- According to NASPA, 24% of FGCS had parents with no postsecondary education, 56% had parents who did not have a bachelor's degree and 59% of the 56% were the first sibling in their family to go to college (RTI International, 2019).
- FGCS accessed financial assistance services at a greater rate (65%) than students from continuing generations (49%) (RTI International, 2019).

Current issues, concerns, and challenges

- In contrast to some FGCS's personal value systems of interdependence and community, universities frequently promote and value an independence culture.(Sussman, 2020).
- The 2006 Spellings Commission's report described added barriers to access, affordability, and standards of instruction (Ilett, 2019).
- Because of more employment and family responsibilities, FGCS report lower academic expectations and less faculty involvement (Bettencourt et al, 2020).

COLLEGIATE EXPERIENCE

- College counselors are essential in FGCS' resource acquisition (Glass, 2022).
- The first-generation identity can be felt more strongly based on the environment the student is present in which can create social distance for FGCS (Bettencourt et al, 2020).
- FGCS experience feelings of culture shock, and inadequacy and struggle with enrollment, financial aid, and the extracurricular process (Ballard, 2021).
- FGCS frequently receive poorer marks, finish fewer credits, and are less likely to complete a program that is intellectually rigorous (Bettencourt et al, 2020).

RELEVANT TERMS

- Nuclear, single-parent, two-parent household:** first-gen student's parents lacking a four-year degree; little interpretation to a standard family (Sussman, 2020).
- Deficit model:** Cultural, social, and economic capital deficits associated with first-generation college students; fails to identify first-generation capital (Sussman, 2020).
- Cultural and social capital:** Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth Model defines first-gen capital (Yosso, 2005)
- Culture shock:** experiencing dissonance and disorientation because of an unfamiliar culture, way of life, or set of attitudes presented on the college campus (Ballard, 2021).
- Organizational identity:** only aware of their first-generation identity due to their environment and institutional efforts to amplify this level of identity (Bettencourt et al, 2020).



ISSUES OF DEVELOPMENT

- Pre-College Experience**
 - FGCS tend to have lower socioeconomic statuses, lower degree aspirations, and were less involved in co- and extracurricular activities in high school (Terenzini et al., 1996)
 - Many FGCS have parents who did not attend college. This can negatively impact students as they feel excluded and invalidated when their peers and professors make assumptions about their parents' educational background and college experience (Ellis et al., 2018).
- Engagement & Sense of Belonging**
 - FGCS tend to be less involved, and therefore, are less likely to integrate diverse experiences that contribute to their learning and intellectual development (Pike & Kuh, 2005)
 - FGCS report lower sense of belonging at their institutions because of their lived experiences and structural/institutional qualities that disadvantage them (Gopalan & Brady, 2019)

IMPLICATIONS

- Current literature is limited for FGCS-most research only considers the 4-year undergraduate experience, not the community college or graduate-level experience (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018)
 - Additional research should recognize the intersecting identities that institutions do and do not consider (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018).
- First-generation college students at 4-year institutions report lower sense of belonging than other students. This demonstrates the importance of better understanding how FGCS experience belonging on campus and how institutions can better serve them (Gopalan & Brady, 2019).

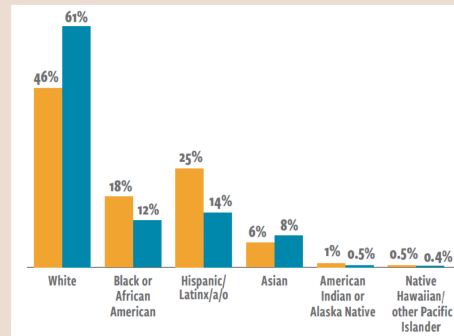
STRATEGIES

- Institutions should support identity-conscious career exploration for FGCS that emphasize social-emotional and identity development (Flores, 2021).
- Student affairs professionals need to foster affirming spaces that value the experience of FGCS (Ellis et al., 2019)
- Course curriculum for first-year experience classes should include objectives that promote self-efficacy to support first-generation college students' integration to the institution (Flores, 2021).
- First-generation college students need more support in their overall transition to college and need tools to better prepare them for the integration into academic and social spheres of college life (Flores, 2021).

DIVERSITY

- FGCS are more likely to be female (60.2%) and come from homes where family income is less than \$25,000 (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018)
- Although many institutions view FGCS as low-income, many other factors and identities contribute to FGCS status such as age, race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic background, veteran status, and employment (Ilett, 2019)
- "FGCS are not a monolith, and their needs are as diverse as their backgrounds and experiences." (Bettencourt et al., p. 272, 2020)

Distribution of Characteristics Among First-generation and Continuing-generation Students



Percentage of Undergraduates Who Were First-generation, by Type of Minority-Serving Institution

