



ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

While not exhaustive, this tool for professional development seeks to provide a foundational reference for recent and relevant research on first generation students. Resources are separated into four categories, enabling users to explore (1) who first generation students are, (2) why a need for distinctive services exists, (3) what academic models provide evidence of effective support, and (4) comprehensive reports addressing all of the above.

First Generation Student Characteristics

Baleman, K. & Feng, J. (2013, July 19). First generation students: College aspirations, preparedness and challenges. Presentation to the College Board AP Annual Conference.

<https://research.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/publications/2013/8/presentation-apac-2013-first-generation-college-aspirations-preparedness-challenges.pdf>

This presentation examines the following topics: 1) first-generation test takers in order better understand the needs and challenges they face on their path to college; 2) college-bound test takers who took the AP and/or the SAT; 3) a variety of data elements including student socio-economic background, high-school characteristics, course-taking patterns, and college plans and aspirations; and 4) insight into particular needs of first-generation students and recommendations.

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- More than 1/3 of 5-17 year-olds in the U.S. are first-generation students. This rate is highest among underrepresented minority groups (61% of Hispanic/Latino 5-17 year olds are first-generation).
- First-generation test-takers tend to have less core academic preparation than non first-generation test-takers; 70% vs. 80%, respectively. (Core includes test-takers who have taken four or more years of English, three or more years of mathematics, three or more years of natural sciences and three or more years of social sciences and history based on self-reported answers to the SAT questionnaire)
- About 1/3 of first-generation test-takers reported taking Algebra in 8th grade compared to about 1/2 of non first-generation test-takers, and about 2/3 of first-generation test-takers reported taking advanced math courses compared to about 3/4 of non first-generation test-takers
- Schools with majority first-generation test-takers had significantly larger percentages of students eligible for free and/or reduced lunch.
- Schools with higher proportions of first-generation test-takers reported lower numbers of approved AP courses

- A larger percent of first-generation test-takers would like to go to college “in my home state” or “close to home” than non first-generation test-takers.
- A substantially larger percent of first-generation test-takers plan to look for a part-time job while in college than non-first-generation test-takers.
- A larger percent of first-generation test-takers plan to live at home than their non first-generation counterparts and a substantially larger percent of non-first-generation test-takers plan to live on campus than their first-generation counterparts.

Garrison, N.G., Gardner, D.S. (2012). Assets first generation college students bring to the higher education setting. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED539775.pdf>

This report details a qualitative research study investigating first generation students' personal assets, providing the field of higher education an alternative to the pervasive deficit-orientation of this under-resourced population. The data revealed that the first generation college students in this study have the following personal assets: proactivity, goal direction, optimism and reflexivity. There were 13 contributing strengths that supported the asset development: resourcefulness, strategic thinking, self-reliance, practical realism, flexibility, persistence, positivity, hopefulness, self-confidence, insightfulness, compassion, gratitude and balance. The development of the students' assets was influenced by their lived experience and occurred in response to their marginalized socio-cultural positioning. The researchers suggest institutions could support first generation students by providing faculty training and augmenting student support services through faculty development and departmental dialogue that exposes instructors to an alternative asset oriented view.

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- First generation students exhibit proactivity, goal direction, optimism, and reflexivity.
- First generation students are resourceful, strategic, self-reliant, practical, flexible, persistent, positive, hopeful, confident, insightful, compassionate, grateful, and balanced.
- Faculty should be trained with an eye toward appreciating student assets and developing course assignments and class processes to encourage students' identification and use of their assets.
- Curriculum must be flexible to allow students with a variety of assets to access their own strength in response to the course content.

McCarron, G. P., & Inkelas, K. K. (2006). The gap between educational aspirations and attainment for first-generation college students and the role of parental involvement. *Journal of College Student Development, 47*(5), 534-549.

The primary purpose of this study was to examine if parental involvement had a significant influence on the educational aspirations of first generation students as compared to the educational aspirations of non-first generation students. Longitudinal data from a nationally representative sample of 1,879 students generated by the National Educational Longitudinal Study 1988-2000 was used as the basis for analysis. Findings suggest parental involvement is a viable predictor of postsecondary aspirations, however, study results indicate that the

importance of student perceptions about academics outweighs any lack or abundance of parental involvement.

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- First generation students are not being supported for success adequately once they are in the college environment, which may need to be redefined to include child day care, campus work placement programs, online courses and advising, accelerated coursework, student services with evening hours, and more comprehensive career counseling.
- First generation students are not receiving clear messages about the demands and expectations of higher education while at the high school level.
- The inclusion of parents in the educational process may serve to not only boost students' aspirations but also to diminish the negative effects of college culture shock.
- It must be understood that the student's home culture is just as valuable as the college culture.
- College staff working in areas such as recruitment must reach out to students and their families via open houses, orientations, and high school to college bridge programs.
- Practitioners at both two-year and four-year institutions should consider developing stronger partnerships to support the educational pursuits of first generation transfers via articulation agreements, scholarships, and guidance with transfer credits.
- Practitioners may reflect on providing more, "all-inclusive" advising, bridge programs, part-time student support programs, more thorough orientation sessions, assistance with deciphering and obtaining financial aid, guidance for family and life issues, and clearer guidelines for success.

Mehta, S. S., Newbold, J. J., & O'Rourke, M. A. (2011). Why do first-generation students fail. *College Student Journal*, 45(1), 20-35.

The results from this study demonstrate that first generation students enter college less prepared to succeed but also have greater time demands and financial commitments. First generation students in the study were found to be less involved on-campus and socially, have different stress make-ups, feel less satisfied with their college experience (academically and socially), and earn lower grades. The authors propose four initiatives that may make first generation transition to college more successful: Participation in Living- learning programs, first generation programs, transfer student programs, and increased academic peer interactions. As noted by the researchers, the results of this study are limited as it was not a longitudinal study but a cross sectional study and only involved data at one mid-sized university.

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- First generation students come from families with lower incomes, work more hours, and rely on grants and student loans to fund their education.
- First generation students were found to be less involved on-campus and socially.
- First generation students feel less satisfied with their college experience (academically and socially), and earn lower grades.
- A transfer student orientation program could be implemented that addresses topics covered in typical freshman orientation programs.
- Professors must be aware of students in their courses who are first generation. They must work to establish relationships with these students, encourage them to get involved on

campus, and ensure that the students are at the very least involved with other students in the class and interactions outside of the class with the professor.

- First generation students must be identified upon their entry to school and programs must be made available for them, including mandatory orientation programs, living-learning programs, and on-campus employment agencies.

Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A., Markus, H. R., Johnson, C. S., & Covarrubias, R. (2012). Unseen disadvantage: how American universities' focus on independence undermines the academic performance of first-generation college students. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 102(6), 1178-1197.

The authors conducted four studies to test the hypothesis that first generation students underperform because the interdependent norms from their mostly working-class backgrounds constitute a mismatch with the middle-class norms of independence prevalent in universities. First, to assess university cultural norms, surveys of administrators at first-tier and at second-tier universities revealed that American universities focus primarily on norms of independence. Second, to identify the hypothesized cultural mismatch, a longitudinal survey revealed that universities' focus on independence does not match first generation students' relatively interdependent motives for attending college, and further, that this cultural mismatch is associated with lower grades. Finally, two experiments at both private and public universities created a match or mismatch for first generation students and examined the performance consequences. Together these studies revealed that representing the university culture in terms of independence (i.e., paving one's own paths) renders academic tasks difficult and thereby undermines first generation students' performance. Conversely, representing the university culture in terms of interdependence (i.e., being part of a community) reduces this sense of difficulty and eliminates the performance gap without adverse consequences for continuing-generation students. Research revealed that first generation college students only underperformed relative to their continuing-generation peers when the university culture was represented according to the American cultural status quo—norms of independence and expressive individualism. Conversely, when the university culture was re-framed to include the interdependent norms prevalent in the American working-class contexts that first generation students often inhabit prior to college, first generation students performed just as well as their relatively privileged peers.

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- American universities focus primarily on norms of independence (i.e., paving one's own paths), which renders academic tasks difficult and thereby undermines first generation students' performance.
- Creating a university culture in terms of interdependence (i.e., being part of a community) reduces this sense of difficulty and eliminates the performance gap without adverse consequences for continuing-generation students.
- Universities could be more strategic in developing communication materials (e.g., student guidebooks, university mission statements, admissions advertisements and videos) that signal the importance of both independent and interdependent models of self. These products may convey to first generation students that the university is aware that there are multiple viable ways of being and that these other ways of being are welcome and can be successful at the university.
- Universities could expand the dominant "rules of the game" or expectations for college students to include more interdependent cultural norms (e.g., connecting to others, working together). For example, in most universities, undergraduate research

opportunities are listed on transcripts as “independent study.” This label conveys that the project will be individually driven, rather than a cooperative project carried out together with a faculty member. By recognizing that research is often a collaborative process, universities might have the added benefit of encouraging a different style of mentoring between faculty and students and, in the long-term, encourage greater numbers of first generation college students to consider pursuing a research path.

- Greater exposure to ideas and practices of interdependence (e.g., working together in groups) could prove useful for students as they transition from their roles as college students to their future roles as employees.

Academic Outcomes for First Generation Students

ACT & The Council for Opportunity in Education. (2013). *The Condition of College & Career Readiness: First Generation Students*. Washington, DC.

This report details the college readiness trends and academic outcomes of first generation students who took the ACT in 2013. The report compares English, Reading, Math, and Science benchmarks for first generation students and the general population; evaluates course-taking patterns in relation to benchmark performance; and makes several recommendations for increasing college readiness including standards, rigorous curriculum, and out-of-school support.

Key Findings:

- Approximately 52% of all 2013 ACT-tested first-generation high school graduates did not meet any of the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. This is 63% higher than for high school graduates from families where at least one parent received a bachelor's degree.

Chen, X., & Carroll, C. D. (2005). First-Generation Students in Postsecondary Education: A Look at Their College Transcripts. Postsecondary Education Descriptive Analysis Report. NCES 2005-171. National Center for Education Statistics.

This study examines the course-taking experiences of first generation students after entering college. Specifically, what do first generation students study in college, how well do they do in their coursework, and is their coursework different from that of their peers whose parents went to college? This report explores these questions by using data from the Postsecondary Education Transcript Study (PETS) of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988.

Key Findings:

- Compared with students whose parents attended college, first generation students consistently remained at a disadvantage after entering postsecondary education: they completed fewer credits, took fewer academic courses, earned lower grades, needed more remedial assistance, and were more likely to withdraw from or repeat courses they attempted
- The likelihood of attaining a bachelor's degree was lower for first generation students compared to their peers whose parents attended college. This finding also held after

taking into account variables related to degree completion including postsecondary credit production, performance, high school academic preparation, and student background characteristics.

- More credits and higher grades in the first year and fewer withdrawn or repeated courses were strongly related to the chances of students persisting in postsecondary education and earning a bachelor's degree.

Ishitani, T. T. (2003). A longitudinal approach to assessing attrition behavior among first-generation students: Time-varying effects of pre-college characteristics. *Research in Higher Education*, 44, 433-449.

This article presented the results of a study that investigated longitudinal effects of being a first-generation student on attrition. The study used a sample cohort of college students who matriculated in the fall of 1995 at a 4-year comprehensive public university in the Midwest. This sample cohort included 1,747 students and their fall and spring semester enrollment status for 5 academic years (nine semesters). Attrition in this study was defined as a student's first spell of departure from the institution, which includes different types of departure, such as dropouts, transfers, academic dismissals, and stopouts (i.e., some of departed students may return and resume their enrollment after a certain period of discontinuation).

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- Overall, the outcomes in this study were consistent with the findings from previous studies: first-generation students were more likely to depart than were their peers.
- The results exhibited more time-profile detail after controlling for factors such as gender, race, family income, and academic standing. The risk of departure among first-generation students was the highest in the first year.

Ishitani, T. T. (2006). Studying attrition and degree completion behavior among first-generation college students in the United States. *Journal of Higher Education*, 861-885.

This study investigated longitudinal persistence behavior of first generation college students and their timely graduation rates at four-year institutions. First generation students showed higher risks of leaving the higher education system than did students of college-educated parents in years one through four. First generation students faced the highest risk period of departure during the second year of college. Compared to students whose parents graduated from college, first generation students were 8.5 times more likely to dropout. The highest risk of departure for students whose parents had some college education also occurred in the second year. They were 4.4 times more likely to depart than their counterparts were. The risk of departure for first generation students waned over time after the second year. Overall, being a first generation student reduced the odds of graduating in 4 and 5 years by 51% and 32%.

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- First generation students with parents who had some college education were slightly more likely to graduate in a timely manner than were first generation students whose parents never attended college.

- High school academic attributes were pivotal in projecting the odds of timely college graduation among first generation students (demonstrating the importance of precollege characteristics).
- First generation students' departure risk varies both by intensity and timing according to gender, race, income, educational expectations, precollege academics, higher education institution, and financial aid. Accordingly, time-specific departure risks and associated policies and practices should be designed to strengthen college success.

Lohfink, M. M., & Paulsen, M. B. (2005). Comparing the determinants of persistence for first-generation and continuing-generation students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(4), 409-428.

Researchers examined and compared the determinants of first-to-second-year persistence for 1,167 first generation and 3,017 continuing-generation students at four-year institutions, using data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Survey.

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- First generation students with higher incomes were significantly more likely to persist than those with lower incomes.
- Female first generation students—who constitute the majority of first generation students—were significantly less likely than males to persist.
- Attending a private institution was negatively related to persistence and institutional size was positively related to persistence for first generation students, although neither was related to persistence for continuing-generation students.
- Participating often in school clubs was significantly and positively related to persistence only for continuing generation students.
- Grant aid was unrelated to the persistence of continuing generation students, but had a significant positive effect on the persistence decisions of first generation students.

Pascarella, E. T., Pierson, C. T., Wolniak, G. C., & Terenzini, P. T. (2004). First-generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes. *Journal of Higher Education*, 249-284.

This study sought to understand how first generation students experience college and benefit from it in a comprehensive analysis of the National Study of Student Learning data that followed individuals through the second and third years of college. The study had three purposes. First, it sought to estimate differences between first generation and other college students along various dimensions of their academic and nonacademic experience of college. Second, it estimated the difference between first generation college students and their peers in select cognitive, psychosocial, and status attainment outcomes. These included standardized measures of science, reasoning and writing skills at the end of the second year, standardized measures of reading comprehension and critical thinking at the end of the third year, as well as measures of openness to diversity and challenge, learning for self-understanding, internal locus of control, preference for higher-order cognitive activities, and educational degree plans at the end of the second and third years of college. Third, the study sought to determine if the specific academic and nonacademic experiences influencing cognitive and psychosocial outcomes differed in magnitude for first generation versus other college students.

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- First generation students completed significantly fewer credit hours across the three years of the study and worked significantly more hours per week than did the non-first generation students. They were also significantly less likely to live on campus than other students
- Despite the disadvantages that accrued to them in the selectivity of the institutions they attend and the experiences they have once enrolled, first generation students who persisted in college had only trivial, chance differences between first generation and other students in second-year writing skills, third- year reading comprehension, third-year critical thinking, and both second- and third-year openness to diversity and challenge
- Level of engagement with institution's social and peer network is critical. Extracurricular involvement had stronger positive effects on critical thinking, degree plans, sense of control over (and responsibility for) their own academic success, and preference for higher-order cognitive tasks for first generation than for other students.
- However, first generation students were significantly less likely to be engaged in these activities during college.
- Not all college experiences, however, are beneficial for first generation students. Volunteer work, employment, and participation in inter-collegiate athletics all tended to have a negative impact.
- Federal and state financial aid policies may need to be reexamined on the extent to which they facilitate or impede the opportunities of first generation students to participate fully in the college experience.

Pike, G. R., & Kuh, G. D. (2005). First-and second-generation college students: A comparison of their engagement and intellectual development. *Journal of Higher Education*, 76, 276-300.

This study examines the college experiences of first generation and second generation students to see how their experiences affect their learning and intellectual development. The findings indicate that on some key indicators of college success first generation college students do not compare favorably with their peers from families where at least one parent graduated from college.

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- First generation students were less engaged overall and less likely to successfully integrate diverse college experiences
- They perceived the college environment as less supportive and reported making less progress in their learning and intellectual development.
- Previous studies of first generation students tended to attribute their lower levels of academic and social engagement and learning and intellectual development to being born to parents who did not go to college. The findings from this study suggest that low levels of engagement are an indirect result of being the first in one's family to go to college and are more directly a function of lower educational aspirations and living off campus.
- Admissions officers could design presentations and publications specifically for first generation students that emphasize the behaviors common to successful first generation students who have graduated from the institution.
- To raise educational aspirations, institutions could work with local school systems in implementing programs that focus on raising educational aspirations.

- Workshops for advisors and others who may work closely with first generation students should address issues that maybe particularly relevant to this group. At the least, advisors should know who among their advisees are the first in their family to go to college and should discuss on multiple occasions how students can get involved in activities inside and outside the classroom that will increase their overall level of engagement with learning resources and that will promote greater social and academic integration.
- If an institution is serious about improving first generation student success rates, then it should require them to live on campus at least for the first year of college. For low-income first generation students, such a policy will clearly require additional financial assistance. Innovative work-study should be explored as a way to offset differences in cost between living on and off campus or at home.

Somers, P., Woodhouse, S., & Cofer, J. (2004). Pushing the boulder uphill: The persistence of first-generation college students. *NASPA Journal*, 41, 418–435.

This study examined the impact of background, aspirations, achievement, college experiences, and price on the persistence of first generation and continuing generation college students at 4-year institutions using the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study of 1995–96.

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- First generation students were more sensitive to financial aid and averse to student loans than their peers.
- High income, high test scores, and high grade point average, which similar studies have found to be significant and positively associated with persistence, did not influence the persistence of first generation students in this study.
- Early college awareness programs are critical: provide information as early as middle school on college costs, financial aid availability, and the economic and social advantages of a college education.
- Early academic achievement programs are effective in providing the academic preparation and encouragement that first generation students often need for college success.
- Financial aid is important in retaining first generation students. Both first generation students and their parents are loan averse.
- Social interaction, which can provide a sense of “belonging” on campus, is important to persistence for first generation students.
- Providing support for first generation students affords a way for student and academic affairs to partner new programs. Such programs could include academic support services, faculty mentors, use of faculty and staff role models who were the first in their family to attend college, and student/parent support services.
- First generation students often have conflicts with their parents on whether to attend college. In addition, they may feel “survivor guilt,” particularly if they are from areas where few of their peers attend college. Personal, academic, and career counselors can be aware of these conflicts and work through these issues with students.

Terenzini, P. T., Springer, L., Yaeger, P. M., Pascarella, E. T., & Nora, A. (1996). First-generation college students: Characteristics, experiences, and cognitive development. *Research in higher education*, 37(1), 1-22.

This study sought answers to three questions: (1) Do the precollege characteristics of first generation students differ from those of traditional students? (2) Do first generation students' college experiences differ from those of other students? (3) What are the educational consequences of any differences on first-year gains in students' reading, math, and critical thinking abilities? Answers come from 2,685 students (825 first generation and 1,860 traditional students) who entered 23 diverse institutions nationwide in Fall 1992 and who completed one year of study.

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- First generation students are more likely to come from low-income families, to be Hispanic, to have weaker cognitive skills (in reading, math, and critical thinking), to have lower degree aspirations, and to have been less involved with peers and teachers in high school.
- First generation students also tend to have more dependent children, expect to take longer to complete their degree programs, and report receiving less encouragement from their parents to attend college.
- Only on the certainty of their academic major do first generation students have an advantage over their traditional peers.
- First generation students in this study not only brought to college background characteristics that put them at a potential disadvantage when compared to their traditional peers, the two groups also differed in their curricular, instructional, and out-of-class experiences, as well as in their perceptions of the environments of the institutions they were attending.
- First generation students took fewer courses in the humanities and fine arts and completed fewer total hours during their first year. They were also less likely to be in an honors program, and they reported studying fewer hours.
- There exists a need to smooth first generation students' transitions from work or high school to college and to extend active, targeted support throughout their first year, if not beyond. Bridge programs involving collaboration between high schools, community colleges, and four- year institutions have proven to be successful. The most successful programs have provided assessment and remediation, learning laboratories, tutorial services, intrusive advising, and monitoring of student progress.
- Validating experiences are critical, including encounters with administrators, faculty, and other students who send signals to first generation students that they are competent learners, that they can succeed, that they have a rightful place in the academic community, and that their background and past experiences are sources of knowledge and pride, not something to be devalued.
- First generation students are less likely than traditional students to perceive faculty as concerned with student development and teaching.
- Reaching out means more than advertising the availability of support services. It also means actively making contact with first generation students and changing current practices or policies that impede rather than facilitate their academic and social integration and success.

Effective Teaching, Advising, and Other Support

Dennis, J. M., Phinney, J. S., & Chuateco, L. I. (2005). The role of motivation, parental support, and peer support in the academic success of ethnic minority first-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*, 223-236.

The researchers take an ecological perspective and include aspects of the person and of the environment in predicting achievement and adjustment after two years of college.

Participants were 100 college students (84 Latino, all Mexican or Central American; 16 Asian, all Chinese or Chinese/Vietnamese; 70% women, 30%, men) who were part of a longitudinal study focusing on the experiences of ethnic minority students whose parents did not complete college. The participants attended an ethnically diverse urban commuter university on the west coast. This study was a short-term longitudinal study based on data collected in the fall and the spring of students' second year in college.

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- Motivation to attend college based on personal interest, intellectual curiosity, and the desire to attain a rewarding career was found to be predictive of college adjustment.
- Peer support (or lack of needed peer support) is a stronger predictor of college grades and adjustment than support from the family, when both family and peer support variables are included in a regression analysis. These results confirm that first- generation college students perceive their peers as better able than their family to provide the support they needed in order to do well at college.
- Having more individually oriented motivation to attend college at the beginning of the sophomore year is an important personal characteristic that predicts feelings of satisfaction with the college environment and commitment to finishing college at the end of the year.

Hutchens, K., Deffendall, M., & Peabody, M. (2011). Supporting first generation college students. *Kentucky Journal of Higher Education Policy and Practice, 1(1)*, 4.

Hutchens, Deffendall, and Peabody detail efforts at the University of Kentucky (UK) to support first generation college students, including the establishment of the First Scholars program, a project funded by and affiliated with the Suder Foundation. This practitioner's brief first provides an overview of relevant literature related to serving first generation college students and then discusses programmatic efforts undertaken at UK designed to improve retention and graduation rates.

Efforts undertaken at UK regarding Scalability, Coordination of First Generation Services, and Establishment of First Generation Living Learning Community:

- Enhanced the university's attention to this student population through the establishment of a living learning community.
- Enhanced the awareness of first generation students through the UK First Generation (UK 1G) Stories Project, a collaboration between UK's Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching and the First Scholars program. The purpose of the project is to record the unique stories of current faculty, staff, and students at UK who are first generation students to help inspire current UK first generation students who may be

dealing with some of those same challenges faced by the individuals featured in the Stories Project.

- Created a Director of First Generation Initiatives to help promote collaboration and coordination among those programs and individuals serving first-generation college students.
- Fostered collaboration to impact first-generation students across campus through the creation of a First Generation Advisory Board, which meets monthly to share information about program events, collaborate for trainings, and brainstorm regarding program challenges. This monthly gathering has resulted in shared resources during difficult economic times and the ability to partner for peer mentor recruitment and training, freshmen orientation, and the generation of ideas for expanding the reach of services to first generation students on a more campus-wide basis.

Suggestions for scalability of institutional initiatives serving first generation students include:

- Finding data for assessment.
- Instilling a sense of community.
- Responding to needs.
- Providing scholarships and financial aid.
- Engaging faculty and staff.

Stephens, N. M., Hamedani, M. G., & Destin, M. (2014). Closing the Social-Class Achievement Gap A Difference-Education Intervention Improves First-Generation Students' Academic Performance and All Students' College Transition. *Psychological science*, 25(4), 943-953.

Researchers investigated the impact of attending one of eight moderated panel discussions, all featuring the same panel of eight demographically diverse college seniors (three were first generation, five were non-first generation). Panelists were instructed to respond to questions differently depending upon the group of students in attendance. For the students in the intervention group, the panelists' responses illustrated how their social class backgrounds both positively and negatively shaped their college experiences and influenced the strategies they adopted for success in college. For students in the comparison group, the panelists' stories included general content and did not highlight the students' different backgrounds. After the panel, all students were invited to complete a survey and create a video testimonial about the panel's main teachings. The researchers controlled for race, ethnicity, gender, income, SAT scores, and high school GPA.

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- A one-hour difference-education intervention using personal stories of senior college students reduced the social-class achievement gap among first generation and non-first generation students by 63% at the end of their first year, as well as improving first generation psychological adjustment and academic and social engagement.
- At the end of their freshman year, the mean GPA of first generation students receiving the intervention was 3.47 in comparison to 3.17 for first generation students that did not receive the intervention.
- It is significant that the difference-education intervention improved psychosocial outcomes not only for the disadvantaged group but for mainstream students as well; indicating that an understanding of how people's different backgrounds matter is a

powerful insight that can improve all students' transition and success in postsecondary education.

The Council of Independent Colleges. (2013). *Making Sure They Make It: Best Practices for Ensuring the Academic Success of First-Generation Students*. Washington, DC: Kerry J. Strand.

This report highlights the institutional efforts of 50 colleges and universities on behalf of first generation students. Although the initiatives themselves vary, all are informed by an understanding of the distinctive challenges faced by first generation students and are targeted toward what research shows these students most need for academic success.

Implications for Practice:

- Academic success requires:
 - Connection: need to feel that they are a part of the campus community;
 - Preparation: need for basic academic skills;
 - Money: need for financial support for educational and living expenses.
- The report identifies best practices as:
 - Identifying, actively recruiting, and continually tracking first generation students.
 - Bringing students to campus early.
 - Focusing of first generation student distinctive features.
 - Developing a variety of programs to meet needs.
 - Using mentors.
 - Institutionalizing commitment.
 - Building community.
 - Involving family.
 - Acknowledging and easing financial pressures.
 - Keeping track of success and failures through ongoing assessment.

Comprehensive First Generation Studies

Engle, J., & Tinto, V. (2008). *Moving Beyond Access: College Success for Low-Income, First-Generation Students*. *Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education*.

Using data from the U.S. Department of Education datasets, the researchers describe the ways in which this population participates in higher education. They discuss the barriers that low-income, first generation students face to achieving success in college, strategies that colleges and universities can pursue to address these barriers and improve students' chances of earning degrees, and recommendations for institutional and government actions that could close the access and success gaps that exist.

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- Problems faced by first generation students are as much the result of the experiences these students have during college as it is attributable to the experiences they have before they enroll.
- To increase success rates:

- Improve academic preparation for college.
- Provide additional financial aid for college.
- Increase transfer rates to four-year colleges.
- Ease the transition to college.
- Encourage engagement on the college campus.
- Promote (re)entry for young and working adults.

Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2012). *Supporting First-Generation College Students Through Classroom-Based Practices*. Washington, DC.

This report, which was commissioned as part of the Institute for Higher Education Policy's Walmart Minority Student Success Initiative, uses institutional examples to highlight how specific policies and faculty-driven, classroom-based practices can change in an effort to better support the academic and social success of first generation students. The report provides a brief summary of first generation students as defined in literature and national data, an overview of existing programs and resources that support first generation students, and a thematic breakdown of promising practices for improving first generation student success, supported by examples from participating institutions.

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- Students may not get the help necessary to complete college admission applications as well as financial aid forms.
- First-generation students appear to perceive the college experience differently, primarily as a way to get a good job.
- First-generation students are less likely to live on campus, less engaged with faculty members, work more hours off campus, and are generally less satisfied with the campus environment.
- Institutions need to amplify their capacity to identify and track first-generation students and other unique student populations.
- Engage faculty early in the process and provide continuous support.
- Embrace curricular change as a way to improve student success.

Ward, L., Siegel, M. J., & Davenport, Z. (2012). *First-generation college students: Understanding and improving the experience from recruitment to commencement*. John Wiley & Sons.

This book by Lee Ward (Director of Academic and Career Planning at James Madison University), Michael Seigel (Associate Professor and Director of the Administration of Higher Education Program at Suffolk University), and Zebulun Davenport (Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis) takes a comprehensive view of existing research and suggests promising courses for future action. Sections are divided into: Who are First Generation Students; the Transition into College; the Transition Through College; Class, Culture, Race, and Ethnicity; Transforming How We Work with First Generation Students; and A Holistic Approach to Student Success.

A critical review of this book concludes with the following:

A more complete picture of the educational experiences of first-generation students can be constructed by providing greater attention to their K-12 experiences and the underlying systemic issues that impact those experiences and influence their future academic success in college. Ultimately, first-

generation college students have every chance of being as successful as the next student, but certain unsupportive educational organizations do not make it easy to navigate the educational pipeline unscarred. *First-Generation College Students* purports to share the experiences of first-generation college students, but rather, the book simplifies the experiences of this group in an attempt to redirect the problem away from the institution and on to the students themselves. What could have been a win for all students instead turns into a loss for first-generation students and a clear conscience for educational administrators unwilling to critically examine higher education institutions. (Squire, Dian (2013) "First-Generation College Students: Understanding and Improving the Experience from Recruitment to Commencement," *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 1.)

Williams, C. R., & Butler, S. K. (2010). A new retention variable: Hope and first generation college students. *Counseling Outfitters*.

This article provides an overview of first generation college student's participation in higher education; outlines the unique issues that this student population possesses as a result of race and class; delineates Snyder's Hope Theory, which is utilized as the manuscripts working definition of hope, based on the theory's positive correlation with academic success; and provides suggestions and recommendations concerning activities and interventions that will assist in the development of a culture of hope on college campuses.

Key Findings and Implications for Practice:

- Traditionally based retention programs focus primarily on student's insufficiencies, are misguided and often fail because they only attempt to identify and treat student's remedial issues, defects, and academic shortcomings.
- Hope is an example of a strengths based variable, which the researchers expect may assist college administrators and practitioners in their efforts to create retention strategies and activities specifically for this population. The ultimate goal of creating a hope inspired retention model is to help students discover, develop and apply their strengths and talents so that they will persist, achieve and gain maximum benefits from the college experience.
- College counselors are most equipped to take a leadership role and serve as the catalysts for this modification to the current retention paradigm. Most administrators and faculty members are not trained to handle the variety of cultural influences and the different levels of oppression that first generation college students possess.
- The process of teaching, developing, and nurturing hope activities can be accomplished by using first year seminars. These courses may be an ideal avenue to train faculty and students about hope, positive psychology, and strengths based interventions.