

Connecting With First Generation College Students

Jennifer Redrup
EXCEL and Enrollment Management Coordinator
Belmont Technical College
jredrup@btc.edu

First Generation College Student: Student whose parents highest educational attainment is a High School Diploma.

Table 1. College Readiness Behaviors of High School Seniors (2008) by First-generation Status

	63%	86%	70%
First-Generation			
Not First-Generation	74%	95%	83%

Source: Access and Success Study - Appalachian Ohio, Executive Summary 2009
Voltaich School of Leadership and Public Affairs

- First-generation students were more likely to be older, have lower incomes, be married, and have dependents than their non-first-generation peers.
- First-generation students were more likely to enroll in postsecondary education part-time, and to attend public 2-year institutions; private, for-profit institutions, and other less-than-4-year institutions than their non-first-generation counterparts
- First-generation students were equally as likely to be taking remedial classes as non first-generation students when they began their postsecondary education. However, there were differences by sector on this measure. At private, not-for-profit 4-year institutions, first-generation students were more likely to be taking remedial courses than their counterparts whose parents had more than a high school education. At the same time, the proportions of first-generation and non-first-generation students at public 4-year and public 2-year institutions taking remedial coursework did not differ significantly
- First-generation students were more likely than non-first-generation students to say that being very well off financially and providing their children with better opportunities than they had were very important to them personally

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS, National Analysis Report, June 1998, Postsecondary Education Database Analysis Report, First-Generation Students: Undergraduate White Males Who Enrolled in Postsecondary Education

- First-generation students were also more likely to say that obtaining the amount of financial aid they needed, being able to complete coursework more quickly, being able to live at home, and being able to work while attending the school were very important influences in their decision to attend their particular postsecondary institution
- First-generation students persisted in postsecondary education and attained credentials at lower rates than their non-first-generation counterparts. This finding held for students at 4-year institutions and public 2-year institutions
- If first-generation students attained bachelor's or associate's degrees, they earned comparable salaries and were employed in similar occupations as their non-first-generation peers
- Even when controlling for many of the characteristics that distinguished them from their peers, such as socioeconomic status, institution type, and attendance status, first-generation student status still had a negative effect on persistence and attainment.

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS, Statistical Analysis Report, June 1998, Postsecondary Education Database Analysis Report, First-Generation Students: Undergraduate White Males Who Enrolled in Postsecondary Education

Demographic Characteristics

The proportion of first-generation students within the overall population of first-time, full-time entering college freshmen at four-year institutions has steadily declined since 1971, reflecting increasing levels of education among the U.S. population.

However, differences between racial/ethnic groups are cause for concern. Specifically, since 1975, African Americans show the greatest decline in their representation of first-generation college students—a declining rate that is of concern because it is faster than the relative proportion of African American adults without a college education as well as the decline of first-generation students in other racial/ethnic groups. Hispanics remain the least educated group (89.1 percent of Hispanic adults lacked a college education in 2005) and have the highest proportion of first-generation college students (38.2 percent) at four-year colleges of any racial/ethnic group.

Parental Encouragement

Contrary to the notion that the parents of first-generation college students can be a deterrent to college access, over the last 15 years, these students are now more likely to report than their peers with college-educated parents that the reason why they went to college was because their parents wanted them to go. While both groups' reports of parental encouragement increased, the trend has more than doubled for first-generation college students since 1971.

First in My Family: A Profile of First-Generation College Students at Four-Year Institutions Since 1971, Executive Summary, April 2007

Work Experiences and Financial Considerations

Over the years, higher percentages of first-generation college students than their peers worked 20+ hours per week in their final year of high school, and well over half (55 percent) now expect to get a job to pay for college expenses—a gap that has widened between these students and their peers since 1987.

Given their typically low socioeconomic status, it is not surprising to find that attending college to "make more money" was more likely to be cited as an important reason for first-generation students relative to their peers (76.4 percent vs. 69.9 percent).

Between 1972 and 2003, more first-generation college students than their peers considered financial factors very important to their choice of specific colleges and at college entry they are twice more likely than peers to report having a major concern about financing college.

Influence of Home in the College Choice Process

Not only have greater proportions of first-generation students than their peers attended higher education institutions within 50 miles from home, but these students considered the close proximity of the institution to their home a very important reason for choosing their institution.

Over the years, first-generation students have consistently been less likely relative to their counterparts to expect to live on campus in their freshman year, a factor which portends for differences in college academic and social integration outcomes.

First in My Family: A Profile of First-Generation College Students at Four-Year Institutions Since 1971, Executive Summary, April 2007

College Selection
 First-generation students were more likely to rely on the advice of high school guidance counselors and relatives in deciding to attend a particular institution.
 Non-first-generation students were most influenced by the academic reputation of the university, likelihood of gaining entry to professional/graduate program and the institutions national ranking. By 2005, however, both groups of students were equally likely to report that preparation for graduate school was a very important reason for attending college.

Academic Preparation and Leadership Ability at College Entry
 A consistent gap between first-generation students and their peers has been demonstrated in the amount of time spent studying in high school, average grade in high school, academic self-confidence, and a widening gap is evident in the self-ratings of math and writing ability.

Although there remains a slight disparity in the measure of social self-confidence, the gap is consistently larger for the self-rating of leadership ability, with first-generation students rating themselves lower.

First in My Family: A Profile of First-Generation College Students at Four-Year Institutions Since 1971, Executive Summary, April 2007

Degree Objectives
 First-generation students tend to have lower educational aspirations than non-first-generation students. This may be explained by students' lack of information about degrees, college progress, availability of resources and their academic preparation.

Over the last three decades, however, the data reflects rising degree aspirations for both groups of students. This portends a positive outlook for the expansion of graduate education.

Changing Student Values
 Financial considerations, including future earnings, have become a much stronger motivation for all students attending college over the last 35 years. In particular, first-generation students are more likely to report "being well off financially" as a very important or essential personal goal (81 percent vs. 73 percent).

During this same time period, the desire to develop "a meaningful philosophy of life" (which is consistently higher among peers with college-educated parents) has declined in importance.

First in My Family: A Profile of First-Generation College Students at Four-Year Institutions Since 1971, Executive Summary, April 2007

First-Generation Students at Private Institutions
 While public institutions have typically had higher proportions of first-generation college students compared to private institutions, the differences between institution types have narrowed since 1971.

First-generation students attending private institutions were more likely to have families with annual incomes over \$40,000, more likely to have attended a private high school (religious or non-denominational), and more likely to have earned an A or better while in high school than their first-generation peers at public institutions.

First-generation college students are more likely to choose to attend private colleges for reasons of size and because they received financial assistance. They are also more likely to live on campus than first-generation college students who elected to attend public institutions. These factors portend well for student engagement and retention in college.

First in My Family: A Profile of First-Generation College Students at Four-Year Institutions Since 1971, Executive Summary, April 2007

Appalachian First Generation College Students

The percentage of first generation college students is higher for Appalachian Ohio than for the rest of the state.

In 2006, 51 percent of first-time Ohio college freshmen from Appalachian Ohio counties were first-generation college students as compared to 40 percent of the freshmen from non-Appalachian counties.

Source: Access and Success Study—Appalachian Ohio, Executive Summary, 2009, Vorwanich School of Leadership and Public Affairs

Preparing for college

- › Taking college preparation courses in high school
- › Taking the ACT or SAT
- › Career Interest Assessments and research
- › College Visits

The Senior Year ...

The Selection Process:

- › Open houses
- › Selecting the college
- › Completing the application
- › Completing the FAFSA
- › Applying for scholarships
- › Receiving financial award packages
- Applying for loans

The Transition to College Student

- › Deposits
- › Living on campus
- › Going to orientations
- › Registering for classes

The first year.....Successful strategies

- › Dealing with culture shock and college norms
- › Dealing with tensions from home
- › Understanding the resources on campus
- › Pick courses wisely
- › Managing time
- › Understanding financial aid and budgeting money
- › Buying books
- › Navigating student communities and organizations
- › Relating to going home

Researchers found that participation in a college access program that helps high-school students prepare for college increases the likelihood that students will plan to attend college right after graduation. Significantly, it also narrows the gap between first-generation college students and students with a parent who has attended college

Table 3 Students' Plans to Continue After High School
(by Parents' Education & College Access Program Exposure)

	First-Generation	Not First-Generation
All Respondents	75.0%	89.0%
Had Some College Prep Program	83.0%	83.0%

Source: Access and Success Study - Appalachian Ohio, Executive Summary, 2009, [Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs](#)

Links

- › [http://www.collegeboard.com](#)
- › [http://www.collegeboard.com/success](#)
- › [http://www.collegeboard.com/firstgen](#)