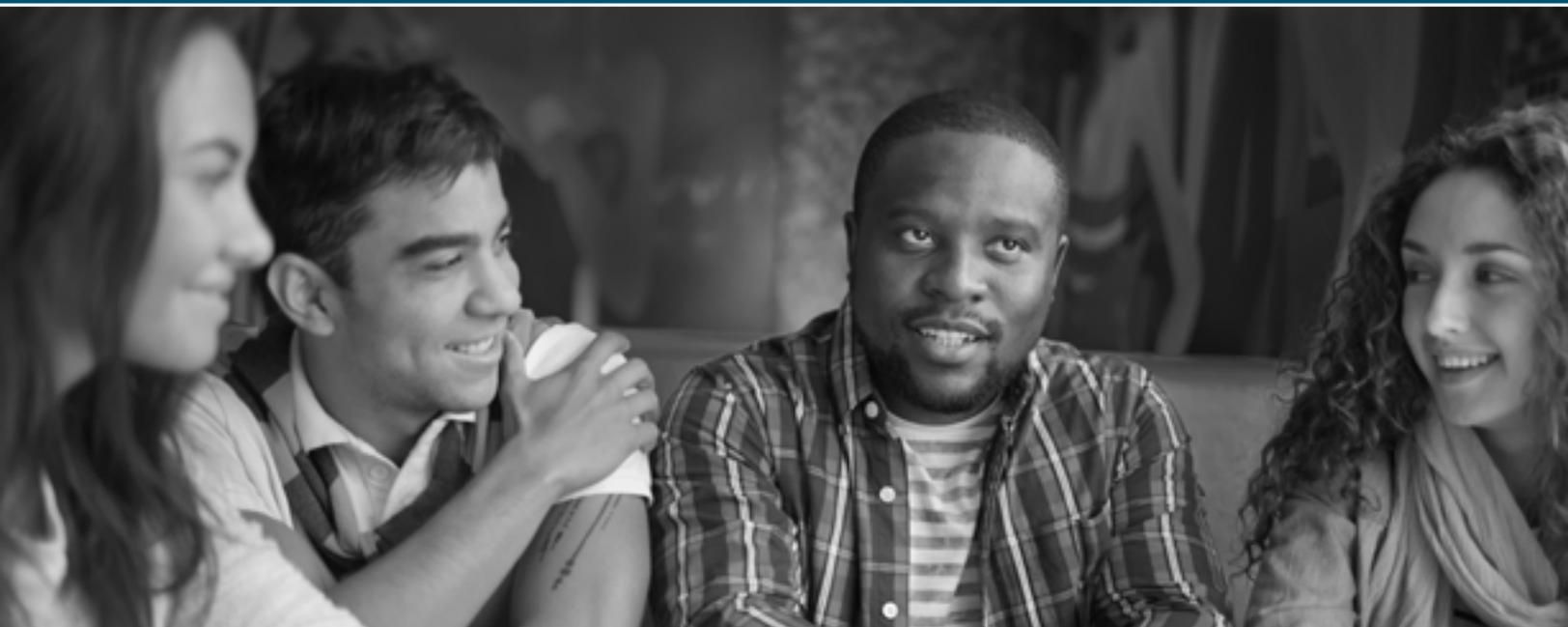


**CENTER FOR
FIRST-GENERATION
STUDENT SUCCESS**

AN INITIATIVE OF NASPA AND THE SUDER FOUNDATION



**FIRST-GENERATION
STUDENT SUCCESS:**
A LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS OF
PROGRAMS AND SERVICES
AT FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTIONS

Sarah E. Whitley, Ph.D., Grace Benson, Alexis Wesaw

 **NASPA**[®]
Student Affairs Administrators
in Higher Education

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Forty students kindly shared their personal stories and first-generation student experiences for this study. These students boldly spoke about the challenges they have faced in navigating higher education, and they were eager to offer solutions for improving experiences for future first-generation students. These stories add significant dimension to the report and offer a critical perspective on this work for which the Center is grateful.

Appreciation is due to the NASPA staff who supported this project, in particular, Dr. Kevin Kruger, President, Dr. Stephanie Gordon, Vice President of Professional Development, Dr. Amelia Parnell, Vice President of Research and Policy, and Deana Waintraub Stafford, Assistant Director of the Center for First-generation Student Success. This project would not have been possible without the generous support of The Suder Foundation and the leadership of Eric Suder, President and Founder, Deborah Suder, Director and Co-Founder, and Diane Schorr, J.D., Executive Director.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across higher education, engaged communities of university leaders, practitioners, scholars and students are working tirelessly to craft approaches that unlock the vast potential of first-generation students. First-generation students make up a third of all college students, but only 27 percent will attain their degrees within four years—markedly lagging behind their continuing generation peers. While research suggests that certain intentional practices can improve first-generation college success, there is a need for *greater clarity around existing approaches and impediments if institutions* are to scale effective, data-informed solutions. The report, *First-generation Student Success: A Landscape Analysis of Programs and Services at Four-year Institutions*, led by the Center for First-generation Student Success, an initiative of NASPA and The Suder Foundation, in partnership with Entangled Solutions, details how institutions are serving first-generation students, the challenges institutions encounter in providing support, and how first-generation students perceive their institutional experience.



FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS MAKE UP A THIRD OF ALL COLLEGE STUDENTS, BUT ONLY 27 PERCENT WILL ATTAIN THEIR DEGREES WITHIN FOUR YEARS

A Phased Research Approach

The Center initiated a two-phase, mixed-method, research strategy to illuminate how institutions are serving first-generation students and the factors and constraints shaping their decision-making and experiences. Phase 1, the qualitative component, comprised interviews with 78 faculty, administrators, and leaders representing 45 four-year institutions, 15 thought leaders at 12 student success nonprofits; and 40 first-generation students through focus groups at eight institutions. Phase 2, the quantitative component, involved a nationwide survey of 371 faculty, administrators, and thought leaders across 273 four-year institutions. Findings and recommendations are outlined in brief below and set out in detail in the report, which features first-generation student reflections, practitioner perspectives, institutional highlights, and profiles of thoughtful, working approaches.

Findings: The Uniquely Complex First-generation Identity

The report parses the complex nature of the first-generation identity and examines the necessary, yet challenging task that institutions face in arriving at an appropriate definition for the term “first-generation.” Several key themes emerged.



Define to align, design, measure, and serve – How institutions define first-generation guides student eligibility for services, drives decision-making, and shapes programs and services. By aligning definitions across programs and services, institutions can improve the data they collect and, in turn, more closely track student needs and assess service efficacy.

- ▶ **Seventy-three percent of institutions surveyed employ a formal definition of first-generation. Of these, 56 percent define first-generation as, “Neither parent or guardian have a four-year college degree.”**



Consider intersectionality – First-generation students can be first-gen plus minority, first-gen plus LGBTQIA, first-gen plus low-income, and more. While this “First-gen Plus” identity can increase campus-wide engagement, it can also unintentionally lead to misconceptions and gaps in use of services. Intersectional identity often drives where first-generation support programs are located on a campus, and given the diverse nature of the first-generation community, it can be important to consider whether those resources are appropriately placed. For instance, aligning programs with the financial aid office might perpetuate the perception that first-generation equates with low income.

- ▶ **Seventy-five percent of surveyed first-generation programs are housed in Student Affairs, 48 percent in Academic Affairs, and 43 percent in Student Success.**



Shift to an asset-based lens – The challenges that first-generation students face are too often erroneously perceived as character flaws or inherent shortcomings. Institutions are uniquely placed to shift this negative narrative to an asset-based lens that celebrates the unique strengths of these students and encourages them to use their talents to enhance the college experience. Such a cultural shift benefits not only first-generation students, but also their campuses and the wider communities in which they put their degrees to work.

- ▶ **Among institutions that report offering first-generation programming, 54 percent of cohort-based programs and 33 percent of non-cohort-based programs host celebratory or graduation events for students to mark significant milestones.**

Findings: The Institutional Mindset and Approach

Institutional support for first-generation students is in a state of flux, but a picture of the prevailing mindset and shifts in approaches emerged throughout the study.



Shift from college ready to student ready – Rather than focusing primarily on whether students are college-ready, institutions are becoming student-ready by changing policies, processes, and practices to improve services and reduce barriers to success. Seventy-eight percent of survey participants believe senior administrators at their institution care about first-generation students. However, 72 percent of these respondents indicate that their institutions should make significant improvements to how they support first-generation students on campus.



Cohort and networked service approaches – Cohort-based programs offer effective, high-touch support for a subset of first-generation students but are resource-intensive. An emerging networked approach, which enhances activities such as resource and data sharing, joint programming, and partnered recruitment, allows institutions to expand the reach and scale of their high-touch support despite resource constraints. Cohort and networked programs are not mutually exclusive; many institutions actively use both models. Of surveyed institutions offering first-generation student success programs, 73 percent indicated having at least one cohort-based program.



Intentional alignment with high-impact educational practices – Practitioners frequently use high-impact educational practices (HIPs) to inform their first-generation offerings because of their widespread use across higher education and the shortage of practice-oriented research centering specifically on first-generation support. While HIPs have been successfully used with first-generation students, practitioners do report that the need for haste in implementing new programs and uncertainty regarding alternative approaches inform their choices. They recommend assessing which are best suited to first-generation students and evaluating their success over time.



Proactive vs. reactive support – By identifying first-generation students earlier, improving information sharing, and strengthening data collection, institutions are expanding programs to support students throughout the postsecondary experience and beyond rather than focusing on the transition from high school to college.

Findings: Practical Insights for Advancing Change

Across the postsecondary landscape, institutions face common challenges as they craft student-ready, proactive, networked support for first-generation students. They struggle with a lack of alignment on program goals; inconsistent, disjointed, and reactive support approaches; a paucity of consistent student data and insights; and constraints on resources. However, the analysis identified creative approaches that have demonstrated success in addressing these issues.



Appoint primary advocates with visibility and influence – First-generation students report that feeling connected to a specific mentor, faculty member, or advisor is critical to their success. Identifying key campus players with sufficient influence to convene appropriate stakeholders and advance concerns to leadership is a key early step in a networked approach.

- ▶ Across surveyed institutions, 50 percent report identifying a “point person” to coordinate first-generation efforts, and 48 percent have designated a particular office on campus as the primary support for first-generation students.



Build and sustain an engaged community – An engaged community is the foundation of successful first-generation work. Bringing together faculty, staff, students, university leaders, families, first-generation alumni, community members, and stakeholders creates a community that can be leveraged to advocate for first-generation students and connect them to resources. Practitioners and students alike particularly value the mentorship opportunities that a broad first-generation community affords.

- ▶ Students participating in focus groups identified mentorship as the top desire for their college experience.

Within this campus community, **Faculty Partners** have multiple roles to play. First-generation programming consistently provides opportunities for students to connect with faculty, and even one-time interactions can have a positive impact. Faculty’s role as advisors can be elevated and they can share personal experiences as first-generation learners. Sixty-three percent of institutions reported feeling faculty on their campus care about first-generation college students.

First-generation Students can be engaged as advocates themselves, planning and executing programs, mentoring peers, and acting as campus ambassadors. This engagement was also found to translate to greater involvement from these students as alumnae. Seventy-four percent of cohort-based programs offer a peer mentoring component.



Proactively set institution and program vision and objectives –

Institutions reported feeling rushed to implement first-generation services, pressed for resources, and regarded assessment as a distant rather than immediate goal. Over time, this can lead to misalignment with mission and vision, illuminating the need for a more proactive approach to establishing objectives.

- ▶ When asked about the three most important success factors driving institutional offerings for first-generation students, 87 percent of respondents identified retention, 65 percent pinpointed completion/degree attainment, and 60 percent identified academic performance as priorities.



Track pre-matriculation through post-completion student data –

Many institutions lack consistent processes to collect, access, share, and understand data. This can foster reporting deficits, confound institutional comparisons, and lead to programs and services that lack informed basis. Many institutions report launching first-generation initiatives with little research or the ability to track impact and success.

- ▶ Eighty percent of institutions are identifying first-generation students during matriculation. However, only 41 percent use data to inform institutional offerings for first-generation students, and only 61 percent track data about first-generation student success.



Understand the reach and gaps of existing resources –

Housing resources and programs geared toward first-generation students within different offices makes them challenging for students to navigate and staff to identify. Surfacing existing resources enables practitioners to glean a better understanding of service gaps, and prioritizing data-tracking enables them to put evidence-based practices to use. Faculty, graduate students, and outside partners can provide research leadership in the absence of in-house support.

- ▶ Only 22 percent of institutions reported using faculty to conduct research on first-generation student experiences.



Consider funding opportunities and return on investment (ROI) –

Practitioners identify resource constraints, both financial and human, as the top challenge to providing first-generation students with support for the duration of their college experience. Institutional funds are the primary source of financial support for programs, and leadership decision-making is based on ROI. To overcome these constraints, institutions can look for opportunities to reduce the cost of advising through alternative programs like peer and alumni counseling; leverage technology; share costs with campus partners; and source additional funding, for instance, via first-generation donors who are interested in supporting first-generation programs.

- ▶ Sixty-four percent of respondents list institutional funds as a primary source for first-generation programs at their institution. Thirty-nine percent list Federal funds for specific programming (TRIO) as a primary source. Sixty-one percent of institutions that responded to the national survey have engaged first-generation alumni in philanthropic giving.



Recommendations

Building on the findings, the report offers a comprehensive list of recommendations intended to guide practical strategies and systemic approaches to advancing first-generation student success.

Highlighted recommendations to colleges and universities include:

- ▶ Establish a common first-generation definition early.
- ▶ Mobilize for institutional change, not just another program.
- ▶ Engage a community of advocates to lead sustained change.
- ▶ Conduct a comprehensive institutional assessment of the first-generation student experience.
- ▶ Dismantle silos for a networked approach.
- ▶ Create systems for actionable data and advancing research.
- ▶ Foster an asset-based campus culture for first-generation students.
- ▶ Weigh the balance between broad reach and meaningful, sustained engagement. Offer appropriate first-generation involvement opportunities with intentionality.
- ▶ Consider post-completion engagement from the time of admission.

Highlighted recommendations for instigating systemic change in higher education include:

- ▶ Isolate key drivers and intersectionality to advance first-generation research and understanding.
- ▶ Develop standardized metrics to collect and track data on first-generation students.
- ▶ Establish a network of peer institutions that serve first-generation students.
- ▶ Reinforce a data-driven national narrative for first-generation student success.
- ▶ Seek opportunities to promote the first-generation identity prior to matriculation.
- ▶ Recognize and reward institutions that are leaders in the first-generation space.
- ▶ Build a culture that celebrates first-generation student success.
- ▶ Advance opportunities to share research and effective practice across higher education.

Conclusion

The landscape analysis uncovered a deeply impassioned community of first-generation practitioners and advocates working to drive systemic change that will allow institutions to become more student-centric and data-informed at a critical time. It has never been more important to support students to degree completion. Although hampered by resource constraints, this community is energized and engaged. The landscape analysis provides examples of innovations, data on multiple dimensions of first-generation programs and services, and comprehensive recommendations for improving institutional and programmatic approaches. A more in-depth discussion of the findings and recommendations from this research is available in the report, *First-generation Student Success: A Landscape Analysis of Programs and Services at Four-year Institutions*.



INTRODUCTION

The Center for First-generation Student Success (Center), an initiative of NASPA and The Suder Foundation, was established in 2017 to serve as the premiere source of evidence-based practices, professional development, and knowledge creation for the higher education community and to drive innovation and advocacy for the success of first-generation students. To understand the current state of first-generation student support programs and services and how to provide the utmost value, the Center partnered with Entangled Solutions to interview institution leaders, practitioners, stakeholders, and first-generation students, and collected data from a national survey to form the backbone of this study. Throughout this report, you will find the voices of first-generation students reflecting upon their unique experiences, perspectives of practitioners who work daily to improve first-generation student outcomes, and analyses of the programs and approaches of four-year institutions deeply invested in first-generation student success.

First-generation students account for nearly one-third of college undergraduates (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018; Skomsvold, 2015), a number that, as detailed in subsequent sections, is often difficult to pinpoint due to the varying definitions used across institutions, programs, and research studies. Completion rates for first-generation students remain stubbornly low, and students with at least one parent who attended college are 54 percent more likely to earn a degree after four years (DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, & Tran, 2011). According to a recent U.S. Department of Education study using a sample of 2002 high school sophomores, 72 percent of students whose parents had never attended college had enrolled in postsecondary education by 2012. Yet, 84 percent of their peers whose parents had some college education had enrolled, including 93 percent of those whose parents had completed a four-year degree (Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018). Even after controlling for factors such as family income and academic preparation, parental education remains a significant factor in student persistence and degree completion (Choy, 2001). Higher education literature details the challenges many first-



generation students face in accessing, financing, and completing higher education (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012; Woosley & Shepler, 2011), as well as the hurdles these students face in not having the cultural capital of their parents' college-going experience as a resource (Collier & Morgan, 2008).

The importance of first-generation students' success has never been more critical. By 2020, 65 percent of all jobs will require some level of postsecondary education (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). This number is 6 percentage points higher than in 2010 and 9 points higher than in the 1990s. College graduates earn 64 percent more than those who only have high school degrees, a gap that remained consistent between 2000 and 2015 (McFarland et al., 2017). In addition to improving employment opportunities and earnings prospects, higher education also correlates with better health, greater civic participation, and more tax dollars (Baum, Kurose, & Ma, 2013). The experiences of these students in postsecondary education are inextricably tied to their employability and thus, they are fundamentally connected to the pressures placed on individual institutions to improve cognitive and skill-based learning and increase graduation rates. Changes in state and federal allocations to higher education have made degree attainment for first-generation students integral to the survival of many institutional types.

For many years, higher education research has suggested some intentional practices can improve success for first-generation students, such as high-touch academic advising and special cohort programs that provide a “scaled down” college experience intended to remove barriers and create community (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Coaching and mentoring, by both peers and faculty, as institutional supports are shown to be desired for first-generation students and critical to their success (Bettinger & Baker, 2011). Yet, deficits remain in the higher education literature regarding first-generation student success and, in particular, the current approaches proving effective when attempting to serve larger populations of these students in today’s often resource-constrained environment. This landscape study is a step toward redressing that shortfall.

The landscape analysis is intended to help you understand how stakeholders within four-year institutions of higher education and their nonprofit partners attempt to meet the needs of first-generation students, and how first-generation students themselves experience and appraise those efforts.

Through interviews and a national survey, isolated trends in how four-year institutions are implementing first-generation student support emerged and surfaced a set of key insights—lessons learned that can help institutions refine their support practices or provide actionable ideas to build new programs from the ground up. These insights are detailed later in this report, but in brief, institutions are finding success with the following practices:

- ▶ Appointing primary advocates with visibility and influence
- ▶ Building and sustaining an engaged community
- ▶ Proactively setting institution and program vision and objectives
- ▶ Utilizing pre-matriculation data obtained by tracking and sharing post-completion student information
- ▶ Understanding the reach and gaps of existing resources
- ▶ Considering funding opportunities and return on investment (ROI)

Beyond the findings, trends, and best practices, the Center discovered a deeply impassioned community of practitioners, educators, and advocates who focus on first-generation students by instigating systemic change across their institutions to become more student-centric. It is a community energized by the potential for deeper understanding of first-generation students and the wider impact this work could have for all students despite the challenges of limited human and financial resources, access to data, and structured support systems. While no program members felt that their work was complete or their resources overflowing, findings highlight many educators who are working collaboratively, listening to the needs of first-generation students, applying innovative approaches, and measuring success in a challenging educational and economic climate.

The report begins with a contextual overview of the uniquely complex first-generation identity and the opportunities and challenges it presents. Next, the state of institutional practices specifically employed to enhance the first-generation student experience is offered. Third, a collection of practical approaches that provide insight and strategies for underpinning successful first-generation programs are shared. Throughout, specific programs and practices from institutions committed to first-generation student success are highlighted.



COACHING AND MENTORING, BY BOTH PEERS AND FACULTY, AS INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTS ARE SHOWN TO BE DESIRED BY FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS AND CRITICAL TO THEIR SUCCESS

METHODOLOGY

This report presents findings from a landscape analysis that was conducted by the Center for First-generation Student Success, an initiative of NASPA and The Suder Foundation, in partnership with Entangled Solutions. The purpose of this landscape analysis was to understand the current state of programs and services that are offered to first-generation college students at four-year institutions of higher education. This included positioning of programs within the university, human and financial resources, program content and delivery methods, communication strategies, community involvement, technology, data use strategies, and institutional successes and challenges. Because first-generation student success programs take on a variety of characteristics and often live in varying areas of the university community, a mixed-methods approach was chosen to provide a depth and breadth of quantitative and qualitative insights.

The first phase of the landscape analysis began with qualitative interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders. The Center partnered with Entangled Solutions to develop interview protocol, to identify institutions that have a variety of characteristics within their first-generation student success offerings, and to select key staff members who could speak to these programmatic efforts. In addition to university staff, leaders from higher education nonprofit organizations and associations who are deeply involved in first-generation student access, outcomes, and success were interviewed. A separate interview protocol was developed for use during focus groups with currently enrolled first-generation college students. In total, 78 administrators representing 48 four-year institutions completed interviews between September and December 2017 and March and April 2018. Each institution was asked to complete a brief intake survey prior to the interview to prepare for questions. Interviews with 15 leaders across 12 higher

education organizations and nonprofits were completed between September and October 2017. Finally, 40 students, of varying academic years and representing eight four-year institutions, participated in focus groups in October and November 2017 and March and April 2018. A complete list of participants and institutions can be found in Appendix A. The Center collaborated with Entangled Solutions to summarize interview findings, identify emerging themes, complete confirmatory analysis, and analyze data to shape the second phase of the study.

The second phase of the landscape analysis consisted of a national survey. Themes identified in the interviews and focus groups were used to develop a survey instrument that covered multiple dimensions of first-generation programming and services. Because practitioners responsible for first-generation programming are often housed in offices across the university and may have job titles that do not reflect their first-generation advocacy, identifying a sample was challenging. Approximately 2,900 individuals were identified through a NASPA database using search criteria that included job title keywords (e.g., first-generation, student success, access, inclusion), a demonstrated history of interest in first-generation professional development through participation in relevant conferences or online events, involvement in NASPA Knowledge Communities that consider first-generation student success, or through submission of a general interest survey on the Center's website. Individuals were invited to share the survey link with colleagues they deemed a better fit to complete the questions or represent other first-generation student success programs. The survey was opened in mid-November 2017 and closed in mid-December 2017. It was reopened in mid-February 2018 and closed in late-March 2018 after additional data collection. The survey instrument is available upon request.

In total, the survey yielded responses from 371 institutional practitioners representing 273 four-year institutions of higher education. Across practitioners, the most common level of education was the master’s degree with 65 percent, followed by the doctoral degree with 27 percent. Survey respondents most commonly work in a division of student affairs (47 percent) followed by academic affairs (25 percent), student success (15 percent), enrollment management (7 percent), and diversity and inclusion (6 percent).

Of the 273 four-year institutions represented in the survey, 54 percent are public and 46 percent are private, not-for-profit. *Figure 01* depicts institutional student enrollment by sector.

INSTITUTIONAL SECTOR



INSTITUTIONAL SECTOR AND SIZE

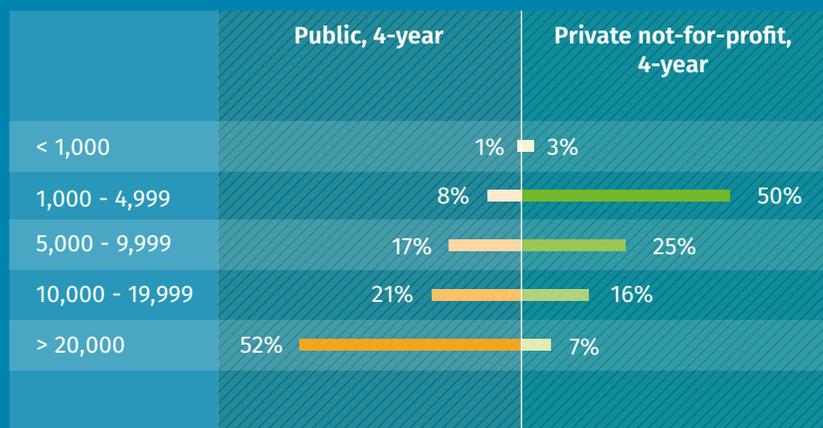


Figure 01: Survey Participation Distribution by Institutional Sector and Size

Unless it is specifically noted that responses are from individuals, institutions are only represented once in the data. The full survey instrument and a detailed overview of data analysis by question is available upon request.

It is important to note that in early planning and initial data collection for this study, it became obvious that the experiences of serving large populations of first-generation students differs between two-year institutions and four-year institutions, and it is worthy of dedicated, detailed study and analyses. Following this landscape analysis, a new project focused specifically on first-generation student success programs and services at two-year institutions will be launched by the Center.

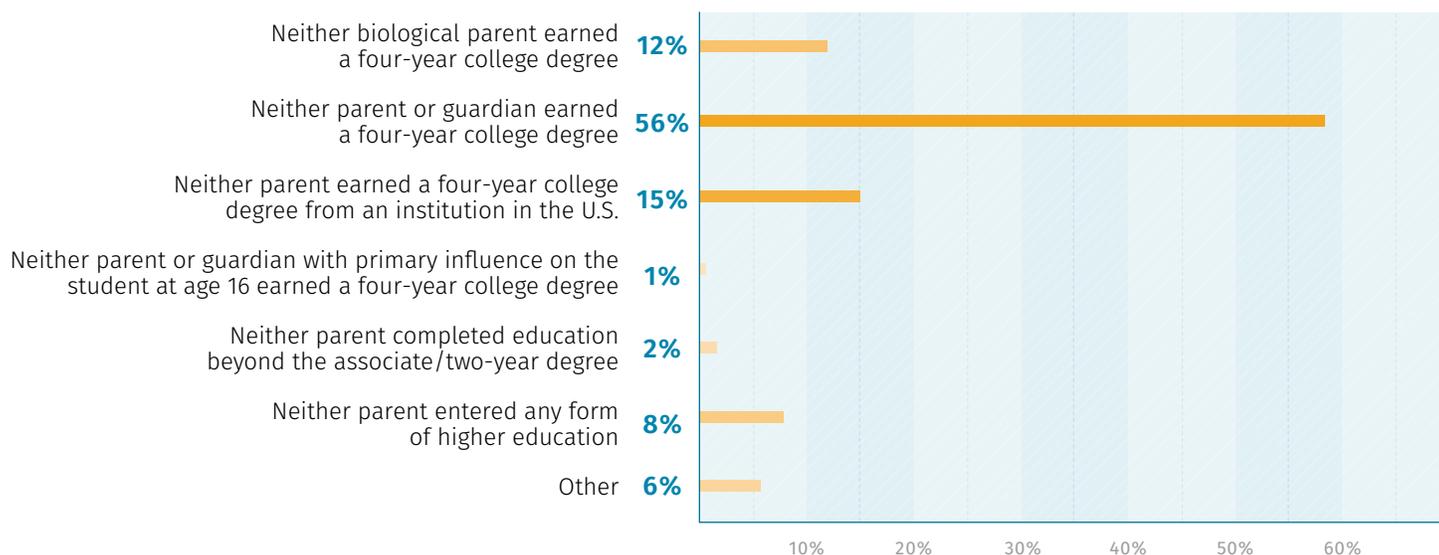
SECTION ONE: THE UNIQUELY COMPLEX FIRST-GENERATION IDENTITY

WHO IS FIRST-GENERATION?

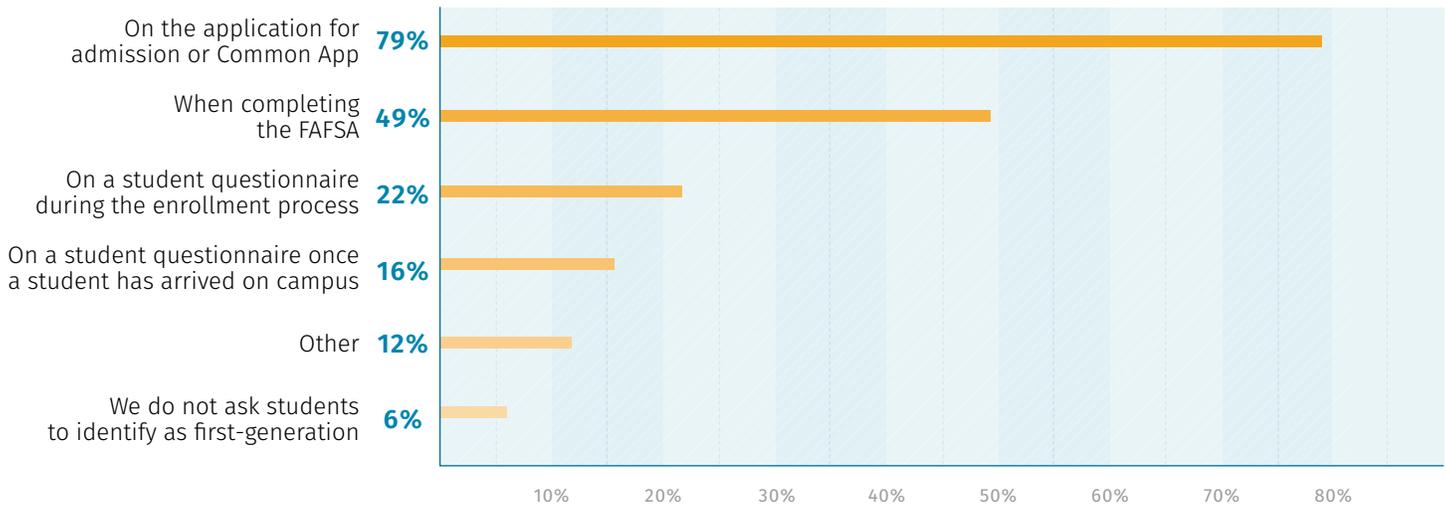
Defining what first-generation means in the context of higher education is more nuanced than it might immediately appear. There are multiple definitions, and adoption of a specific definition by an institution, for program selection or for research samples, varies based upon how the term is being used. Yet, the selection of an appropriate definition for use in the necessary context is critically important and often shapes student eligibility to receive support services. The majority of institutions that were included in the study define first-generation students as those from households where neither parent has obtained a four-year undergraduate degree. Moreover, 56 percent of institutions responding to the landscape survey selected “Neither parent or guardian earned a four-year college degree” as the most common definition—a self-reported data point most commonly entered during the admissions process (Figure Q01 and Figure Q02). A common theme across interviews included institutions grappling with the selection of a common definition, revisiting their current definition in an effort to realign with current student needs, or reconsidering how definitions align with admissions practices and funded programs that require a specific definition for reporting purposes.



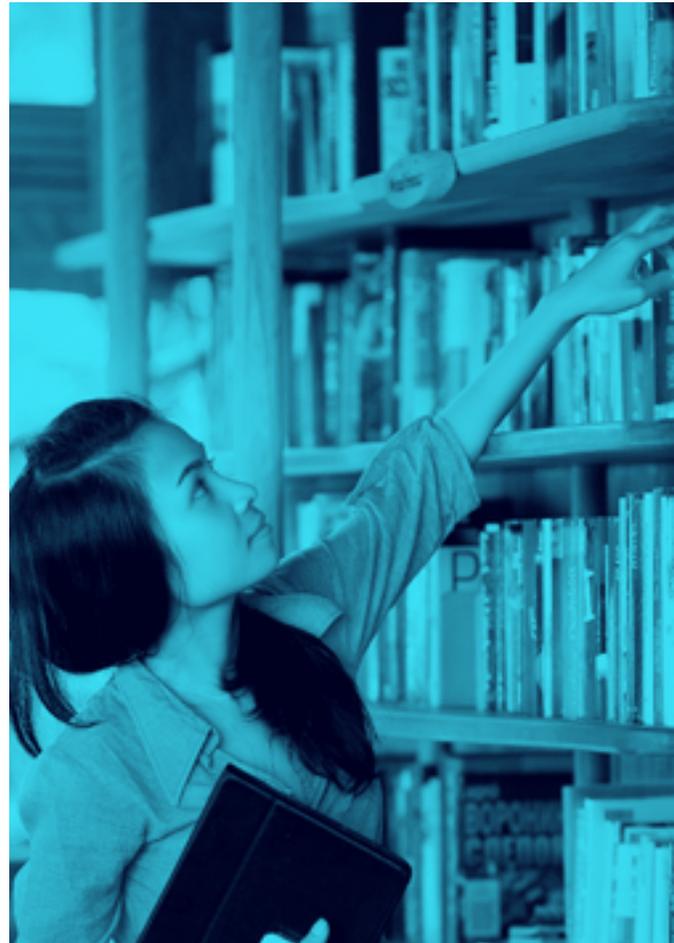
Q01 | From the definitions below, which most closely aligns with your institutional definition of first-generation college student?



Q02 | At what point during the matriculation process does your institution ask students to self-identify as a first-generation college student?

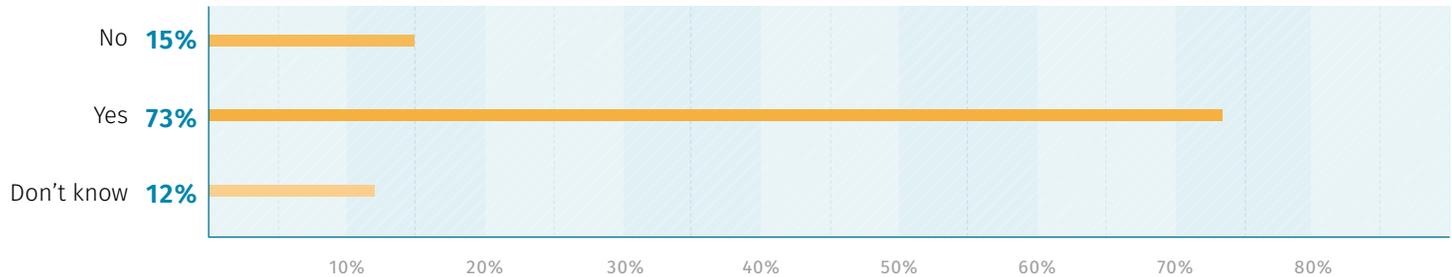


Adding to the challenges of creating an institutional definition are the ways in which measures can vary across a single institution where offices, programs, and services choose their own definition, with or without coordination, to identify and serve first-generation students. Of the 273 institutional survey responses, 73 percent report having a formal definition of “first-generation,” 15 percent report having no definition, and 12 percent are unsure if an institutional definition exists (Figure Q03). Many institutions have aligned with the definition of first-generation used by federal TRIO programs, as these were often the earliest programs to highlight first-generation students and require data reporting for continued funding. (For more on the role of TRIO, see “Defining First-generation”). Of surveyed institutions that reported a formal definition:

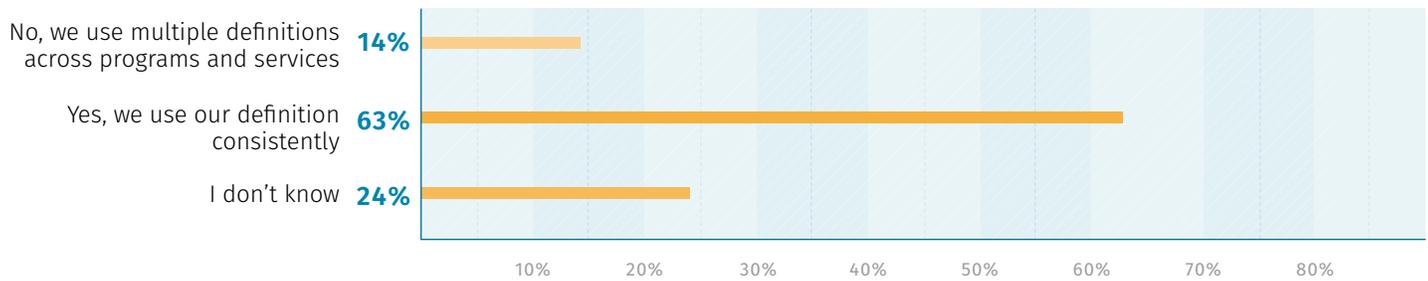


Collectively, these survey responses demonstrate the importance many institutions have placed on identifying and collecting data on first-generation students concurrent with significant improvements still needed to advance success.

Q03 | Does your institution have a formal definition of a first-generation college student?

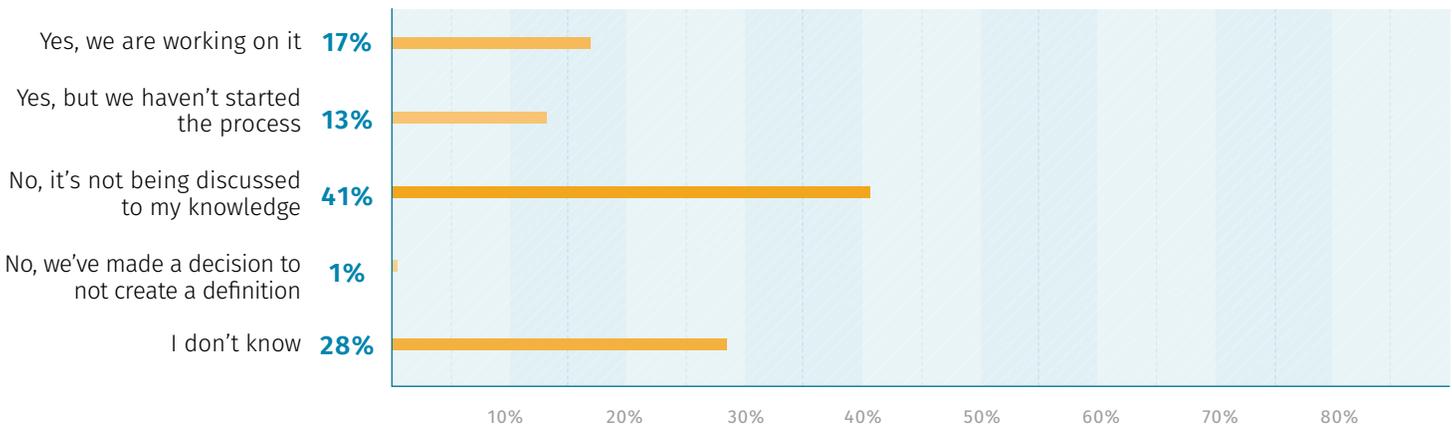


Q04 | Is this definition used in the enrollment process and consistently across your institution's programs and services?



Figures add to 101% due to rounding

Q05 | At what point during the matriculation process does your institution ask students to self-identify as a first-generation college student?



The nature of self-reported data also complicates defining and identifying first-generation college students, as institutions are reliant upon student willingness to respond, comprehension of the question, and other factors. Across focus groups, students reported being “hesitant” to identify their first-generation status on the admissions application because they believed it “may be held against them as a negative factor” by admissions staff. Katrina, a first-year, first-generation student at Georgia State University, did not answer questions about her parents’ education because she did not know the answer, and she views this as a missed opportunity to be identified as first-generation earlier. Similarly, Kwame, a second-year, first-generation student at the University of Florida recalled not identifying with the term “first in the family” because his older siblings had attended college. Thinking carefully not only about how this data is used across an institution but the strategies being used to define terms, collect data, and create an environment where students feel empowered to self-report emerged as critical.

DEFINING FIRST GENERATION

The term “first-generation” entered the legislative lexicon as part of H.R. 5192: Education Amendments of 1980 after being coined by the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE), a Washington, D.C., based association that champions federal TRIO and educational opportunity programs. The term was intended to identify underserved students, like those from low-income, racial minority, or rural backgrounds, who did not have the benefits of cultural capital and college-going knowledge because their parents did not complete a four-year college degree. Moreover, the term “first-generation” aimed to identify underserved students without referring to race or ethnicity. This created a definition for first-generation that included students whose parents did not earn a four-year college degree, and it is still widely used by institutions, access programs, financial aid officers, and support services.

In the decades since 1980, the definition of first-generation has evolved as higher education has expanded and enrollment diversified. While many institutions rely upon the federal or legislative definition affiliated with the 1980 amendments and TRIO programs, variations have emerged for specific programs and research, and in order to meet specific needs of the population. The U.S. Department of Education offers three approaches: the aforementioned legislative definition and two that are specific to research. The primary research definition captures a narrower set of students—only those whose parents have no postsecondary experience whatsoever. This definition excludes students whose parents began college but did not obtain degrees, or those who obtained associate degrees. Even further is a delineation between students whose parents obtained high school diplomas and those who stopped out before

high school graduation. Still other definitions are often used by colleges and educational associations. A recent New York Times article discussing the fluid nature of the first-generation identity (Sharpe, 2017) cited the work of University of Georgia education professor, Robert K. Toutkoushian. Using data from a longitudinal study begun in 2002, Toutkoushian analyzed eight different definitions of the term, and within a sample of 7,300 students, he found that those who could be called first-generation ranged from 22 percent to 77 percent.

In practice, many colleges align their definitions with the federal definition used by the Department of Education, often due to reporting requirements for federal funds, but some have explicitly broadened the scope to include students whose parents obtained degrees internationally or students whose parents obtained degrees as nontraditional students after the age of 25. Among the 204 institutions that responded to the national survey as having a formal definition, 15 percent use “Neither parent earned a four-year college degree from an institution in the U.S.” and consideration of a change to this definition was a common topic across interviews. The variation continues across survey responses, albeit in smaller numbers, where 12 percent of institutions include the specificity of the parents being biological to the student, 8 percent use the research definition of parents never entering higher education, and 2 percent delineate parental education as not going beyond the two-year degree. Even with this breadth of nuance, another 6 percent of institutions indicated having a definition of first-generation that was not included among the survey choices (Figure Q01.)



It is important to note the role that siblings who are attending, or have completed, college play in the first-generation definition conversation. While college-educated siblings are often a significant source of valuable cultural capital, most institutions do not believe their attendance removes the first-generation identity from the currently enrolled student. However, many students, including those interviewed for this study, were slow to identify as first-generation because they believed their siblings' college attendance negated their status. A number of interviewed students, like Kwame, indicated not revealing their first-generation identity on the application for admission, because they no longer believed it applied.

It is worth noting that even within the same institution, varying definitions are sometimes used for the purposes of admission, scholarship eligibility, data tracking, and inclusion in support services. The definition used for providing support services generally is the most inclusive because, overwhelmingly, practitioners agree that when students turn to them for help, they genuinely need and should receive help, regardless of whether they meet the precise definition of first-generation. At Brown University, where an institutional commitment was recently made through the establishment of the First-Generation College and Low-Income Student Center, the federal definition is expanded to include:

“Any student who may self-identify as not having prior exposure to or knowledge of navigating higher institutions such as Brown and may need additional resources. For example, if a parent attended a four-year college in a different educational system outside of the United States; if a student has only had close contact to people with minimal college experience; if a student and/or parent feel that they are unfamiliar with college

culture at Brown—these are diverse ways in which students might identify with the first-generation identity.”

The variations in definitions have several implications in practice. Who should receive communications about resources targeted at first-generation students? Who should be counted when reporting data on retention and completion? How can institutions identify students for proactive, early intervention programs? How can educators know that they are making appropriate comparisons when considering institutional data against national benchmarks and other institutions? How will a student know if he or she should self-identify? These were common questions and concerns that emerged from interviews as leaders and practitioners wrestled with the challenges that institutional variations in definitions can create, especially with regard to data collection, reporting, and peer benchmarking. Moreover, educators shared concern that while the legislative definition might be widely used, it does differ from the research definition and may not be right for an institution striving to meet the particular needs of its campus community. **They suggest the formal recognition of a more uniform definition to facilitate benchmarking in the field**, although individual institutions still need room to set their own parameters for service provisions based on their student population and available resources. A carefully crafted definition is an important decision for an institution, as it will determine whether a student is eligible for targeted financial support, academic assistance, and programming.

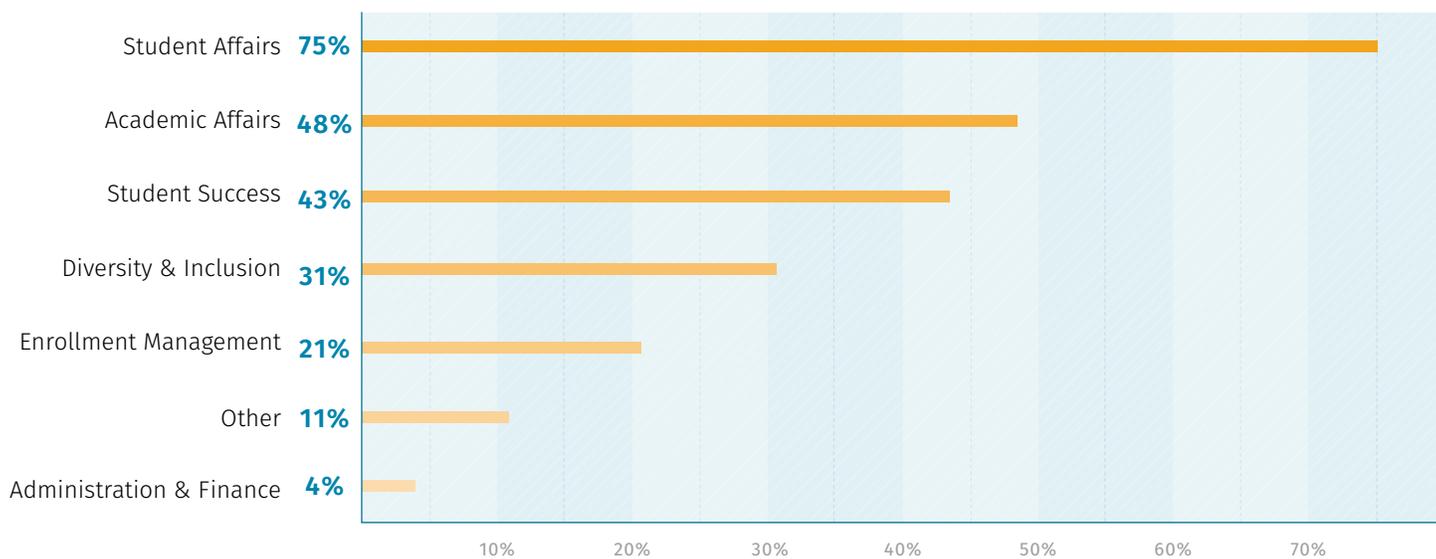


Amid the complexities of determining who qualifies as a first-generation student based upon myriad definitions is the vast intersectionality associated with the first-generation identity. It is no secret that nearly all first-generation students enter college grappling with other identities and seeking to find their place within specific communities. **This is the “first-gen plus” nature of the first-generation identity: Students may be first-gen plus minority, first-gen plus LGBTQIA, first-gen plus low-income, first-gen plus from an immigrant family, to name a few.** While practitioners most often speak about the intersectionality of low-income students and minority students, they also recognize that the first-generation community is diverse, extends beyond these two groups, and is critical to consider in the first-generation student experience. Students noted the importance of their intersectional identities as well. Marco, a second-year student at Texas Christian University, shared:

“While it was great to have a peer mentor my first year, it would have been cool to connect with someone like me. My mentor was pretty rich, white, and in [a fraternity]. He helped me out, but maybe having someone who is more like me, from a family without a lot of money or Latino would have been really cool, too. Someone I felt more like myself with.”

Across institutions, this intersectional identity is often a driving factor in determining the location for first-generation support programs on campus. As shown in Figure Q06, 75 percent of programs are housed in Student Affairs, often within multicultural affairs or diversity services, residence life, or leadership programs. Academic Affairs and Student Success, 48 percent and 43 percent respectively, also share in first-generation programs, which are often housed within academic advising, learning support services, academic bridge programs, and honors programs. Placement of these offices is specific to the unique structure of an institution and, as depicted in Figure Q06, many institutions have programs in multiple divisions and units. While a division can be an ideal fit for certain programs, it is important to examine whether programs are situated in ways that may be unintentionally exclusive. Practitioners reported that program and service placement shapes their ability to recruit students for participation and can hinder whether students feel comfortable enough to enter an office to ask questions. This highlights the importance of thoughtful and data-informed consideration.

Q06 | From the options below, please select the institutional division(s) that have primary responsibility for first-generation programs and/or services.



It is important to note that the first-generation identity is not being lost amongst intersectional identities for current students. Practitioners reported seeing greater recognition of the first-generation identity—in all of its complexity—in recent years, on their own campuses and nationwide. Increasingly, leaders, staff, and faculty members are coming forward to share their own stories about being first-generation and to lend their experience, skills, and time to students following in their footsteps. Institutions are commonly initiating programs to publicly identify and recognize first-generation faculty and staff to bridge gaps with first-generation students seeking community. A common practice is simply to provide stickers to faculty and staff to apply to office doors or windows that boldly identify their first-generation status. The University of California, San Diego offers an online directory of faculty members who identify as first-generation, as part of the Triton Firsts program. Students arrive on campus with increased awareness of their first-generation status, often having learned about the term during the college application process or from supportive high school teachers who encouraged their pursuit of higher education. As Julia, a first-generation student at Kansas State, reflected:

“I knew my parents didn’t go to college my whole life, but I didn’t know there was an actual term for it until I was in the [college prep] program in high school. I remember thinking, ‘Oh, hey, that’s me!’”

These types of initiatives have increased student pride in their first-generation identity, created more advocacy for programs and services, and increased the number of first-generation student organizations on campuses.



IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE FIRST-GENERATION IDENTITY IS NOT BEING LOST AMONGST INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES FOR CURRENT STUDENTS

ON BEING FIRST-GENERATION: THE HIDDEN STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

Those who work closely with first-generation students know that college is often only one of many competing priorities in their lives. In the phase 1 focus groups, first-generation college students offered insights about the expectations and responsibilities from home that create additional layers of physical, emotional, and financial stress. These perspectives often are hidden, but they illustrate and emphasize the complex nature of the demands on first-generation students.

"If I make a mistake and I fail, they are going to be so crushed and disappointed. It is a lot of pressure," says Marianne at Texas Christian University (TCU) about her family's high expectations regarding college. *"I don't want [my parents] to know how hard it is. I just want them to be proud of me,"* adds Christopher, another first-generation TCU student. *"I don't want them to see what I'm dealing with."*

Financial obligations at home often require first-generation students from low-income households to continuously balance work and academics.

"I've got to take care of my mom, and I've got to take care of my brothers and my sister and my nephews. I feel that on me," says Sofia, a student at The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). *"They don't ask me for anything, but there will be times I'll call my mom up and be like, 'Has this bill gotten paid? OK, well I'm going to pay it.' That's just on me."*

"My mother has two jobs. My father has two jobs. ... It's just something that is always in the back of my mind," says Ana, another UTA student. *"I have a moral responsibility that's fallen upon me especially since I am the only child. I don't have any other options of someone else to lean on. It falls on me,"* she says. *"First-generation means I have to get it done."*

It can be hard for students to ask for help navigating academics, finances, and social issues, and it can be hard to feel different.

"I think when I realized I was first-gen ... it was when I came and I moved in, in the fall, by myself. And everybody during move-in day was with their parents, and all of my suitemates had people, had carloads of stuff, and I had a suitcase. I realized I was 1,100 miles away from home and alone," says Molly, a third-year, first-generation student at Cornell University.

"I take care of things myself. I go to class. I go to work at one of the dining halls. That's my life. Nobody really helped me before I got here, and the real world after [college] is going to be the same way. Why should I expect GSU to do anything for me when I'm just another student?" says Kiara, a third-year, first-generation student at Georgia State University.

When they do connect with services, mentors, and advisors, students can feel guilty about taking advantage of resources that they are aware are limited.

"There might be people who need that help more than we do, who are struggling and don't know where to go. There are a lot of people here who are first-gen but aren't in these [support] programs," says Jessica at UTA. It's hard, she says, for her to think about *"the people who have been left out."*

In navigating a difficult academic course load, holding employment, managing family needs and expectations, completing requirements to remain enrolled, adjusting to life in college, joining clubs and organizations, building networks, and hoping to enjoy friendships in college, these students recognized their first-generation identity as a significant challenge with barriers to overcome. The first-generation identity is both an experience that sets them apart from peers and an immense privilege that, in their words, will allow for a better life post-completion, where their struggles will be fewer than their families' struggles.

THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF THE INTERSECTIONAL FIRST-GENERATION IDENTITY

The unique intersectional nature of the first-generation identity presents both opportunities and challenges for stakeholders invested in first-generation student success. Efforts to support first-generation students may generate questions and concerns from various campus offices about how emerging efforts fit into existing work that supports low-income and minority students, or existing opportunity initiatives such as TRIO programs. Conversely, institutions may fall into the trap of believing that first-generation students are being served through existing programs that target populations encompassed within the first-generation label—e.g., multicultural offices, diversity programs, or academic preparation offerings—when in fact, many first-generation students are being overlooked. It is important to note that many first-generation programs intended to also meet the needs of an intersecting identity, such as minority or low-income status, are successful in strengthening belonging and improving academic outcomes, but it is important that the scope of programs offered across an institution strive to meet the largest number of students possible. There is no evidence of a campus successfully serving every first-generation student, so it is likely that there are students on every campus who are being missed in program recruitment processes.

However, the diversity of first-generation student identities serves as a mobilizing force for people across campus to coordinate and collaborate. Faculty and staff who identify as first-generation are especially eager to engage because they see reflections of their own stories in students' experiences. For example, interviews with practitioners revealed that there was excitement when first-generation faculty and staff were invited to engage with students through meals, workshops, and events. Faculty and staff reported "feeling connected" and being able to "share an experience" that they did not realize mattered to these students. **Sixty percent of surveyed practitioners agreed or strongly agreed that faculty on their campus genuinely care about first-generation students.** With broad representation from different corners of campus, **the first-generation identity serves as a powerful catalyst for greater institutional mobilization to create change.** Moreover, because the scope of the change is "first-gen plus," these efforts have the potential to drive broad, rather than niche, institutional change. These are opportunities to reach more students, dispel myths associated with their identities, scale support programs, and see improved outcomes. These are initial steps in **creating accessible and inclusive environments for first-generation students that will provide opportunities for institutions to be "student-ready" for all students.** In Section Two, additional insights into the "student-ready" concept and how this approach can benefit first-generation students are shared.

"We work to dispel myths about first-generation students, like they are not as smart as other students or that they are only underrepresented students. Our first-generation population disputes those assumptions. We have a very diverse group of first-generation students, and they are thriving."

Dawn Bruner,
Director of Parent and Family
Relations, University of Rochester

SHIFTING TO AN ASSET-BASED LENS

Rising tuition costs, debates over the purpose of higher education, issues of inequality, and a push for improved completion rates are only a few factors driving current conversations on college student success. Higher education literature fuels debate by highlighting the struggles first-generation students face in the college-going process including the ability to afford attendance, tendencies to stop out, and the lack of academic preparation for university-level studies upon arrival. Too often, these first-generation student experiences are perceived as shortcomings or detriments by institutional leaders who have perpetuated negative connotations and provided only reactive or limited support. However, that is changing. The landscape study found that practitioners are actively promoting a counter-narrative by building campus cultures and engaged communities that highlight the strengths of first-generation students. Grit, ambition, a track record of beating the odds, and fresh viewpoints that enhance the broader academic community are all qualities that educators emphasize.

“We need to help first-generation students understand the assets they bring to the academy, their job, and society so that they can begin to see that being an outsider is an asset.”

Leslie Pendleton,
Senior Director
of Retention and Success
Initiatives, Student Affairs,
University of Florida

Shifting to an asset-based lens, where the inherent strengths, talents, and abilities of students are identified and utilized, instills students with a sense of pride and confidence, empowering them to seek support without stigma and increasing their awareness of the tools they possess to navigate struggles both academic and social/emotional. Across interviews, practitioners overwhelmingly report the detrimental effect of imposter syndrome on the first-generation student experience, and they emphasize that it is critical to avoid a deficit-based support model to assist students in shaking the negative feelings of doubt they may encounter in their new communities. Some institutions reported directly addressing the concept of imposter syndrome with first-generation students as a means of empowering them to understand their feelings and to encourage asset-based coping strategies as a proactive approach.

First-generation program staff are building positive campus cultures for first-generation students from many angles: designing events and program curriculum that highlight strengths and achievements; creating paraphernalia such as T-shirts, decals, special pins, academic cords, and stoles for students to wear at graduation to foster pride and show community presence; educating faculty and staff through competency training and development workshops; and hosting events that celebrate achievements such as a first-generation awareness week. These celebratory events also serve as opportunities to engage students' families, many of whom are eager to participate and learn more about their children's college experience. Simply having first-generation faculty and staff share their own struggles and successes in college offer students a sense of confidence and a pathway to make connections for mentoring in a setting they know will be inclusive. Of the institutions that reported offering first-generation programming, **54 percent of cohort-based programs and 33 percent of non-cohort based programs host celebratory or graduation events for students to denote significant milestones.**

Creating asset-based approaches in academic settings is an important step in allowing first-generation students to see themselves as successful in the postsecondary environment. Using theories and approaches from positive psychology, Northern Arizona University (NAU) has adopted a strengths-based approach to academic advising where

“We are socialized into the complexity of higher education institutions, but an audit into internal processes can reveal many potential improvements to break down barriers for first-generation students.”

William Durden,
President Emeritus, Dickinson College

students are actively involved in understanding their inherent talents and applying these to appropriate academic decision-making and support-seeking behaviors. Similarly, at the University of Memphis, students in the First Scholars® program, an initiative of The Suder Foundation, complete strengths inventories upon arrival and then complete curriculum-based workshops that promote strengths-based decision-making.

Celebrating accomplishments is also an important component of an asset-based approach, not only for students but also for the institution. At the University of Wisconsin–Madison, first-generation students who have successfully completed their first year are invited to a joint event with first-generation graduating seniors to celebrate these milestones together. Graduating students impart messages of support and encouragement to peers and are examples of success. To celebrate first-generation students at a national level, the Center for First-generation Student Success partnered with the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) for the inaugural First-generation College Celebration on November 8, 2017, to coincide with the 52nd anniversary of the Higher Education Act. Institutions were encouraged to have their own celebrations and share student stories on social media. Members of Congress shared their own first-generation stories and encouraged a renewed focus on policies related to student success. The annual celebration is open to all institutions, and celebrations on November 8th are encouraged.





The interviews revealed that practitioners and leaders recommended close evaluation of current policies and procedures as a first step in evaluating how an institution is approaching first-generation students and identifying opportunities to shift to an asset-based lens. While making adjustments within a program or service area is important, collaborating with colleagues and using a critical lens to examine campus culture for first-generation students will garner greater results. Involving first-generation students in this process may also elicit unique insights.

Questions for consideration include:

- ▶ Are you currently asking first-generation students to go through a “runaround” to receive services that may shift their focus to feeling unprepared?
- ▶ What type of assumptions are being conveyed in advising appointments or offices when they seek help?
- ▶ Does your current administration include first-generation students in major speeches or statements in a way that makes them feel welcome and successful?
- ▶ What does the language used in institutional publications or on websites convey to first-generation students regarding their place within the community?
- ▶ In what areas of the administrative structure do programs specific to first-generation students reside?
- ▶ How are first-generation student accomplishments recognized and celebrated within your community?
- ▶ How are data being collected on first-generation student use of campus resources and academic support services to improve strengths-based approaches to delivery?

While increasing student confidence is critically important, simple changes in language and approach from within the institution can make major improvements during the shift to an asset-based environment and can lead to opportunities to celebrate the strengths-based successes of students. Additional recommendations are offered at the end of this report.

SECTION TWO: THE INSTITUTIONAL MINDSET AND APPROACH

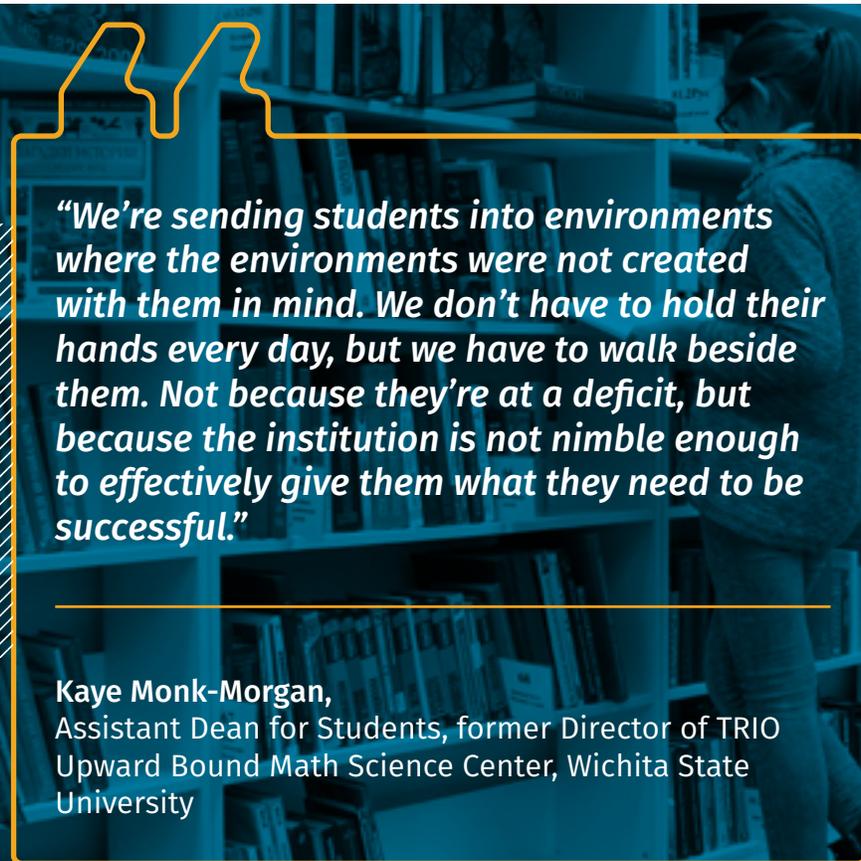
SHIFTING FROM COLLEGE-READY TO STUDENT-READY

Shifting to an asset-based perspective challenges long-held institutional attempts to create interventions to make students college-ready. Interventions often meant identifying students who had met a specific set of benchmarks that signified that they were ready for immediate college success instead of, perhaps, having the skills and talents inherent for success when placed in the right environments and with the proper support. Practitioners now stress the importance of flipping this narrative so that it becomes the responsibility of institutions to become more student-ready. The term “student-ready” was highlighted in [Becoming a Student-Ready College: A New Culture of Leadership for Student Success](#), where authors encourage a shift from focusing on how prepared a student may be for college to the approaches colleges and universities are using to prepare and build successful environments for entering students (McNair, Albertine, Cooper, McDonald, & Major, 2016). Echoing this call, practitioners argued that institutions need to examine their own policies, processes, and practices to understand precisely how students are being served and their strengths utilized while also reducing barriers to student success. Moreover, practitioners recommend examining the first-generation student experience specific to campus needs, and involving students in this process, to fully understand where improvements could be made.



SURVEY PARTICIPANTS BELIEVE SENIOR ADMINISTRATORS AT THEIR INSTITUTION CARE ABOUT FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS (78 PERCENT) AND THERE IS INSTITUTIONAL AWARENESS AND RECOGNITION OF THE FIRST-GENERATION POPULATION (71 PERCENT). HOWEVER, 72 PERCENT OF THESE SAME RESPONDENTS INDICATE THEIR INSTITUTION SHOULD MAKE SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN THE WAY FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS ARE SUPPORTED ON THEIR CAMPUS.

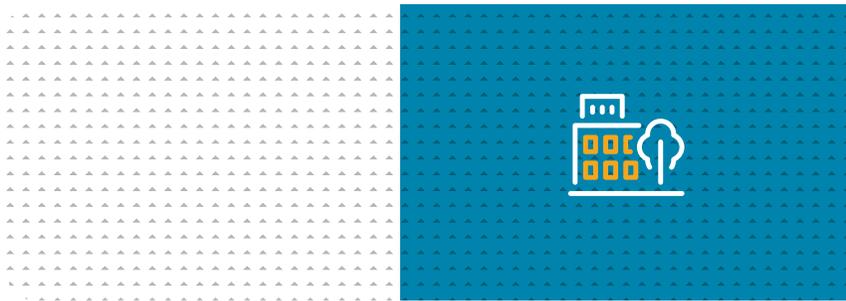
For example, the College Transition Collaborative (CTC), a stakeholder interviewed for this study, has found that modifying institutional academic probation processes and subsequent communication with students about their academic standing has a positive effect on student retention. Executive Director of CTC, Natasha Krol, indicates the key is for institutions to focus on the actions students can take to receive help and succeed, rather than on a label associated with failure.

A quote by Kaye Monk-Morgan is presented in a white, stylized speech bubble shape with a blue outline. The background is a photograph of a library with bookshelves and a person looking at books, overlaid with a blue tint and a white diagonal line pattern. The quote reads:

“We’re sending students into environments where the environments were not created with them in mind. We don’t have to hold their hands every day, but we have to walk beside them. Not because they’re at a deficit, but because the institution is not nimble enough to effectively give them what they need to be successful.”

Kaye Monk-Morgan,
Assistant Dean for Students, former Director of TRIO
Upward Bound Math Science Center, Wichita State
University

The siloed nature of colleges’ organizational structures is another institutional barrier that needs to be addressed if colleges are to become student-ready. In such disconnected environments, students seeking help for a particular issue can find themselves shunted from office to office. College success coaches at ScholarMatch, a nonprofit focused on college access and success, identify this campus runaround experience as a major source of frustration that contributes to first-generation students feeling as if they do not belong on campus. Across focus groups, students recounted personal examples and expressed a desire for a dedicated physical space or center in which they could receive comprehensive help tailored to their needs. Students noted “giving up” and “just going back to their room” when they were unable to find help after multiple attempts, and one student noted that an attempt to pay a bill took an entire day simply because he was unfamiliar with the term “bursar.”



Some institutions have responded by tackling this issue using a student-facing approach, creating a one-stop-shop for student services and, increasingly, specific to first-generation students. In fall 2017, the University of Michigan opened First Generation Student Gateway, a centralized information resource area and gathering space that also houses the office of a professional staff member knowledgeable on the first-generation student experience. Kansas State University recently announced the creation of a centralized Office of First-Generation Students in an effort to bring all programs under one umbrella. Clark University houses the Office of Multicultural and First Generation Student Support where students can engage in workshops, participate in the first-generation student union, or use the resource room for meetings, homework, and social gatherings. These approaches not only provide direct benefits to active first-generation students but also send a strong message to the campus community about institutional priorities. They signal importance and belonging to prospective and newly enrolled students.

“It means a lot to have a space of our own on campus. It is something we wanted for a long time, and I love being one of the students who get to help think about how we use the Gateway and how we are helping other first-gen students. I’m really proud of it.”

Henry,
a first-generation student leader
at the University of Michigan

COHORT AND NETWORKED SERVICE APPROACHES

Programs for first-generation students have long existed on college campuses. For example, there are Federal TRIO programs that serve first-generation, low-income students; scholarship programs that serve first-generation, high-achieving students; and mentoring programs that serve first-generation students who pursue a specific course of study. These long-standing programs generally take a **cohort approach**: high-touch support for a small subset of first-generation students, often with intrusive advising at the core of the offerings. **Of surveyed institutions reporting offering first-generation student success programs, 73 percent indicated having at least one cohort-based program.**

Eligibility requirements around family income, academic achievements, and location of residency are common, and students often must complete an application process to participate. Some institutions take a cohort-based summer bridge program approach for first-generation students that is intended to better equip students for the transition to college. Cohort-based programs can also have a niche focus. For instance, the Honors College PATH program at the University of Arkansas serves fewer than 20 academically talented first-generation and low-income students. What can be challenging about cohort-based approaches is that they often require significant human and financial resources to be successful while serving a limited number of students, and in the current economic climate, making the case for long-term support of these programs can be difficult.

Yet, data from these cohort programs have shown positive results on multiple facets of student success including belonging, performance, persistence, and completion. Students participating in the First Scholars® program at the University of Memphis receive a four-year renewable scholarship of \$5,000 alongside extensive support and learning opportunities from a campus-based staff member devoted solely

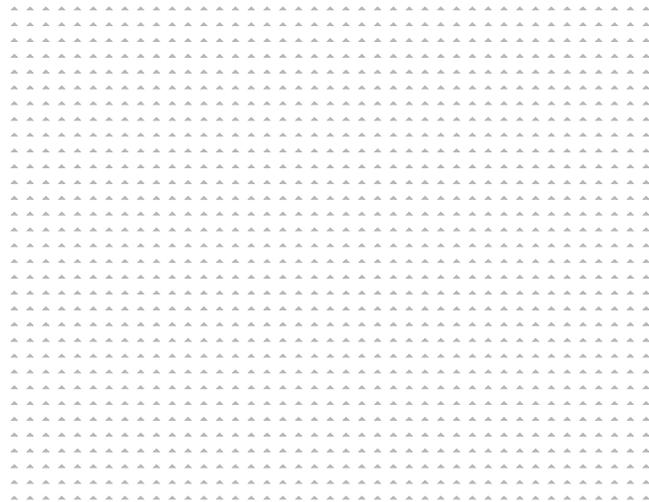


to this program. At Memphis, the First Scholars® program receives more than 400 applications for 20 spaces, and those selected are persisting on to the second year at an average of 93 percent. The results are 18 percentage points higher than Memphis first-generation students not engaged in the First Scholars® program. Across all six public universities currently housing this program, First Scholars® students are persisting from the first year to the second year at a rate of 92 percent, and they move more quickly toward degree completion and with higher GPAs when compared to both non-participating, first-generation students and continuing-generation peers. That said, this and similar programs report that scaling their reach has proven expensive and challenging.

In recent years, a **networked approach** to first-generation student support has emerged to mobilize stakeholders across campus to build support into different functions.

Through intentional collaborations and information sharing, a networked approach offers a collaborative, resource-sharing opportunity to support larger numbers of students while lessening the burden on practitioners. First, support is provided to first-generation students through coordinated programming and services to lessen “campus runaround” and to create a stronger sense of belonging. While programs may remain in their respective areas, practitioners who have adopted a networked approach report shared benefits of streamlined application processes that serve more students, simplify program scheduling, enable institutions to share resources and personnel, and provide opportunities to share data and insights with each other and with students. After realizing that first-generation programs were opening across campus without collaboration, staff at Texas Christian University used the National First Generation College Celebration event as a platform for learning about other programs, developing partnerships, and having formal conversations about service provision approaches and responsibilities. To strengthen community and facilitate conversation, Truman State University selected *Make Your Home Among Strangers*, a novel detailing the experiences of a first-generation student from an immigrant family, as the common reading.

A networked approach also includes support through collaboration with, and education of, campus partners to integrate first-generation student support into different functions. Integration is often accomplished through development of first-generation committees or working groups charged to create efficiencies and share information. It may also require foundational work such as visiting campus offices, presenting at staff trainings, and securing the backing of university leadership who will reinforce this approach as an institutional priority. Ideally, this approach results in a campus community with strong understanding of and commitment to first-generation student success. It also provides opportunities for collaboration and resource-sharing rather than remaining in the siloed approaches discussed throughout interviews. Practitioners noted that simply knowing about other programmatic offerings for first-generation students, particularly at decentralized institutions, not only fosters information sharing and opportunities for students but is also essential in developing creative solutions.



If an institution wishes to expand reach and scale in a resource-constrained environment, it is wise to pursue the networked model. Students participating in focus groups agreed that a concerted effort to serve all first-generation students is desirable, and they acknowledge that many students who locate small-scale or cohort-based support programs stumble upon them out of “luck.” Even TRIO programs, particularly Student Support Services, that exist on many campuses and in numbers larger than traditional boutique scholarship programs serve a relatively small percentage of first-generation students. Despite the programs’ monumental efforts and noted successes, only a little more than 208,000 students are served, less than 5 percent of the nation’s total low-income, first-generation college students, and often the result of struggles with federal funding appropriations. Among the institutions interviewed, Northern Arizona University (NAU) has invested heavy resources in its cohort programs, including institutional funds to increase the capacity of its TRIO programs. These investments have allowed NAU to serve 1,000 out of 8,000, or roughly 12.5 percent of the total first-generation population. While this is an admirable commitment with significant benefits, the number of students served remains relatively small.

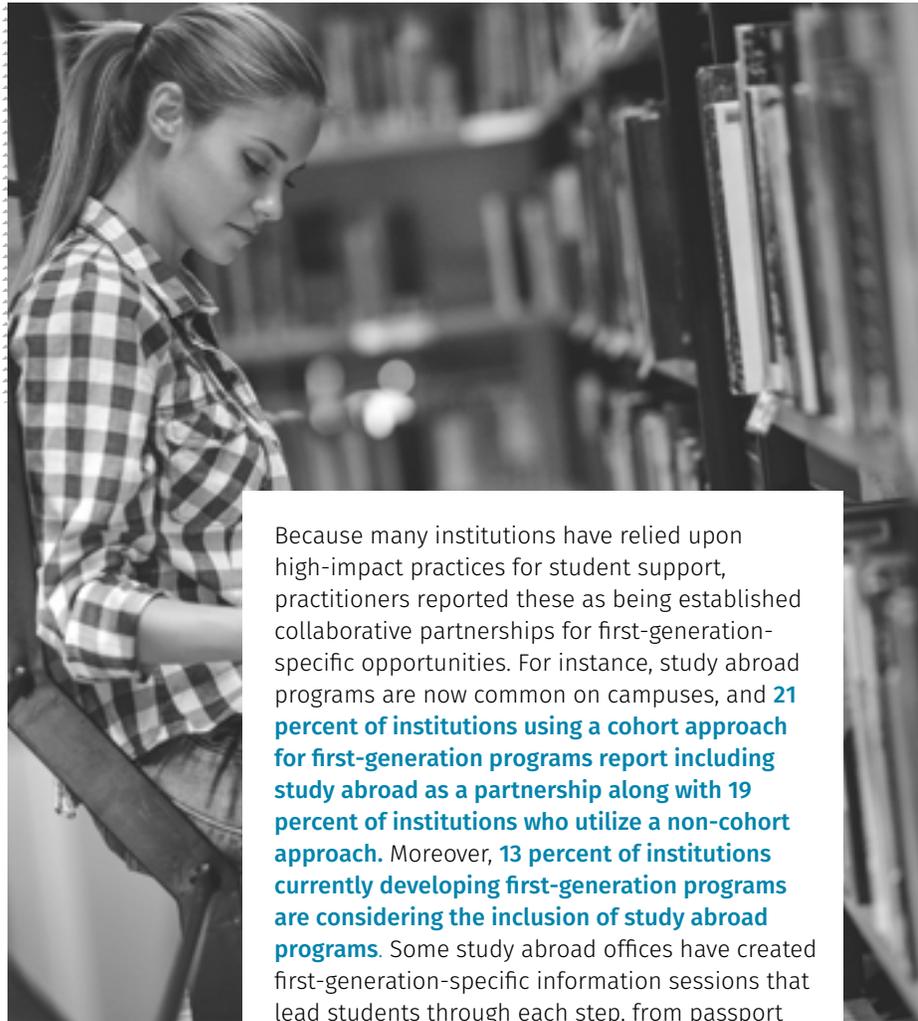


It is important to understand that cohort programs and networked programs are not mutually exclusive—many schools actively pursue both models, and cohort programs often benefit from being part of a networked approach. In fact, the largest cohort program among the institutions included in the landscape study is the Machen Florida Opportunity Scholars program at the University of Florida (UF), which serves roughly 20 percent of the school’s total first-generation population. In 2013, UF began an initiative to serve first-generation students who do not qualify for the scholarship program, which targets low-income, in-state students and has proven quite successful. Wake Forest University is a leader in utilizing both a cohort and networked approach. When students

who were not eligible or selected for the Magnolia Scholars program—a competitive, cohort-based scholarship program—began asking if they could be involved in the programmatic efforts and support workshops without the cohort or scholarship funds, program Director T. Nathaniel “Nate” French was intrigued. The result was the creation of First in the Forest, a voluntary program for first-generation students that provides access to resources, social events, and mentoring for students of all academic years. The program’s initial success has led to the addition of a welcome lunch for families and a graduation pinning ceremony. The expansion of this program would not have been possible without significant collaboration, and it relies upon networked relationships to keep students engaged.

INTENTIONAL ALIGNMENT WITH HIGH-IMPACT EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

With most scholarly literature focusing on the outcomes of first-generation students, practitioners report a lack of practice-oriented research targeted at first-generation student support. As a result, they turn instead to widely known, broadly used programmatic practices in higher education or approaches from positive psychology to inform their first-generation offerings. They frequently cite “high-impact educational practices” as their chosen solutions because of their widespread use and popularity across higher education. HIPs, as they are commonly known, comprise ten teaching and learning practices that are found to benefit college students, especially those students historically underserved, and are often readily accessible on campuses. High-impact practices are intended to provide coordinated, active learning experiences for students; improve critical inquiry, and intellectual and practical competencies; foster a sense of purpose; and engage communication and listening skills. George Kuh, Chancellor’s Professor of Higher Education Emeritus at Indiana University, suggests that institutions should make at least one high-impact activity available to every student every year, as well as prioritize these opportunities for historically underserved students early in the academic career (Kuh, 2008).



Because many institutions have relied upon high-impact practices for student support, practitioners reported these as being established collaborative partnerships for first-generation-specific opportunities. For instance, study abroad programs are now common on campuses, and **21 percent of institutions using a cohort approach for first-generation programs report including study abroad as a partnership along with 19 percent of institutions who utilize a non-cohort approach.** Moreover, **13 percent of institutions currently developing first-generation programs are considering the inclusion of study abroad programs.** Some study abroad offices have created first-generation-specific information sessions that lead students through each step, from passport application to financial support to preparing for their voyage. Going one step beyond, Loyola Marymount University created a study abroad opportunity for 15 first-generation students to travel to the Dominican Republic for ten days. Clemson University also created a special study abroad opportunity for first-generation students, in which five first-generation students study at the University of Nicosia in Cyprus. Highlighting these targeted approaches is important, as practitioners asserted that simply suggesting study abroad opportunities to first-generation students, rather than tailoring details to meet their needs, was a common approach and one that was often unsuccessful.

HIGH-IMPACT EDUCATION PRACTICES ARE: LEARNING COMMUNITIES, WRITING-INTENSIVE COURSES, COLLABORATIVE ASSIGNMENTS AND PROJECTS, UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH, DIVERSITY/GLOBAL LEARNING, SERVICE LEARNING, INTERNSHIPS, AND CAPSTONE COURSES AND PROJECTS.



Because they offer a supportive, high-touch environment that fosters both academic and social success, living-learning programs are successful in higher education. Recently, first-generation-specific living-learning programs have grown in popularity. After many years of successful living-learning programs, the University of Texas at Dallas is developing a community-specific program for residential, first-generation students. In its 10th year, the Gen-1 program at the University of Cincinnati offers a living-learning component accompanied by four annual ceremonies and requirements to complete benchmarks in four functional areas including student health and wellness, career preparation, success strategies, and community service. To support students as they “transition to life at a large university and flourish in their academic and personal journey,” and to raise awareness of the first-generation student experience, University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) offers the First To Go living-learning community annually. In 2009, Clarice Ford, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of Illinois Springfield, opened Necessary Steps Mentoring Program, a living-learning program that incorporates academic coursework and study skills, social interaction, and civic engagement, as well as communication with parents. While highly successful, living-learning communities can also be cost-prohibitive, difficult to scale, and troublesome to integrate into a breadth of programmatic and housing requirements often planned to support new student transition.

32 PERCENT OF COHORT-BASED PROGRAMS AND 24 PERCENT OF NON-COHORT BASED USE LIVING-LEARNING COMMUNITIES AS A HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICE WITH FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS.

HIP’s efficacy in improving student success has been attributed to the fact that it directs students to “purposeful” activities that prompt them to engage meaningfully with faculty and a diverse set of peers. In practice, to decide on offerings, staff members draw on the broad principles underlying high-impact practices and combine them with their own experiences. For example, Fort Hays State University titled a pre-orientation session for first-generation students “Exploring Passion and Purpose through Student Involvement,” using an asset-based lens and drawing on the high-impact principle of creating purpose. Students were guided to explore their strengths, passion, and purpose in college and then encouraged to connect their personal passion and purpose to engagement experiences on campus.

It is important to note that while some institutions are having great success with employing HIPs for first-generation students, interviews also uncovered that the choice of HIPs often are a result of uncertainty, lack of resources, or ease of availability. Practitioners reported that they were not quite sure of what other approaches to take and, often in efforts to implement programs as quickly as possible, chose to partner with an existing high-impact practice or to adopt an approach from the list with the intention to “assess later.” While data collection and program development is laborious, practitioners recommend taking the time to diligently assess which HIPs may be best for an institution’s first-generation student population, to evaluate those decisions over time, and to think creatively and collaboratively in the process.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS: PROVIDING INCENTIVES FOR STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN HIGH-IMPACT ACTIVITIES

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill created an extensive, yet flexible, [set of requirements](#) to encourage first-generation students to participate in a broad range of high-impact activities including study abroad, undergraduate research, honors thesis, internships, service learning, and learning communities. First-generation students who complete these requirements with a GPA of 3.0 or above can submit an application to become Carolina Firsts Honors Students and receive a special stole to wear with their regalia at graduation. Those who narrowly miss the 3.0 GPA threshold but earn a 2.7 or above are dubbed Carolina Firsts Honors Participants. Carmen Huerta-Bapat, Carolina Firsts program director, conveyed the same observation that many other practitioners made: **A small incentive can go a long way**, and these incentives can be of varying approaches or value. Students have been enthusiastic about completing the requirements to be part of the Carolina Firsts program, wear the stole with pride, and feel it contributes to their confidence and sense of belonging within the campus community.

Financial incentive is a strong motivator for students to participate in programming geared at increasing success, but a full scholarship is not always feasible. Through the Cardinal First program, North Central College gives a \$500 scholarship to first-generation students who attend a certain number of workshops and events throughout the academic year. Before the financial incentive was in place, “I was not reaching the students who needed to be in this program because they think they’re better off working. Since we added the scholarship,

we are definitely reaching well over half [of the first-generation students] on our campus,” said Julie Carballo, director of First Generation Programs. The scholarship is awarded at the beginning of the next academic year as an incentive for students to return. Cardinal First offers a continued programming model across all four years that is also accessible to transfer students. It allows students to renew their scholarship. Students at North Central noted that the workshops and opportunities to contribute to the campus community as mentors are driving factors in participating, and that the scholarship lessens burdens and allows them to more fully engage in their college experience. One student, Mark, noted that he chose to attend North Central because of his older brother’s experience with Cardinal First and the overwhelming support he found from program staff and faculty.

Across interviews and survey responses, creative approaches to directly and indirectly support and incentivize students emerged. A number of institutions provide extended computer lab hours and free printing to first-generation students. Others offer priority course registration to first-generation students in certain programs or meeting certain goals. For many, offering a nutritious meal or a set of lockers for storage provided a major boost in program involvement as it met a need that was preventing participation. For programs attached to a campus office, students reported having a place to “hang out” as being a significant incentive for continued involvement, and practitioners noted that adding couches and microwaves to their office space increased community involvement and interest.

PROACTIVE VS. REACTIVE SUPPORT

In the past, deficit-based interventions often directed first-generation students to resources and help after a negative event occurred, such as poor midterm grades or placement on academic probation. Higher education literature also supports the concern that first-generation students are more hesitant to seek institutional help or may be unaware of the assistance options available until an issue arises, such as losing their financial aid due to a shortage of credits or getting dropped from classes due to an unpaid account balance or missed deadline. For first-generation students, this may be a result of lacking the cultural capital needed to effectively navigate the complexities of higher education environments and jargon and, despite often being quite supportive, families may not be able to provide direction. Practitioners consistently report the need to engage with first-generation students proactively, as early as when students are in high school and during their transition to college, to them understand and embrace their first-generation status earlier so fewer barriers exist upon entry. Many practitioners also report the desire to establish more processes that proactively identify potential issues or needs for students and to conduct targeted outreach to offer help. These reasons also support the need for strengthened institutional identification of first-generation students, information sharing, and data collection so proactive approaches can be implemented with intentionality.

Educators have long recognized the need to bridge the time between high school and college, especially for students whose parents may have limited ability to help them navigate that transition. Practitioners report the efficacy of early interventions like summer bridge programs that span several days to several weeks and target first-generation students. **Half of the surveyed institutions employing a cohort-based approach to programming include summer bridge programs.** In addition to boosting academic preparation, these programs help students connect with a community of peers, faculty, and staff early on



“We’re a problem-solving office and it’s always better to begin working with a student at the beginning stages of a problem or concern, but oftentimes we’re coming in when it’s crisis mode, when there are limited options for the student.”

Natalie Verge,
 Senior Associate Director,
 University Service Center, Boston University

and get acquainted with resources available on campus. Often, students earn academic credit through summer bridge participation, positioning them well for manageable course loads during the academic year. At the University of Texas at Dallas, the eight-week [Academic Bridge Program](#) offers approximately 160 first-generation students classes in math and rhetoric, mandatory tutoring, and a weekly seminar to discuss their experiences with program staff. Participants in the program graduate at 70 percent, which is well above the UT Dallas average.

Florida State University and Chapman University both offer highly successful, networked approaches to summer bridge programs that utilize different formats. At Florida State, students are identified for the Center for Academic Retention & Enhancement (CARE) program through intentional recruiting programs in Florida high schools and are selected as part of a seamless application process during university admission. Each summer, more than 400 CARE students arrive for one week of orientation. It is designed so families only have to make one trip to campus, and then students remain for six weeks of classes for academic credit. The experience includes weekly group meetings, academic support, a diversity and justice required course, cultural activities, and transition preparation. CARE students attend this program at minimal to no cost through use of financial aid and institutional partnerships. Recognizing that staff support for first-generation students is quite limited, Chapman University also offers a summer bridge program, Promising Futures, which focuses solely on transition and acclimation. Before fall orientation, first-generation students are invited to move in to their campus residences, a cost-saving measure, for a three-day workshop style program that focuses on academic skills and strengths, campus resources, financial planning, campus employment, community acclimation, and social integration. Through a partnership with the Office of Residence Life and First Year Experience, students attend this program at no additional cost. According to Promising Futures Program Coordinator, Crystal De La Riva, “Chapman isn’t an institution rich with historic tradition, so we are working to make programs like our bridge a tradition of success for first-generation students.”

Without partnerships, summer bridge programs can be expensive to provide as they often require accommodations, food, and travel for participating students. Moreover, some first-generation students struggle to devote a portion of their summer to intensive bridge programs when they also face family demands or a need to be employed. A less resource-intensive effort that targets first-generation students early is pre-orientation programs. Bates College offers a pre-orientation under its umbrella first-generation student program, Bobcat First!, which provides a range of workshops and cocurricular events throughout the school year. The affiliated pre-orientation lasts one week, during which students live in two houses together on campus. Students attend workshops, panels, campus tours, social events, and even day trips to surrounding cities. Pre-orientation programs help first-generation students build an early network without taking them away from commitments for the entire summer. Similarly, Williams College offers the First Generation Pre-Orientation program led by first-generation student leaders who directly communicate with incoming students assigned to various groups based on geography. These student leaders use Facebook, texting, and the GroupMe mobile app to communicate with their assigned groups and help incoming students form a network early in the first year. Taking this more casual approach has allowed organic but productive relationships to form during critical early days but without a formal mentoring program that requires students to make an additional time commitment.

COHORT-BASED PROGRAMS REPORTING SPECIAL ORIENTATION PROGRAMMATIC OFFERINGS: 50%

NON-COHORT BASED PROGRAMS OFFERING SPECIAL ORIENTATION PROGRAMMING 24%

Pre-orientation and orientation programs also provide opportunities for institutions to engage with parents of first-generation students, a constituent that practitioners consistently agree should be involved early and often despite a sometimes reluctant or nervous appearance. Practitioners report that these parents typically wish to be involved, but they don't necessarily feel empowered or understand the appropriate steps to take. Dawn Bruner, Director of Parent and Family Relations at the University of Rochester, conducted interviews with first-generation students' parents through her doctoral dissertation. Bruner observes that there is a general misconception that first-generation families are "disinterested and uninvolved," but she found the "exact opposite. Parents are interested in being engaged at the college level but often do not feel like they are getting information that's the most useful." Practitioners recommend seeking engagement opportunities within first-generation student programs. At Chapman University, once families send their students off to begin the bridge program, they are asked to remain for a few hours for a question and answer session with bridge program staff. First-generation parents are also invited to return for a social event during football season, where they can begin to feel more comfortable within the campus community. Florida State University also offers a parent orientation program as part of the academic bridge arrival to eliminate repeat travel. As part of First-Gen Fest, a week-long celebration of first-generation students at the University of Texas at San Antonio, families are invited to attend First-Gen Familia Day. Intentionally held on a Saturday, this event features engagement activities for the parents and relatives of the more than 11,000 first-generation students on the UTSA campus.

PROGRAMMING FOR FIRST-GENERATION FAMILIES IS REPORTEDLY INCLUDED IN 29% OF COHORT-BASED AND 25% OF NON-COHORT BASED OFFERINGS.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY'S PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Parent engagement can encourage student engagement. Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) offers first-year parents “Beyond Orientation: Partnering for Success in Today’s University,” a once-a-week, online, pass/fail course for academic credit that illuminates the college experience and connects them to resources, administrators, faculty, and other parents. While this course is open to all first-year parents, first-generation parents have been actively interested in participating. The course covers a new topic in higher education each week, such as the importance of academic advising and how college-level writing differs from high school writing. VCU speakers explain how the school approaches the subject and answers parents’ questions live online. Parents answer weekly homework questions via the discussion board in Blackboard, the same course management system that students use. VCU staff actively monitor the discussions and quickly respond

to issues raised there. The course requires parents to write a final reflective essay addressing what they’ve learned about being a college student and how they might use that knowledge to help their students succeed. *“The goal of this is not only to make them connected, but also to help their students be more successful,”* says Daphne Rankin, VCU Associate Vice Provost for Strategic Enrollment Management. And it works. Rankin reports that students whose parents attend the course have higher rates of retention and higher GPAs than their peers. They visit their advisors and the school’s writing center more often, and they register for classes earlier. *“Two years in a row I took a little snapshot at the end of the semester. How many students of these parents had already registered for spring classes compared to the rest of their cohorts? Over 95 percent of these students had registered for spring,”* Rankin says.

SECTION THREE: PRACTICAL INSIGHTS FOR ADVANCING CHANGE

Interview themes and survey data revealed that first-generation initiatives vary broadly in their maturity and scope with a consistent theme that more can always be done. Despite the successes found across institutions, consistent issues plaguing program development, collaborations, and resourcing also emerged. Collectively, findings identified that

institutions struggle with a lack of alignment regarding program expectations and goals; disjointed, reactive, or inconsistent student support; issues in collecting, obtaining, and utilizing student data; and resource constraints that are prohibitive to scaling program size and scope.



Yet, in remaining consistent to the spirit of service found across the community of first-generation student success practitioners, landscape findings uncovered creative approaches that are being successfully implemented to solve challenges across four-year institutions. Next, practical approaches from the work of practitioners and scholars, examples of successful strategies being employed at institutions, and high-level recommendations and solutions are offered.



Appointing primary advocates with visibility and influence



Building and sustaining an engaged community



Proactively setting institution and program vision and objectives



Tracking pre-matriculation through post-completion student data



Understanding the reach and gaps of existing resources



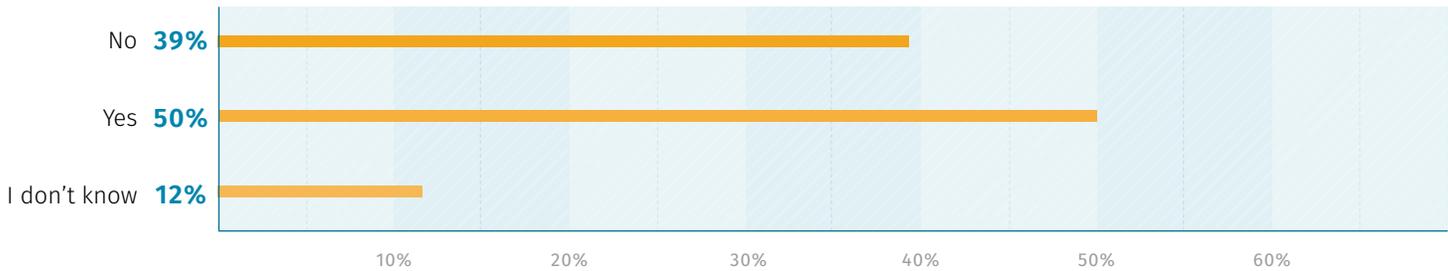
Considering funding opportunities and return on investment (ROI)

First-generation students participating in focus groups commonly identified a specific person—e.g., mentor, faculty member, advisor—with whom they felt connected as critically important to their success. Similarly, identifying key campus players to champion first-generation student success as an institutional priority emerged as an important early, if not first, step in the networked approach to first-generation student success. It is imperative to note that it is not the sole responsibility of a single “point person” to advocate for first-generation students, but rather to convene appropriate stakeholders, advance concerns to leadership, remain abreast of institutional culture, and keep student success in focus. Many of these individuals are also responsible for portions of program development and delivery.

Across surveyed institutions, **50 percent report identifying a “point person” to coordinate first-generation efforts, and 48 percent have designated a particular office on campus as the primary support for first-generation students** (Figure Q07 and Figure Q08). Approaches to identifying a “point person” are mixed, as some are formally appointed by institutional leadership while others assume the responsibility out of personal interest or connection to the position. A common sentiment across interviews was that the characteristics of this person are important. It should be a person who is intimately familiar with the inner workings of the institution, possesses access to senior leadership, and is connected on both the academic and student services sides of the institution. These individuals are believed to be able to foster systemic institutional shifts in prioritizing first-generation student success as opposed to small advances in one program. However, survey data revealed a different reality. Across survey respondents who indicate being responsible for some area of first-generation student success, **83 percent have been in their current position less than five years, and 53 percent have been at their institution for less than five years** (Figure 02). This may indicate that these individuals are having to work increasingly harder to build relationships and elevate issues to leadership. Moreover, these individuals are often being tasked with leading first-generation efforts in addition to other full-time job responsibilities or without appropriate resources and compensation. Practitioners advocate that in order for first-generation student services and success to maintain forward momentum with measurable results, having a formally appointed person who is provided appropriate time and resources is imperative, and it sends a strong message of acceptance to first-generation students, as well.



Q07 | Has your institution identified a “point person” to understand, coordinate, or lead first-generation student related efforts?



Figures add to 101% due to rounding

Q08 | Has your institution designated a particular office on campus as the primary support for first-generation students?

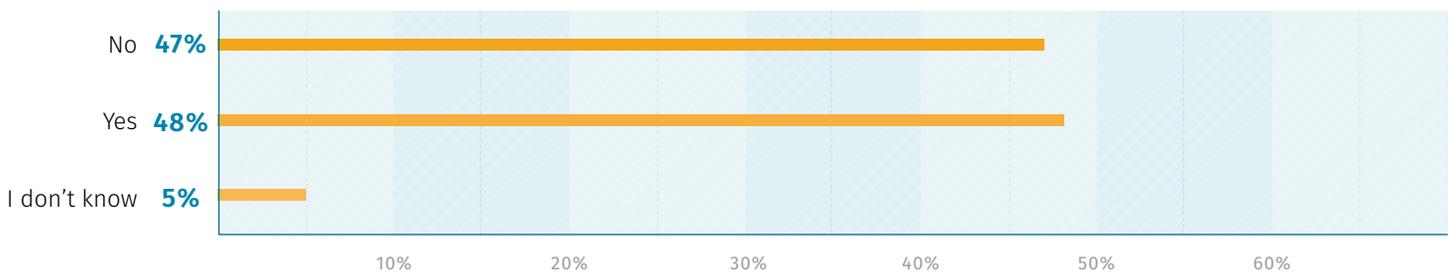


Figure 02: Number of years survey respondents have been in current position and employed at current institution.

While these individuals are often charged with implementing support for first-generation students, their role in collaborating with and supporting campus partners is just as critical. Practitioners report spending significant time identifying, building, and maintaining partnerships across campus. These partnerships allow practitioners to take advantage of existing infrastructure and expertise, incorporate wide-ranging topics in offerings, and extend the reach of their own influence. It was found that many institutional advocates were utilizing a committee approach to coordinate efforts. Some committees emerge intentionally with strategically planned approaches regarding stakeholders and outcomes. Others, such as the University of Wisconsin–Madison, grow from a committed group of faculty and staff who are often first-generation themselves, gathering to ask critical questions on how progress can be made. Some institutions reported utilizing the committee approach for networking of services and resources and to streamline processes. Others used these gatherings to develop support structures for first-generation students facing academic, social, financial, or mental health difficulties. *(Additional approaches are offered in the next section.)* Practitioners reinforced building continuity as an important benefit of an advocate-led committee approach. By having well-informed advocates who understand both the philosophical and practical commitments to first-generation students, progress can continue should the “point person” leave his or her position or leadership transition prompts change.

In an environment with scattered resources and varying departments serving first-generation students, a centralized advocate can also bring cohesion and clarity to the student experience.

“It’s critical to have access to senior administrators for the institution to empower folks doing first-generation work to be in larger conversations.”

Rosanna Ferro,
former Associate Dean of the College, Williams College

Individual offices have individual agendas, but a centralized advocate can help build consensus around shared goals and drive consistency in definitions, approach, and messaging. An integrated approach with a centralized advocate translates into a more streamlined first-generation student experience with a single point of contact providing timely, targeted support and access to a larger pool of advocates. This person also becomes a consistent part of the student experience and a resource when students feel uncertain of where to seek support.

The intersectionality of the first-generation identity, complexity of higher education systems, and myriad programs and services available to students combined with resource challenges and time constraints produce an environment that can easily lose focus on first-generation student success. By appointing a knowledgeable advocate who ideally has designated time, resources, and connections across the community to lead campus efforts, institutions ensure that leaders, faculty, staff, and first-generation students all benefit and a commitment to student success is preserved.

THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF THE FIRST-GENERATION IDENTITY, COMPLEXITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS, AND MYRIAD PROGRAMS AND SERVICES AVAILABLE TO STUDENTS COMBINED WITH RESOURCE CHALLENGES AND TIME CONSTRAINTS PRODUCE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT CAN EASILY LOSE FOCUS ON FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT SUCCESS.

BUILDING AND SUSTAINING AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY

An engaged community is fundamental to all aspects of first-generation student success. It is necessary in planning, implementing, assessing, and scaling opportunities. It is the critical underpinning in each of the approaches uncovered in this study, and was identified by practitioners as the foundational key to success in advancing first-generation work. An engaged community includes faculty, staff, and students, as well as university leaders, families, first-generation alumni, community members, and stakeholders. Community members can be leveraged in many ways including sharing their own stories, advocating for the first-generation community, connecting students to resources, building networking and internship opportunities, and creating solutions and programs in different corners of the institution. In particular, a broad network of first-generation community members available as mentors is reported by practitioners and students to be especially important and desirable. In fact, students participating in focus groups identified mentorship as their top desire for their college experience. Mentors and advocates starting at the leadership level also create a unified campus culture of first-generation pride, which is reported to improve students' sense of belonging.

A common approach to establishing ongoing collaborative relationships with campus partners is for the appointed first-generation advocate, as described in the previous section, Appointing Primary Advocates with Visibility and Influence, to form a working committee that meets regularly. Members of these committees are recruited via targeted outreach to particular offices as well as broad outreach calling for first-generation faculty and staff via email. Common campus partners include staff from admissions, financial aid, orientation, housing, advising, study abroad, career development, alumni affairs and development, and academic units. These collaborations take many forms. Some result in concrete "products," such as educational content that students can be given during orientation and workshops, specific opportunities or financial support reserved for participating first-generation students, and joint



events. Some collaborations revolve around creating more inclusive practices that are mindful of the first-generation student population, such as examining the language in communications to students to minimize confusing jargon and training advisors on specific first-generation needs. These committees often also do the work of identifying students who are in distress and need intervention while providing appropriate pathways for access to student services.

It is important to celebrate and reward those who are advancing first-generation student success. Not only does it offer gratitude, but it supports maintained engagement and brings greater awareness to first-generation initiatives. Many institutions recognize faculty and staff who are first-generation themselves or advocate for this community by listing names on a website or offering first-generation stickers for office doors and windows. At the University of Texas at San Antonio, First-Gen Champions are recognized with a website photo depicting their new "first-gen faculty" office placard. The First To Go program at UCLA highlights faculty and staff, each wearing a "first-generation college graduate" T-shirt on the program website. Others recognize contributions through invitations to dinners and banquets or by allowing students to recognize those campus partners who have served as meaningful mentors. Another approach is for the individuals who are leading first-generation efforts to write letters to academic leadership recognizing the role of faculty and staff in first-generation efforts. These approaches allow service to be added to performance evaluations and promotion review.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS: HOW INSTITUTIONS HAVE INVOLVED FACULTY AND STAFF

UCLA's First To Go team hosted a two-day First-Generation Institute in May 2017 for faculty and staff across campus to come together and talk about first-generation students. The goal of the Institute was to build awareness and inspire stakeholders to consider possible offerings in their own areas. Participants were divided into working groups assigned to different issues, and they brainstormed possible solutions. After the Institute, the Medical School, Law School, and Graduate division implemented new ideas on their own.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill conducts two-hour competency training for faculty and staff on first-generation students. After receiving the training, faculty and staff are listed as "advocates" on the Carolina Firsts website so that students can reach out to them.

Northern Arizona University started a first-generation book club among faculty and staff to learn more about topics around first-generation students. That book club turned into a learning community that is now developing competency trainings across campus to help faculty and staff understand how they can better support first-generation students.

When formal programs were not being implemented quickly enough at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, a group of dedicated faculty and staff who personally identify as first-generation began meeting regularly to discuss how improvements could be made. This initially "underground" approach now has a large membership, designated priorities, and institutional support.

Faculty Partners

Faculty partnerships also can take many forms. It was observed that first-generation programming consistently provides a great deal of opportunities for students to connect with faculty—from casual interactions at social events or one-on-one lunches to more formal mentoring opportunities. While a sustained relationship is the ultimate goal, even one-time interactions can make a difference. As a result of sitting at the same table as her professor during an informal dinner at North Central College, a student volunteered the answer to a question in class the day after the dinner. During the informal gathering, the professor shared a picture from her undergraduate years and talked about her experience working in retail 35 hours a week. In the seven weeks leading up to the event, the student had not participated in class, but the dinner gave her a new perspective and the courage to engage.

Sixty-three percent of institutions reported feeling that faculty on their campus care about first-generation college students. Practitioners all reported the positive impact of having faculty tell their personal stories of being first-generation students. To harness that impact, faculty are often invited to tell personal stories at panels, workshops, and events. Many institutions have also put up stories and videos of faculty on their first-generation website. Examples can be seen on University of Portland's [Faces of FGEN](#) website and Massachusetts Institute of Technology's [I Am First Generation](#) website. In addition to encouraging faculty to share their stories in person and online, institutions have actively pursued ways for faculty and staff to self identify as first-generation and show presence and support, such as giving them posters and stickers to tack onto office doors, listing names of first-generation faculty and staff on a website, or encouraging faculty to identify as first-generation on the first day of class or in course syllabi.

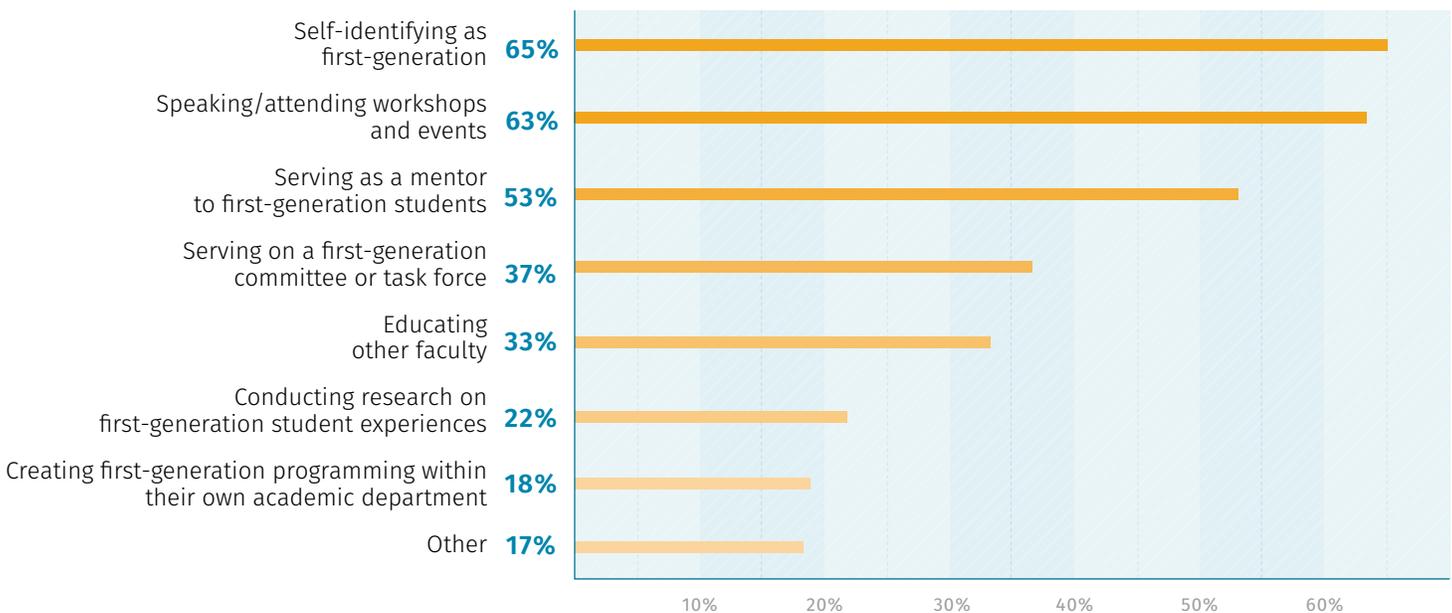
“Students like meeting faculty and hearing about how they flunked a test, how they didn’t think that they would finish college, or they called home crying every night the first month, because it just normalizes whatever our students are experiencing.”

Julie Carballo,
Director of First Generation Programs, North Central College

Faculty’s advisory role can also be elevated. First-generation staff can train faculty with resources to help them talk to students and create clear paths to report concerns and issues. At California State University, Fullerton, faculty have the opportunity to complete a first-generation student support workshop offered annually through the Faculty Development Center. Faculty advisors can utilize holistic approaches to broaden their impact and tap into issues of wellness, time management, and financial aid. A holistic approach requires a shift from the transactional nature of traditional academic advising and the passive role faculty have sometimes played in the overall advising strategy. Often, student affairs professionals feel more comfortable navigating this holistic approach, but with proper training faculty can make great strides in supporting students in this way, too. Higher education literature indicates first-generation and low-income students are unlikely to turn to faculty or staff for support in academic decision-making, and the use of more intentional practices and asset-based approaches may begin to shift this narrative.



Q09 | In what ways has your institution involved faculty in serving first-generation students?



Engaging First-generation Students as Advocates

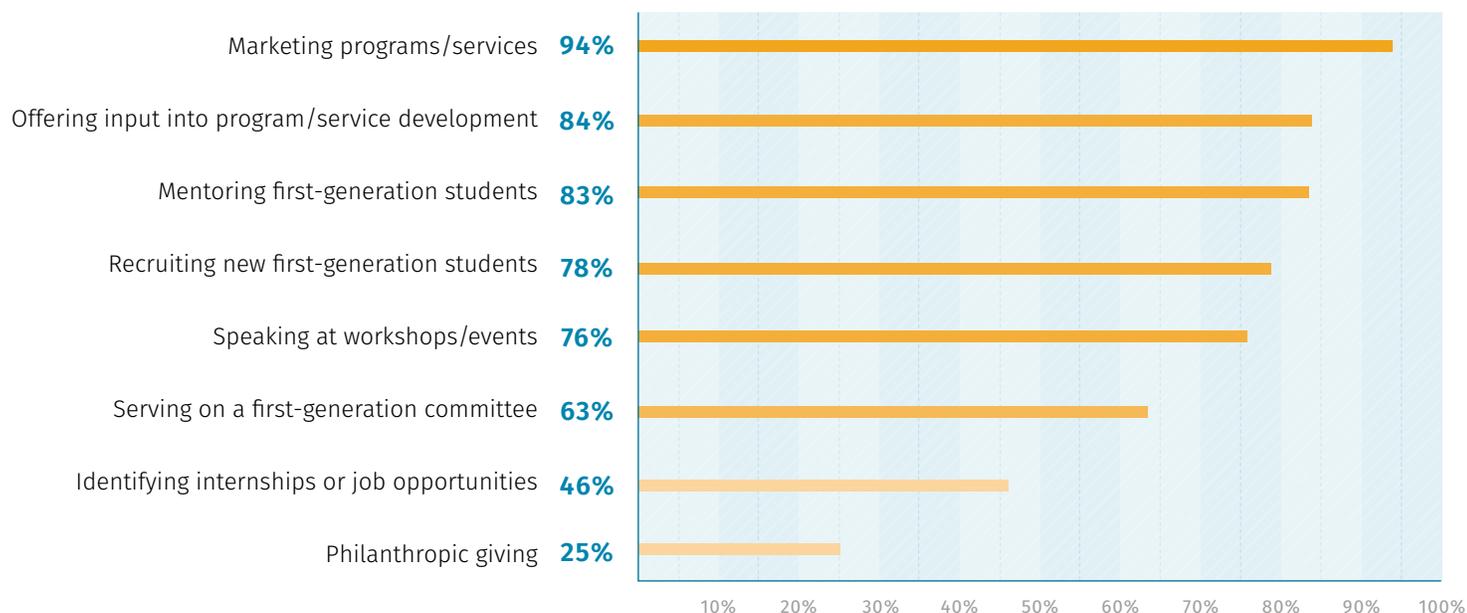
Throughout both phases of the study, practitioners shared first-generation students’ passion, leadership, and a strong willingness to pay it forward within the first-generation community. Institutions have involved students in paid and unpaid capacities to plan and execute programs, mentor other students, and serve as ambassadors to the greater first-generation community on campus. **Seventy-four percent of cohort-based programs offer a peer mentoring component.** Practitioners highlight the critical role that students play to promote a positive culture and give the first-generation movement credibility. Their leadership experience also serves as a stepping stone to other leadership and work opportunities. Students in focus groups validated the impact of peers and shared many stories about the value of peer mentoring, both as a mentor and as a mentee. Students described mentoring as a “responsibility” within the first-generation community to build stronger paths to success for future students.

At Loyola Marymount University, first-generation students actively lead various first-generation program components in both paid and volunteer capacities, including a peer-to-peer mentoring program. But most notably, two first-generation upperclassmen, under the guidance of a first-generation faculty member, plan and teach a first-year seminar for a cohort of about 20 First To Go Scholars to discuss their experiences in the first year. Topics include: college expectations vs. reality, survivor’s guilt, the hidden curriculum, cultural capital, imposter syndrome, and preparing for finals. Students consistently report this one-unit seminar as one of their favorite classes because they feel a strong sense of community of peers who share similar experiences.

“The first-gen student org at Cornell was really eye-opening for me. I had this idea that first-gen students all looked like me and there probably weren’t that many at Cornell. I showed up to the first meeting and actually left the room because I thought [I] was in the wrong place. It was packed and there were so many different kinds of kids there. It made me more proud to be first-gen.”

Javier,
a first-year, first-generation student at Cornell University

Q10 | Please identify the ways your institution engages current first-generation students in serving prospective, new, or current first-generation students.



It is worth mentioning that there are examples of students' grassroots efforts leading the way for institutions to serve first-generation students. Student unions and organizations are becoming popular on campuses, with **30 percent of surveyed institutions having an active presence**. These student-driven approaches can build community, provide a platform for students to share similar experiences, and give students a voice to self-advocate. The University of Florida; Cornell University; George Washington University; University of California, San Francisco; and Kansas State University all have active and successful first-generation student groups. These organizations report having close ties to university administration and see themselves as a voice for the needs of first-generation students. At Brown University, it was a group of thoughtful student leaders who advocated for strengthened support services that later became the First-Generation College and Low-Income Student Center. However, it is important to note that focus group students expressed the need for institutions to carry the primary responsibilities in building and executing programs rather than relying

solely upon students. Students indicated feeling this as a burden and also feeling used by their institutions as examples of success at admission events or family weekends in exchange for program budgets or facetime with leadership.

Sustainability of an engaged community is at the crux of success. Often, programs and initiatives in higher education are fleeting as new trends emerge or societal issues shift attention. By intentionally engaging a breadth of faculty and staff, not only is a knowledgeable network established for sustainability of programming but a shift in campus culture emerges. By involving students, a legacy of pride and student success is shared with new students and steps are taken toward defeating deficit-thinking and imposter syndrome. By engaging alumni and community members, the institution is now accountable to additional stakeholders deeply invested in first-generation student success. As shared by practitioners throughout this study, first-generation student success requires systemic change across a campus community, and the support of advocates is imperative to realizing success.



“We should remind students that we are there to support [their first-gen involvement]. Encourage them to think about how [first-gen involvement] fits into their schedule, whether that’s something they can commit to and still achieve academic success. We should model good behavior for students to think about their community and the important role they can take in the community, but also be protective of their own success.”

Dawn Bruner,
Director of Parent and Family Relations, University of Rochester



ADVICE FROM CURRENT FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS TO NEW FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS

What advice would first-generation students in college give first-generation students heading to campus? Connect. Connect to people of all kinds, to new experiences, and to resources that can help make navigating college easier.

Get involved, advises Jamal, a fourth-year student at the University of Florida. *“Just getting connected is socially supporting. Finding that base. It really does help you because you feel that you’re connected to the campus. You’re more inclined to look for help, and you’re more inclined to look for opportunities.”*

“Make sure to have your people, but make sure you are not always with those same people,” says Selena, a first-generation student from Texas Christian University (TCU). *“Interact with different types of people—people from different backgrounds. That is where you are going to learn the most.”*

Students emphasized the importance of being willing to ask for help. Visit advisors and support centers, they recommend. Talk to professors. Take advantage of offers to upgrade study skills and increase financial literacy.

“I feel like there is a big stigma around asking for help, and if you are struggling, that is a bad thing,” says Mikayla, a TCU first-generation student. *“Don’t be afraid to go to office hours*

or to the counseling center. It is okay, because everybody struggles and everybody has trouble their first year and throughout college.”

“When I first got here, I really wanted to fit in, and I think my goal was always: don’t call unwanted attention ... just blend in with everyone else,” says Cayde, a Cornell University first-generation student. *“I don’t see why I did that. And I don’t think it’s the best approach to college life. I think you benefit more when you’re speaking to your professors and ... you’re being upfront about your first-gen identity. ... A lot of professors now, I realize, are very understanding.”*

“Don’t be scared. I know that is easier said than done but just don’t be scared. Push yourself outside of your comfort zone and ask questions. Don’t miss out on opportunities just because you were too afraid to try,” offered Monique, a Kansas State University first-generation student.

James, a TCU student, offered, *“Don’t forget who you are, and don’t forget where you came from.”*

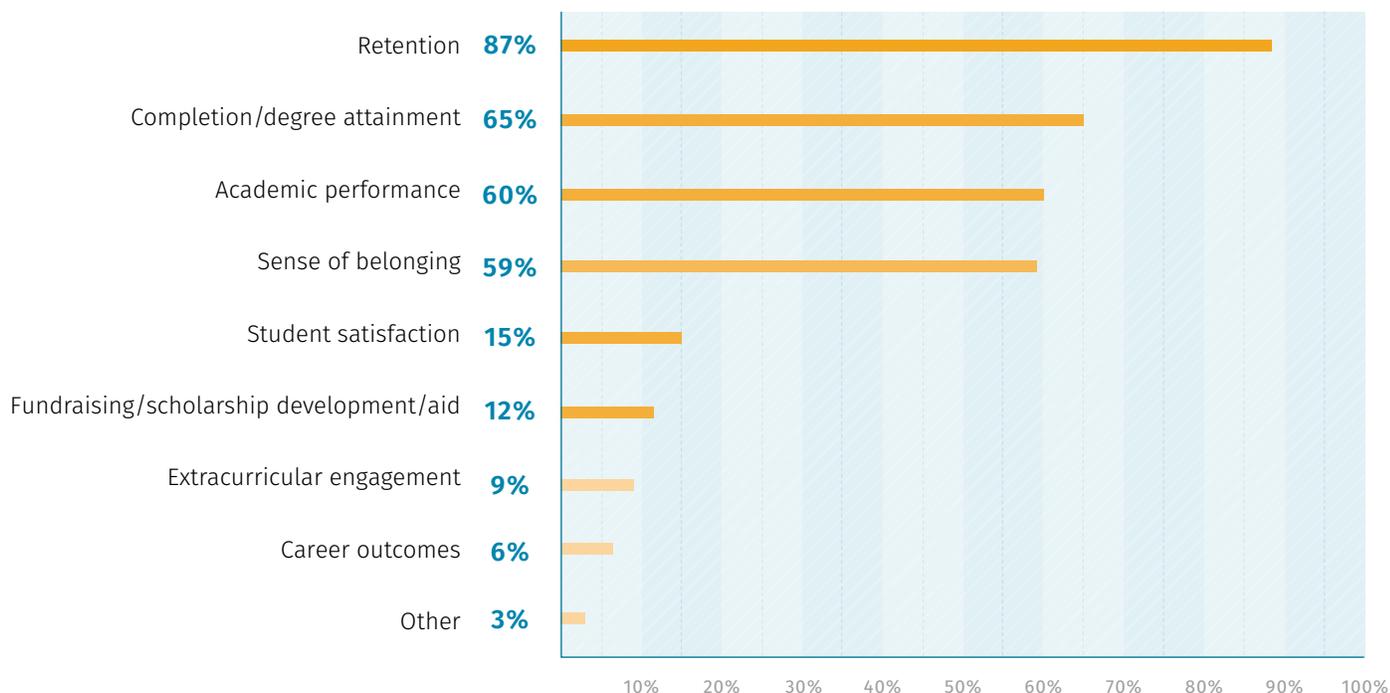
Know that *“you belong here, too,”* says Marco, a first-generation student at Cornell University. *“You went through the same admissions process as everybody else. You deserve to be here.”*



PROACTIVELY SETTING INSTITUTION AND PROGRAM VISION AND OBJECTIVES

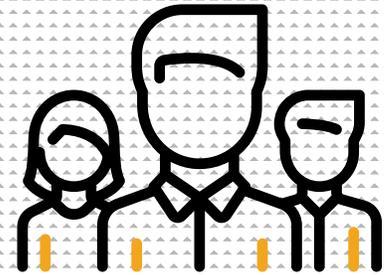
It is worth focusing on the term success as it relates to first-generation students. Across higher education, there is debate over how the term “success” has evolved and what it should mean for today’s students and institutions. There is no one definition, but there are commonalities in how practitioners think student success should look. For four-year institutions, retention, persistence, and completion generally are the overarching goals, in some instances alongside academic performance. When asked about the three most important student success factors driving institutional offerings for first-generation students, survey respondents identified retention, completion and degree attainment, and academic performance as priorities (Figure Q11). Practitioners are aware that these are “lagging indicators” that provide insight about student success too late and too infrequently, and that they contribute to a culture of reactive intervention. In each focus group, first-generation students were asked to share their thoughts on what being successful in college would look like for them. After long periods of silence, students overwhelmingly indicated that it was something they had never thought about in these terms but often shared “making lasting connections,” “taking advantage of opportunities,” and “using [their] degree to get a good job and have a good life” as signs of success. The lack of consideration indicates an opportunity for institutions to help students understand the complex and broad indicators of “success” along their student journey and to lead intentional goal-setting earlier in the college experience.

Q11 | What are the three most important student success factors driving institutional decisions on offerings for first-generation students?



While all practitioners want their programs and services for first-generation students to be “successful,” they often noted struggles in keeping programs aligned, feeling rushed in implementation, considering assessment as a future rather than current goal, and being concerned about offerings stretching beyond capacity to cover students from other populations. A common sentiment included feeling institutional pressure to get a program “off the ground” and then returning to “fix any problems after a year or two.” In both interviews and survey responses, practitioners were eager to learn from peers and implement evidence-based approaches, but they often felt resource or time-constrained. For more seasoned professionals with established programs, some reported a sense of “mission creep” from where they began with programs to how they are currently being offered. Mission creep was often compounded by practitioners feeling stretched thin, as first-generation student programs are only a small part of their vast job responsibilities.

Given that there is no one definition of program objectives for first-generation student success, it was important to explore the objectives and outcomes that practitioners were hoping to meet with existing approaches. Academic success, as measured by course grades and GPA, were cited as important benchmarks by interviewees. But overwhelmingly, practitioners emphasize students’ sense of belonging and social/emotional success as equally, if not more, important. Survey data indicated offering social events through cohort and independent programs as the most common occurrence, above academic offerings, for first-generation students (Figure Q12 and Figure Q13). Research has shown that social integration brings many benefits that are especially important to underrepresented students—access to social support that helps ease the stressful college transition; access to information from peers; a sense of self-worth; and increased commitment to the institution—which lead to better retention (Tinto, 2012).



ACADEMIC SUCCESS, AS MEASURED BY COURSE GRADES AND GPA, WERE CITED AS IMPORTANT BENCHMARKS BY INTERVIEWEES. BUT OVERWHELMINGLY, PRACTITIONERS EMPHASIZE STUDENTS’ SENSE OF BELONGING AND SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL SUCCESS AS EQUALLY, IF NOT MORE, IMPORTANT

With resource constraints, it is sometimes necessary to make difficult decisions regarding program offerings in order to remain aligned with program goals and guarantee longevity. With less than half of one staff member’s time devoted to first-generation initiatives and minimal funding, the University of Portland decided to offer programming to students whose parents had no college experience, representing 7 percent of the student population, rather than overcommitting resources to the 20 percent of students who meet an expanded definition of first-generation. In addition to seeing improvement in first- to second-year retention, this approach has allowed for intentional program evaluation that provides valuable data that can be used to seek resources for program growth.



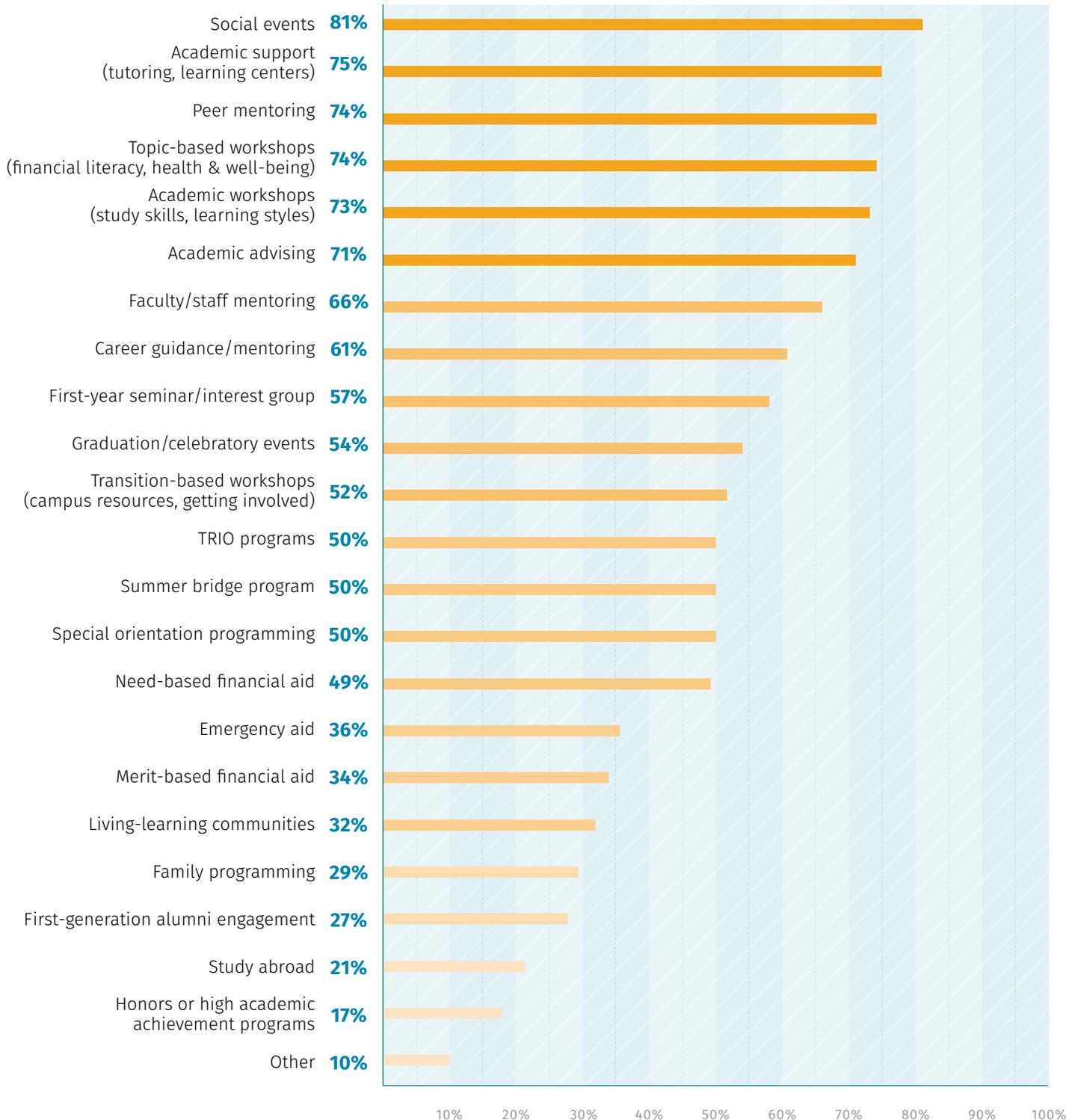
IN EVERY PRACTITIONER INTERVIEW, TRANSITION SUPPORT AND CONNECTING WITH CAMPUS RESOURCES WAS IDENTIFIED AS A CRITICALLY IMPORTANT PROGRAM OBJECTIVE

In interview and survey responses, institutions with first-generation student success programs, delivered both in a cohort model and independently, were asked to share the approaches being used to meet program goals and objectives. In addition to social events, programs place value in offering academic support and workshops, topic-based programs on financial literacy and well-being, and academic advising. Mentoring, both peer and faculty, as well as career guidance and need-based financial aid are also common offerings. An interesting disparity in the data surrounds the inclusion of transition-based workshops for understanding campus resources and acclimating to the campus community. In every practitioner interview, transition support and connecting with campus resources was identified as a critically important program objective. Moreover, students overwhelmingly named campus connections as most important in their student experience and noted that they contributed to a sense of belonging. Yet, 52 percent of cohort-based programs and only 28 percent of non-cohort-based programs indicated including these in their service plans. However, it is possible that these topics are being addressed through other programs or approaches.

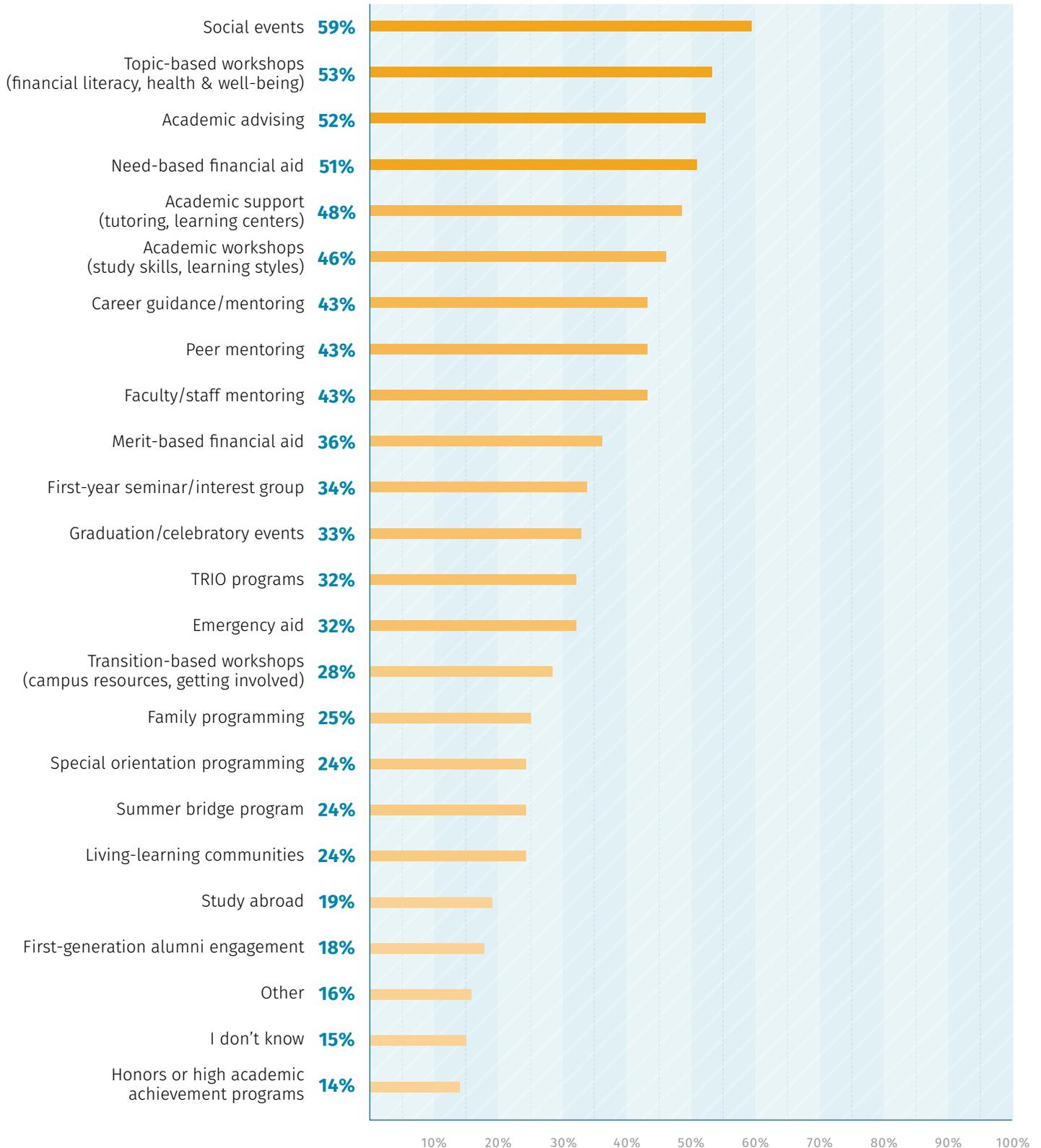
Most telling about this data is the breadth of objectives that practitioners are trying to meet through programs to support first-generation students and the multitude of programmatic approaches possible. In most cases, institutions are selecting multiple programmatic approaches, from workshops to mentoring to high-impact practices, to serve students in partnership with services such as financial and emergency aid. At Georgia Gwinnett College, the expansion of a freshman learning community for first-generation students was implemented with multifaceted intentionality. In addition to participating in academic courses, students have a dedicated student success advisor, and they can participate in workshops, and engage with first-generation faculty and staff. Students are required to participate in service learning and then present their experiences through a campus symposium. While the size of the program is limited, the combination of multiple high-impact practices and the intentionality of design allows for successful outcomes and opportunities to evaluate growth potential. Having multiple approaches speaks to the importance of intentional program development and goal setting, gathering data on best approaches for institutional and student needs, and considering collaborations for networked approaches and resource sharing.

Q12 | From the list below, please choose the programs and/or services that best describe how your cohort program serves first-generation students.

An institution can have both cohort and non-cohort based offerings.

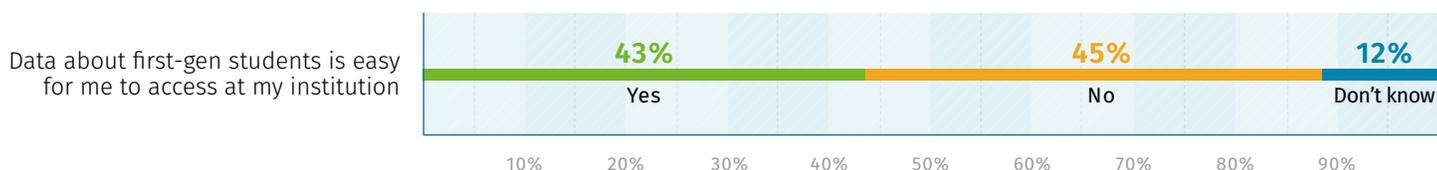


Q13 | From the list below, please choose the programs and/or services that best describe how your institution serves first-generation students **not involved in a cohort program**.



TRACKING PRE-MATRICULATION THROUGH POST-COMPLETION STUDENT DATA

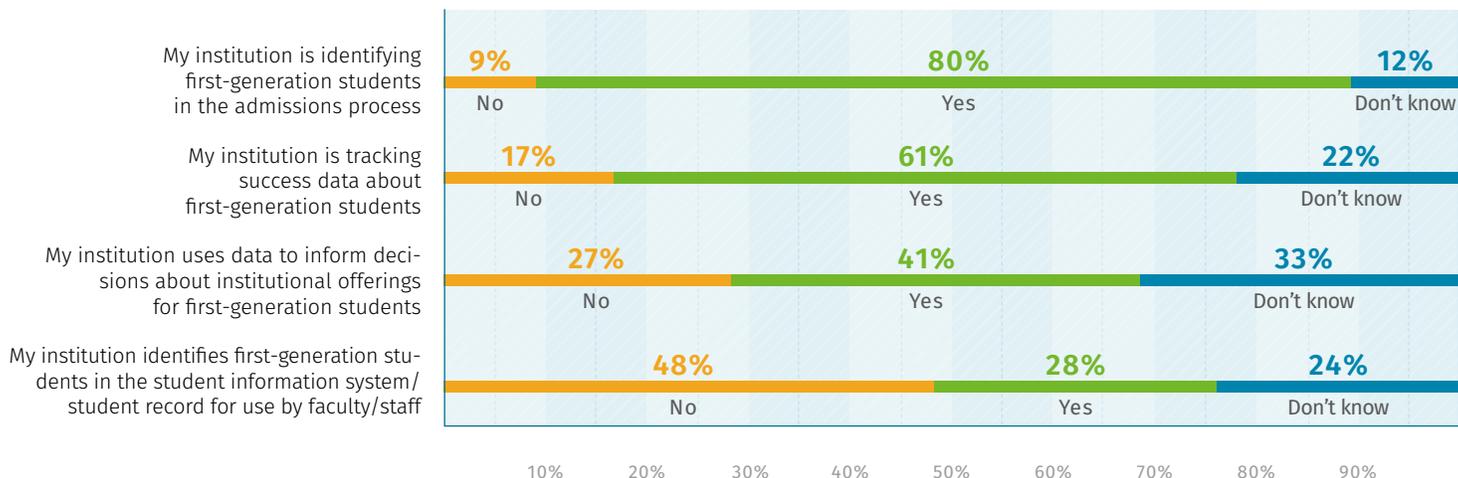
Q14 | Please select the best response regarding your institution's use of data regarding first-generation college students.



The landscape analysis revealed a consistent lack of robust data, tracking, and insight on first-generation students as a population segment, even at institutions where first-generation support is quite comprehensive and mature. While most institutions are able to identify their first-generation students using self-reported data collected in the admissions or matriculation process, many institutions lack consistent processes to track, regularly analyze, and apply data for actions or outcomes. Common barriers include data inconsistency (linked to the varying definitions of “first-generation”) and the lack of data sharing across institutional silos. Some practitioners also noted simply not having a strong understanding of how to analyze and implement first-generation data once they gain access. These inconsistencies in data collection and use create deficits in reporting and make institutional comparisons difficult to impossible. The result is that programs and services are left without an informed foundation.

Despite the high level of interest in and intentionality for first-generation student programs, many institutions report embarking on initiatives with relatively little research into the specific needs of of the segment or without tracking capabilities to measure the impact and success of these initiatives. As depicted in Figure Q15, 80 percent of institutions are identifying first-generation students during matriculation, but this percent falls dramatically when considering long-term tracking, use of data to inform decisions, and application of data to the student record and availability for use.

Q15 | Please select the best response regarding your institution's use of data regarding first-generation college students.



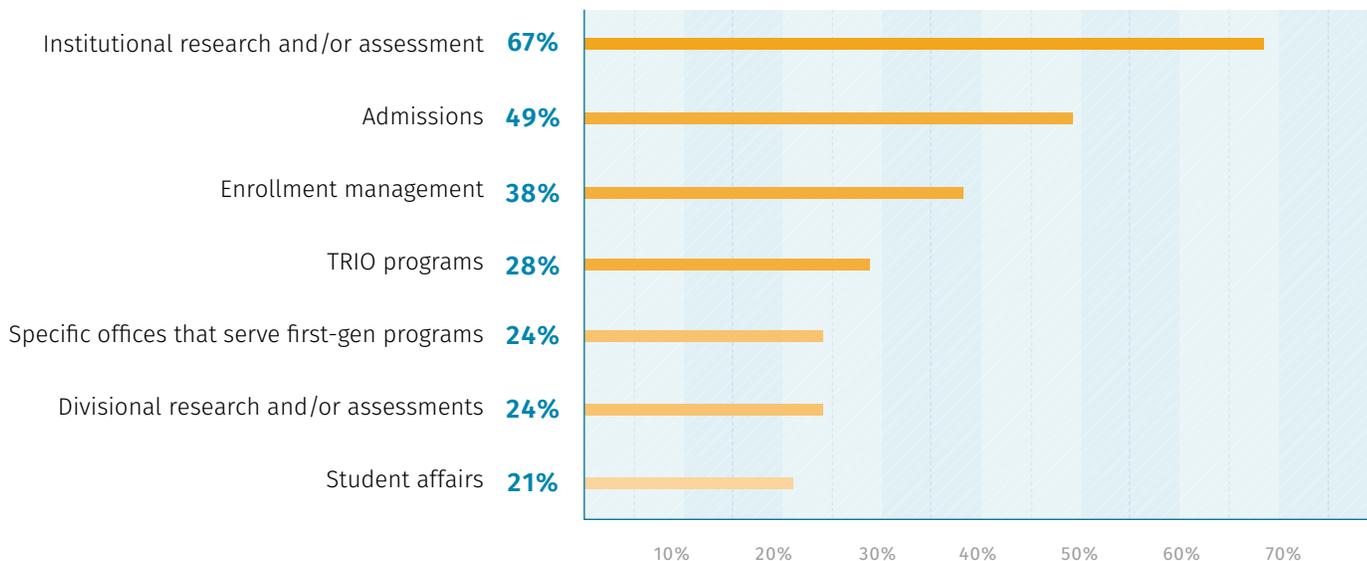
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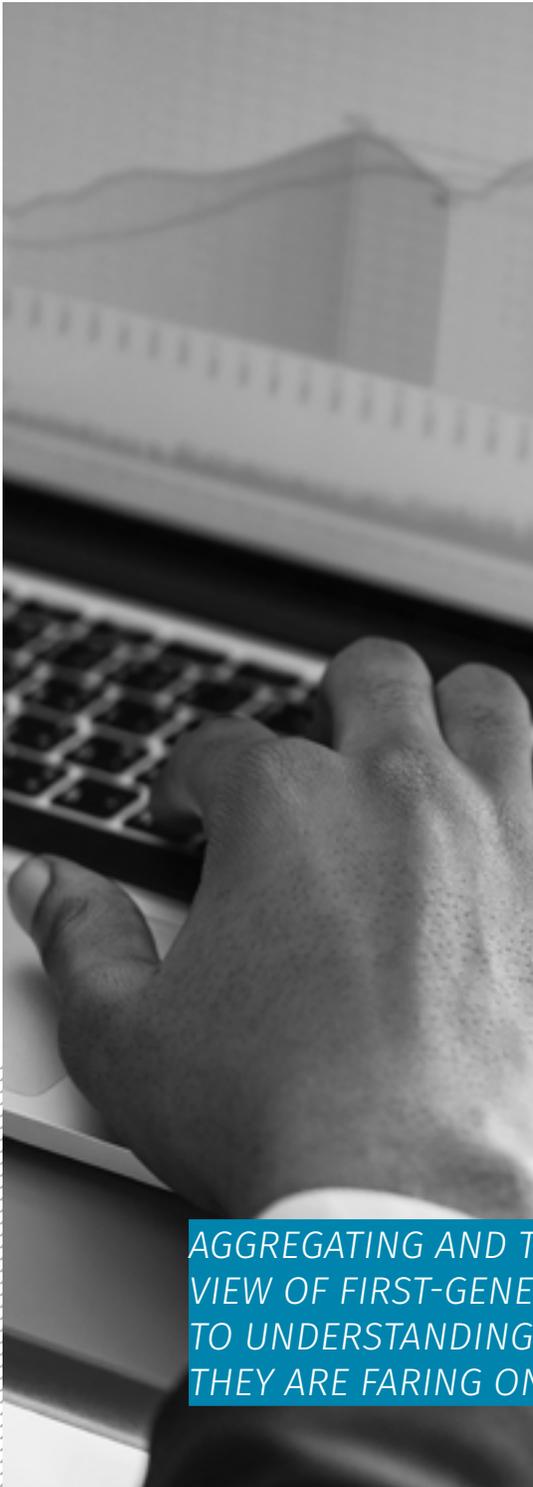
When asked to provide graduation data for first-generation students, interviewees often had to make a custom data request from their institutional research (IR) office, and many lamented the long turnaround typical of those requests. Generally, data is not widely or intentionally shared, and often useful first-generation data was reported as not being captured in the student information system. The exceptions to this lack of robust data are a few large institutions with a history of first-generation programs; some small institutions; and cohort programs, particularly scholarship-based and TRIO programs, for which robust data-tracking processes were built in from inception and often are required by funders. Yet, the lack of institutional data proficiency makes comparison against first- and continuing-generation peers difficult. Even from institutions with decades of evidence in supporting first-generation students, a common refrain included feeling disconnected from a larger network of peer institutions who can share experiences and provide a set of comparative measures for success. At Northern Arizona University, where data processes are mostly successful, Executive Director for Student Affairs, Wendy Bruun, shared, *“As an institution, we’ve been committed to doing this work for a very long time, yet we are still uncertain who our peer institutions in first-generation student success are. We hear about the good work others are doing but there are no formal networks or measures.”* Moreover, when considering how to go about obtaining data, practitioners identified multiple sources where information may exist (Figure Q16) and referred to the process as “daunting,” “labor-intensive,” and “a bit of a scavenger hunt.” A common sentiment for practitioners with direct oversight of first-generation programs was a reliance on other colleagues, particularly from orientation or first-year experience programs, to share data sets and reports when it could not be directly obtained.

“Cultivating a relationship with the IR office is critical. Ask for their advice. Involve them in how we can best support first-generation students and what data may already exist. You have to steward the relationship and not just go once or twice a year. IR staff need to be a part of the initiative, to feel they are part of solving the puzzle.”

Brett Bruner,
Director of Transition and Student Conduct, Fort Hays State University

Q16 | When looking for data on first-generation students on your campus, who might you ask?





AGGREGATING AND TRACKING DATA TO PROVIDE A COMPLETE VIEW OF FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS IS AN IMPORTANT STEP TO UNDERSTANDING WHO THOSE STUDENTS ARE AND HOW THEY ARE FARING ON CAMPUS

Aggregating and tracking data to provide a complete view of first-generation students is an important step to understanding who those students are and how they are faring on campus. Colorado State University has gone through a particularly thorough process of examining and [publishing data on its first-generation students](#) as it built a case for the need to better support this population. Rutgers University–New Brunswick is another institution that viewed data collection as a “first priority,” said James Whitney, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Academic Affairs. *“We wanted to know which students are completing what courses, which students are identified as first-generation among the grant programs, how students are performing academically and in our programs and on campus.”* Annually, Rutgers University–New Brunswick uses this data to shape the RU-1st Forum, a gathering of leaders, faculty, staff, and students that discuss issues of student access, equity, and inclusion on campus.

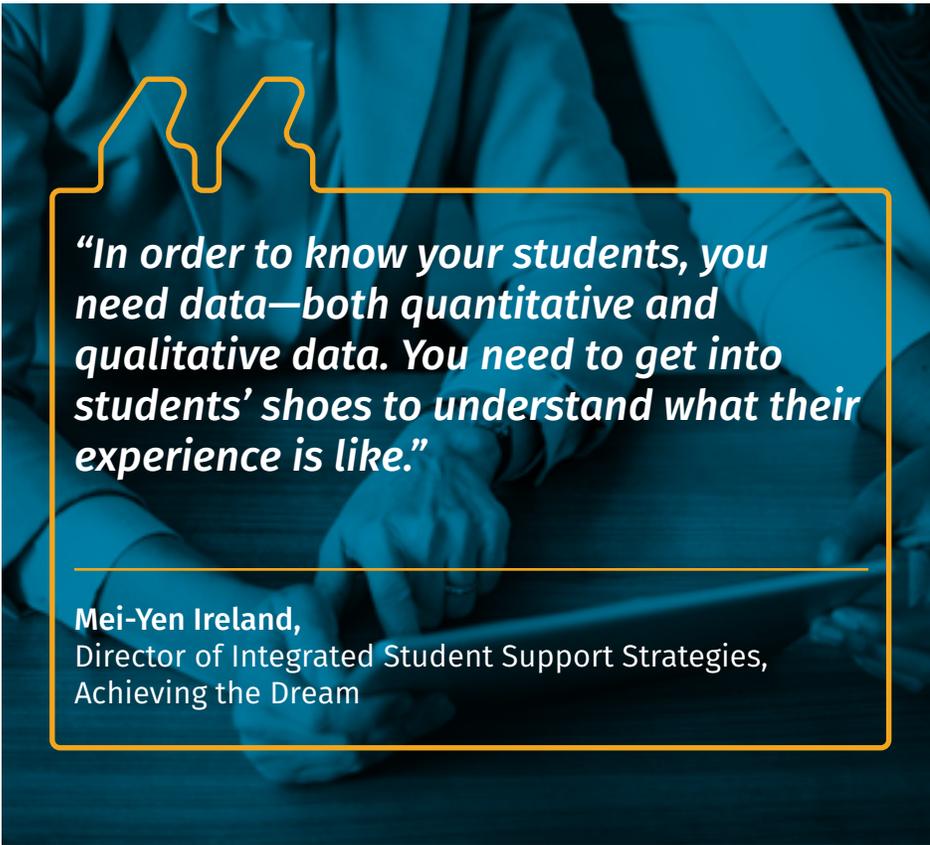
Practitioners shared the overwhelming desire to implement evidence-based practices that are effective in supporting first-generation students. In order to identify more evidence-based practices, however, institutions must treat tracking data as a priority. Involving colleagues from IR and institutional assessment, as well as divisional research and assessment functions early can help set the stage for long-term collaboration. The process also requires a verbal commitment from institutional leadership that indicates that first-generation data tracking is a priority and time should be devoted to collection, analysis, and dissemination. Practitioners reiterated that this is where having a designated campus advocate with access to senior leadership becomes critically important, as that contact can request first-generation student data. Collaborations focused on data provide a useful entry point to first-generation committee development where essential stakeholders can gather to discuss and share information, identify challenges, and strategize solutions collectively. Through interviews, many educators indicated that they have access to data that they did not realize others may benefit from using, as well.

Institutions that have invested resources into qualitative research to better understand the needs of their first-generation student populations are able to identify potential underlying causes behind the tracked data. Armed with these insights, they are able to make a stronger case for programs. A faculty research grant from The Teagle Foundation allowed Davidson College to conduct high-quality research involving many student focus groups over the course of a year. The findings show a significant disparity in the satisfaction expressed by first-generation students and their peers, making the rationale for a first-generation initiative easy to grasp by leadership. Similarly, a semester-long student group research project, under the direction of a faculty member at Brown University, laid the foundation and rationale for improving first-generation student support. Yet, simply gathering first-generation students for both formal and informal discussions about their experiences is a useful and cost-effective way to collect vital information while also signaling to students that their perspectives matter.

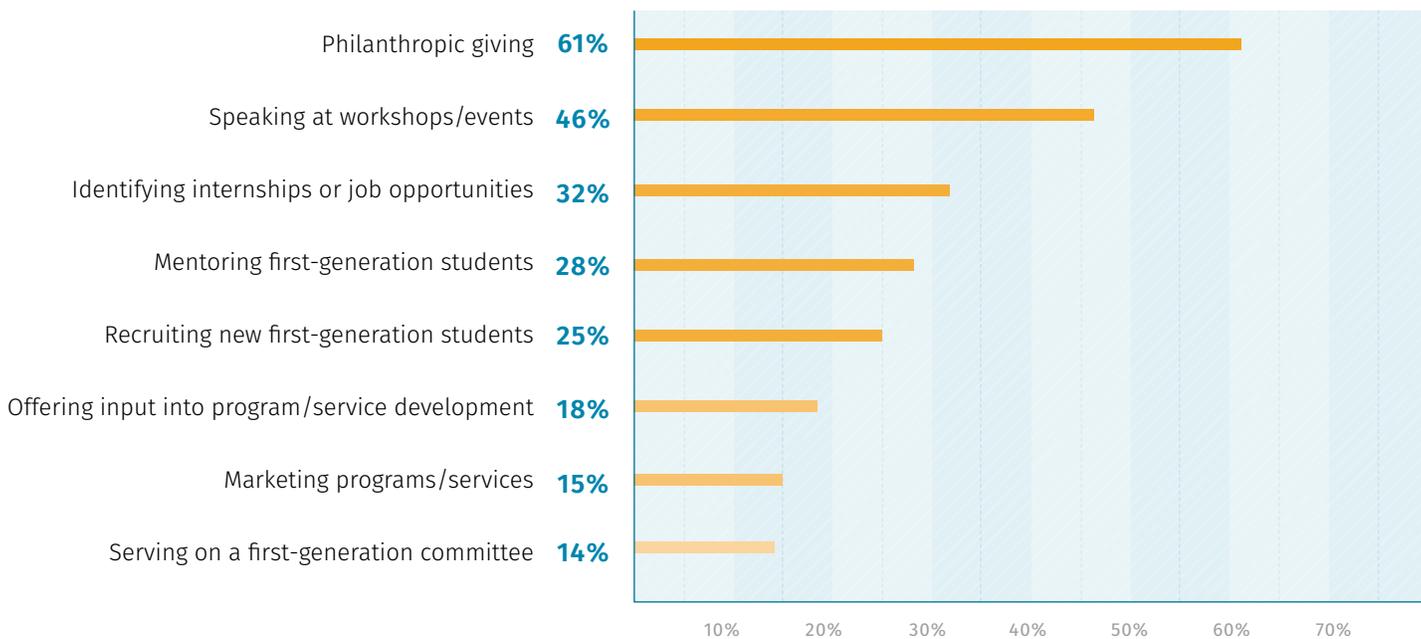
ONLY 22 PERCENT OF INSTITUTIONS REPORTED ENGAGING FACULTY TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ON FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT EXPERIENCES.

Rigorous research is a daunting task, but practitioners can look to faculty, graduate students, or outside partners for research leadership if there is no robust in-house research support. Specific academic programs focused on education or sociology may have faculty and graduate students who are interested in pursuing research about first-generation students. The University of Florida is in the process of awarding mini grants as seed funding for faculty to conduct research on first-generation students on campus. At the University of Virginia, graduate students in the Curry School of Education took on focus groups with first-generation and low-income students as part of a class project. Simple tools like surveys can also deepen understanding of the first-generation student experience. After orientation, Williams College administers student surveys that ask what topics captured students' interest and why they decided to attend. Bates College distributes student surveys at the end of the first-generation pre-orientation program as well as at the end of the first year. They ask questions about students' satisfaction, faculty interaction, and mastery of time management skills. In addition to program evaluation and assessment, a low-cost option is to consider surveys or data collection opportunities currently happening at your institution. Colleagues may be willing to collaborate to allow you to add a short set of first-generation questions to an existing survey protocol rather than needing to launch your own. Just remember to share your findings.

It is important to note that tracking student data should not conclude when a student earns a degree. More important than ever is the continued tracking of first-generation students beyond completion and into the workforce. Not only does this allow for greater understanding of how first-generation students continue on academically, personally, professionally, and financially, but it also opens a possibility for continued relationships with the institution. Practitioners shared the benefits of bringing first-generation alumni back to campus for speaking engagements or to partner with them for community events. As depicted in Figure Q17, 46 percent of institutions reporting having first-generation alumni speak at workshops and events. Institutions are slowly embarking upon partnerships with first-generation graduates for mentoring and job opportunities. At Washington University in St. Louis, first-generation students in the social work program are being paired with first-generation program alumni for field placements and internships with success. The landscape study revealed that 32 percent of institutions report engaging alumni for internships and job opportunities, and 28 percent report offering mentoring opportunities between current first-generation students and alumni.

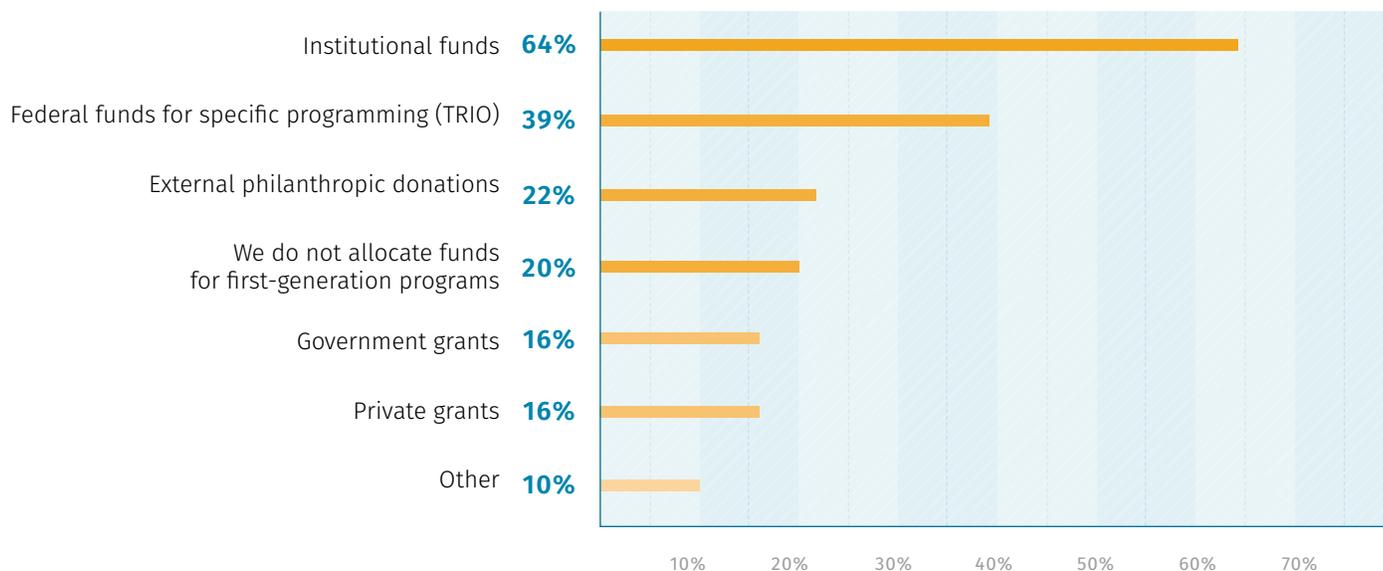


Q17 | Please identify the ways your institution engages current first-generation alumni in serving first-generation students.

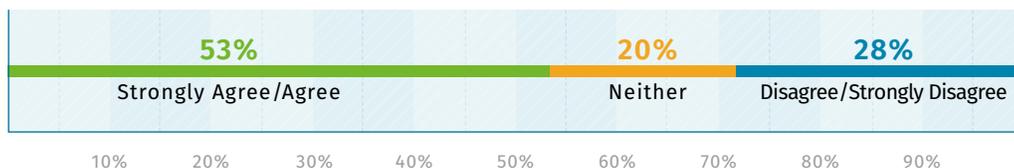


UNDERSTANDING THE REACH AND GAPS OF EXISTING RESOURCES

Q18 | Please identify the primary funding sources for first-generation programs at your institution.



As an institution, we have dedicated human and financial resources to address first-generation student success



Figures add to 101% due to rounding

Practitioners agree that college campuses have existing resources for first-generation students, but that the siloed nature of resources and programs, housed as they often are within different offices, make it difficult for students to find or navigate them. In fact, the scattered nature of programs makes it difficult for staff to identify all of the services available to first-generation students and understand how they can all best work together. TRIO programs in academic affairs, QuestBridge or charter school alumni programs in admissions, scholarship opportunities in the financial aid office, and minority programs in the multicultural office all have first-generation students among their audiences. These are often in addition to targeting programming specifically to first-generation students. When coordinating efforts to open the Office of Student Success at the University of Arkansas, staff realized that at least five campus programs were serving first-generation students without collaboration or knowledge of the others. Because resources exist, some institutions mistakenly assume that their first-generation students are already appropriately being served through multicultural and low-income student programs. For practitioners leading first-generation student initiatives, identifying the scattered resources and programs relevant to first-generation students is an important task for three primary reasons: 1) to understand the reach and gaps of existing resources, 2) to be able to share accurate information with students, and 3) to avoid redundancies when formulating services and programming. Existing programs hold extensive infrastructure, materials, and know-how that can be leveraged. The scattered nature of programming also reinforces the aforementioned need for a networked approach and for establishment of a centralized contact to coordinate first-generation student initiatives.

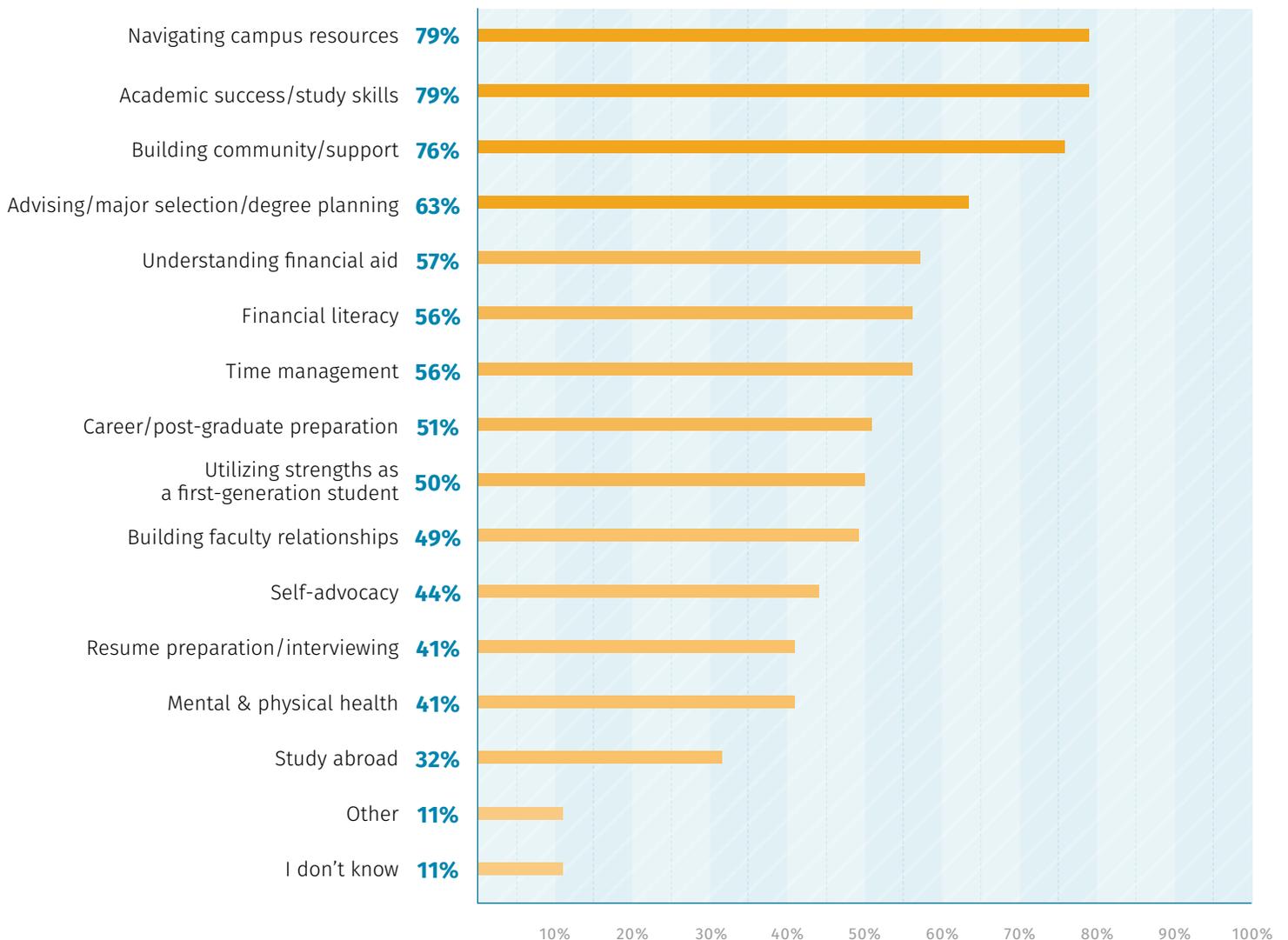


INSTITUTION SPOTLIGHT

Rutgers University–New Brunswick is a large public university with 35,000 undergraduate students, one-third of whom are first-generation. Across campus, first-generation students are being supported in multiple TRIO programs; a state Educational Opportunity Fund program for students from New Jersey that includes summer bridge and advising components; a STEM program for minorities funded by the National Science Foundation; a first-generation student union; a leadership institute that provides special education opportunities and advising; a few faculty-led initiatives embedded within departments; and many others. Yet, the school estimates that there are still nearly 7,000 first-generation students not supported by such programs. When Rutgers University–New Brunswick created a first-generation initiative called RU-1st, one of the first steps included a close review of all programs on campus serving first-generation students—a lengthy process at a large public university with five campuses and many grant programs. As that information was collected, the RU-1st Alliance built a database to catalog these resources. “We want to make sure we as staff are not disconnected from those resources so our students are not disconnected from those resources,” said James H. Whitney III, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Academic Affairs. As the RU-1st Alliance catalogs the various programs and services, staff members involved are collecting data on which students are served through these programs and which students may need additional outreach.

Once existing resources have been identified, practitioners can have a better idea of the gap in reach as well as the unmet needs along the course of the student journey, from when students apply to when they are alumni. Many of the institutions interviewed identified the areas of college entry and workforce transition as critical for students, with the highest concentration of programming focused on the first-year transition. Typical programming takes the form of summer bridge programs, orientation, and first-year seminar and workshops over the course of the semester, focusing on topics related to campus resources, academic success, and college skills like time management, study skills, and financial literacy (Figure Q19). While many first-generation students participate in transition programs such as orientation, these programs are often designed for the masses and not the specific needs of this population, but they could be a shared opportunity for improvement.

Q19 | Please select the priority topic areas covered in current offerings to first-generation students at your institution.



Mapping the existing resources and support onto the complete student journey can help practitioners understand how students are being supported across their time at an institution. Offerings past the first year tend not to be as robust, but practitioners are actively expanding their offerings, with particular focus on the preparation for life after college graduation. Moving toward a more “sustained” model of student support, rather than an “inoculation” model of transactional interventions, has been shown to be more effective. At the University of Florida, all first-generation students are eligible to apply for First-Generation Academy, a year-long leadership program for third- and fourth-year students interested in self-awareness, community building, strengths-based career planning, and post-completion success. Annually, Wichita State University hosts the Ad Astra Conference for First-Generation College Students, an opportunity for students across Kansas to gather and share information, explore strengths, and celebrate successes.

The gaps in reach may exist even when a program or service is available. Practitioners report that they sometimes struggle to motivate first-generation students to participate in programming targeted to them. They attribute this partially to an overload of information and programming, given students’ limited time and inability to assess which programs would be most beneficial. Today’s college student often wants information when it is needed and not necessarily in a proactive way. Moreover, despite purposeful attempts by institutions to create an inclusive community, some students still struggle to acknowledge or feel pride in their first-generation identity. They would prefer to blend in to the college environment rather than take part in something that they feel makes them stand out.

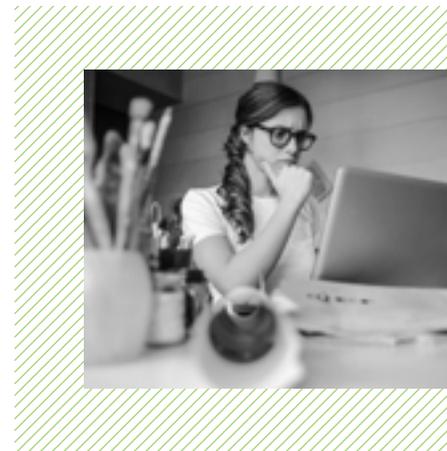
“Even with all those other students in my classes, I would always just look around and assume I was the only first-gen student. That I was the one who didn’t know what was going on, and I didn’t want anyone to know that. But, in reality, so many students are first-gen and were probably feeling the same way.”

Olivia,
first-generation student at Kansas State University

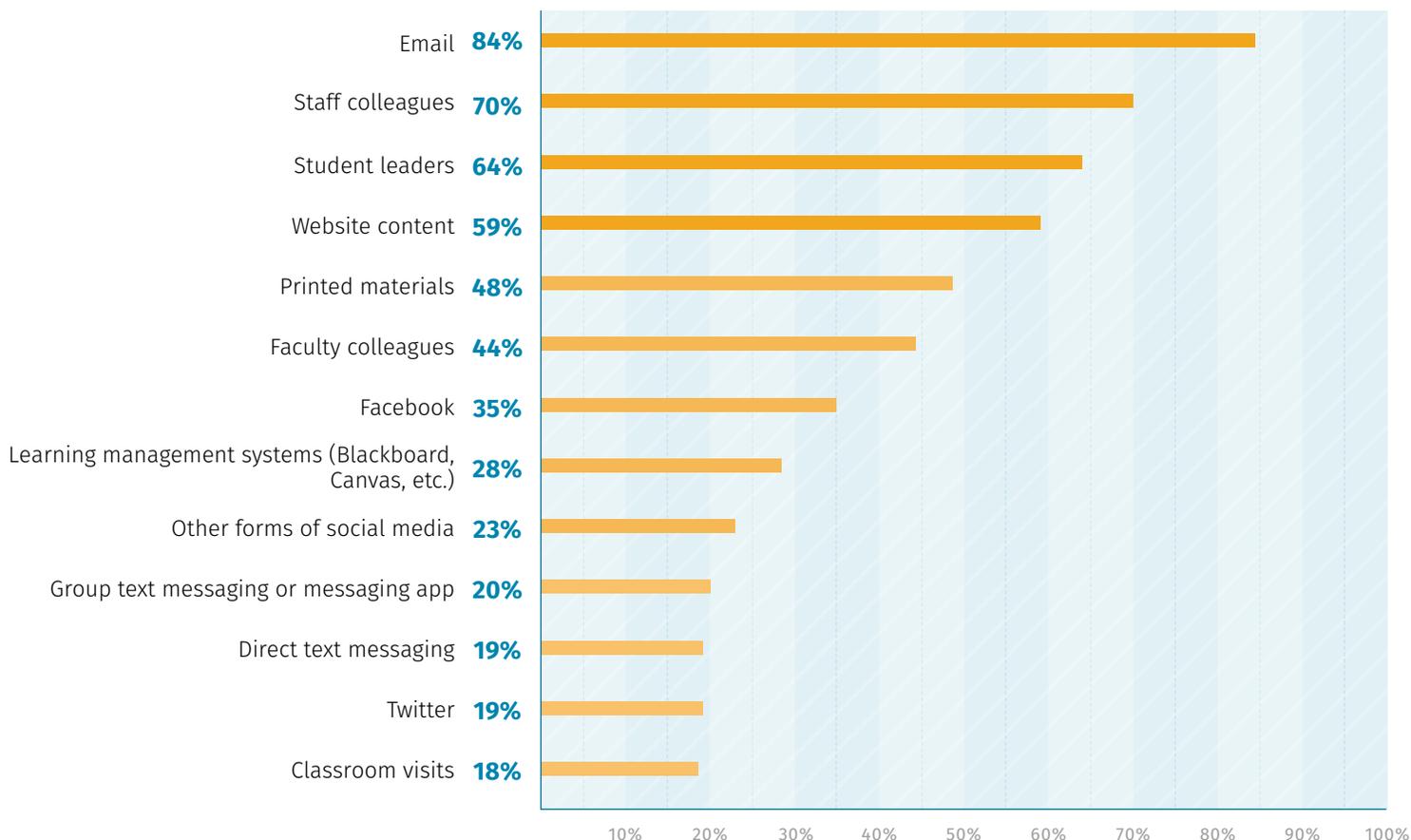


A possible way to increase participation is to better utilize different marketing channels and to build relationships between students and these methods even before arrival. Practitioners shared that email is their main medium of communication with students, even though they are well aware of the limits of email. Students do not always check or read their emails, and they often receive a large volume of them through various accounts. Inclusion of first-generation-specific information on websites, or pages fully devoted to the population, are growing in popularity. **Of surveyed institutions, 49 percent indicate having a web presence with dedicated first-generation information.** Advisors who keep in close contact with students are well aware that texting generates much better response, yet the study findings identified a lack of systematic adoption of texting as a way to communicate with students. While some advisors keep in touch with students via text, they are doing so manually with a limited number of students. This connection with students also calls into question the expectations of faculty and staff to support students in this capacity and whether they should have to use their own personal devices to navigate communication.

Social media and messaging apps are other alternate communications channels that should be considered and leveraged (Figure Q20). At UCLA, an active Facebook group consisting of more than 1,400 first-gen students, staff, faculty, and alumni generates active engagement both virtually and on campus. An event that was solely advertised on the Facebook group generated 250 attendees. Chapman University is also seeing great success with Facebook and a weekly newsletter that is kept “simple” and “written in student-friendly language.” Similarly, Boston University’s First Gen Connect program offers a monthly newsletter and a Facebook page for students and families. At the University of Virginia, staff utilize a single first-generation Twitter account to share announcements from different offices across campus as well as answer questions from students, creating a Twitter one-stop-shop for information relevant to first-generation students. At the University of Memphis, cohorts of first-generation students use the GroupMe application to communicate during the first-year, and many continue to use the group throughout their college experience. Not only is it a social connection but students reportedly find it to be an easy way to access help when looking for a classroom or campus office.



Q20 | How often do you utilize the following channels of communication to reach first-generation students?





CONSIDERING FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES AND RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

Unsurprisingly, in interviews practitioners consistently cite limited financial and human resources as top challenges in their work. Resource constraints limit the reach and potential duration of support, and are the primary barriers to institutions' ability to provide students with support through the whole of their college journey. When first-generation program support is one of the many job responsibilities of a busy person, it does not allow for the appropriate attention to be given to burgeoning programs. Without data to support program success, it is difficult to attract donors and funding opportunities. Uncertainty around long-term funding is a hindrance as well, and it adds to the importance of institutions sourcing additional funds, exploring low-cost strategies, leveraging technology, and identifying cost-sharing measures.

Opportunities to reduce the cost of advising

Advising is a fundamental component of first-generation student support, especially among cohort programs. Requiring regular contact with a knowledgeable, caring professional who provides guidance and encouragement is one of the most powerful tools that enhance student success programs. However, advising is expensive to scale. In the absence of financial resources to hire additional advisors, there are alternatives that can provide supplemental touchpoints for students. An institution can utilize peers and alumni for mentoring as a less expensive way to provide additional one-on-one support but not as a replacement for academic advising or curricular planning. The intent is to supplement meaningful interaction with faculty and professional advisors with access to others who can provide guidance, emotional support, and a connection to resources. Another approach is to prioritize one-on-one advising, especially early on in students' transition to college, for target populations. (Refer to program highlight: Northern Arizona University Combines Positive Psychology and Targeted High-touch Advising.) Besides one-on-one advising, practitioners can also identify opportunities for group advising. While these alternatives do not replace one-on-one, high-touch interactions with a designated university advisor, they provide opportunities for additional touchpoints in between students' meetings with their advisors. Some institutions also reported partnering with third-party success coaching organizations to amplify what is working in a staffing-constrained environment.

Clemson University opened a successful first-generation peer-mentoring program in 2006 for STEM students but has since expanded to mentor students of all majors. Student mentors are paid and receive training through a one-credit class during the spring semester. Training mentors is a time-intensive effort, so providing training through a credit-bearing course can ensure the appropriate allocation of time and create a method of accountability. This training allows for greater individualized and group support and dissemination of information without relying solely on limited university staff.

At North Central College, first-generation faculty have been woven into every component of the comprehensive Cardinal First program. For first-year students, first-generation faculty participate in small lunch groups and share their personal experiences prior to weekly workshops as a way to build mentoring relationships with students. During the second year, faculty serve as table hosts for “sophomore suppers” and join students for a “halfway to graduation” celebration at the end of the year. According to Eric, a second-year Cardinal First participant, “The faculty at North Central are just so nice. They want to help and they want us to do well. I have a faculty mentor that isn’t from my major but he helps me with anything I need. It’s nice knowing I can go talk with him [about], well, just about anything.” By engaging faculty across the program in nontraditional ways, North Central has developed a campus culture that supports first-generation students; faculty are keenly aware of needs and students feel comfortable sharing their experiences with faculty in both academic and social settings.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY COMBINES POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND TARGETED HIGH-TOUCH ADVISING

Northern Arizona University’s Freshman Outreach program is a university-wide initiative that applies approaches from positive psychology—the study of the strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive—to target outreach to specific student populations, first-generation students among them. Using a tool that builds on the Student Readiness Inventory, the Student Success Inventory, and an in-house self-assessment, all freshmen students are asked to complete an assessment that focuses on positive psychology measures like grit, academic effort, commitment to earning a degree, and campus involvement. The school then targets several populations of students based on participation in mentoring programs, demographics, or academic characteristics. Through student outreach conducted by various programs, these target students meet with staff for a brief one-on-one or small group meeting to talk about their strengths and learn about campus resources. Just over 50 percent of the target students attend these meetings, which have shown positive effects on retention.

Opportunities to leverage technology

Interviews surfaced a strong recognition that technology presents ample opportunities that have been underutilized in scaling support for first-generation students. Some of the technology solutions require a significant initial financial investment and staff time to implement, but some can be implemented by building new processes within existing systems. Using an early alert system to prompt faculty outreach is one such example. Practitioners reported learning that existing student information systems have unused features or available additions that provide significant value at a lower cost. For instance, some systems are equipped to send an automatic email that prompts students to meet with their advisors when they make certain changes within their student record. Many institutions are collecting student information, such as first-generation identity, during the admissions process, but it is not being filtered into the student information system. The lack of data continuity prevents faculty, academic advisors, and staff from having informed conversations with students using an asset-based approach. Utilizing technology to serve first-generation students may also provide opportunities for important data collection that can bridge gaps in data shortfalls or provide a new perspective on programs or experiences.

Besides automation and scale, technology also can offer a personalized view of pathways, plans, and checklists directly to students. Many practitioners who lead cohort-based programs shared the significant time they spend sending emails and text messages with reminders to first-generation students. Some are turning to mobile coaching applications that present students with resources, dates, and checklists that are specific to their college and begin support as early as the matriculation process. But even the advocates for technology understand that it is no replacement for human contact, and that the processes and tools all aim to connect students to the appropriate people who can provide help when they need it.

BESIDES AUTOMATION AND SCALE, TECHNOLOGY ALSO CAN OFFER A PERSONALIZED VIEW OF PATHWAYS, PLANS, AND CHECKLISTS DIRECTLY TO STUDENTS

Opportunities to share cost

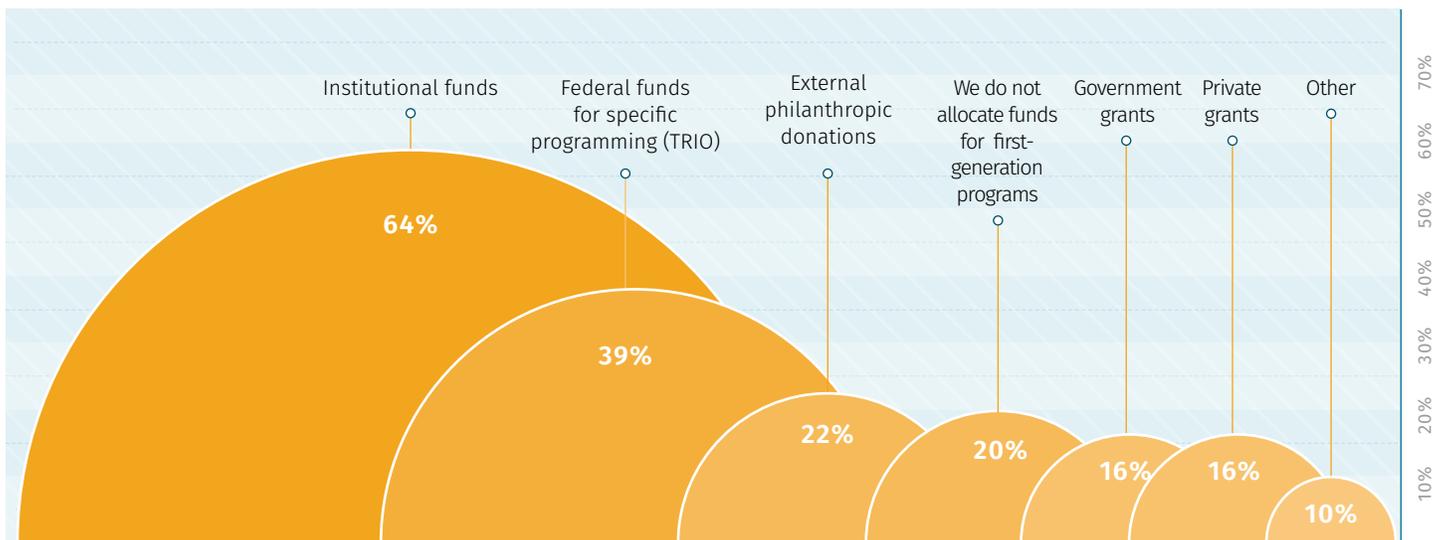
One of the key benefits brought about by a network of campus partners is the opportunity to tap into existing programming or funding. At the University of Rochester, a first-generation reception called “What does it mean to be the 1ST ONE?” was developed using funding from Meliora Weekend, a campus event for alumni, parents, and the campus community intended to showcase student, faculty, and staff talent, and homecoming activities. A videographer was hired to record attendees’ stories about being first-generation, and the resulting video was posted on the school’s first-generation website. Similarly, many practitioners utilize existing funding and infrastructure for orientation to incorporate content targeted at first-generation students. These cost-sharing measures can have the additional benefit of meeting students where they are and becoming more integrated into their student experience as they move beyond their first year. At Colorado State University, a primary objective of the university initiative for first-generation students is to encourage individual academic units to integrate first-generation student support and programming into their existing budgets. As students become third and fourth-years, they are more embedded into their academic departments. The CARE program at Florida State University is an exemplary model of cost sharing with its commitment to complete collaboration across offices and divisions. The program includes staff with reporting lines in multiple offices, shared processes and physical space with partner offices, and a dedicated enrollment management team that meets regularly to identify efficiencies and cost-sharing measures specific to improving the student experience.



Opportunities for funding

Alumni donors who were first-generation students themselves showed a distinct interest in funding first-generation initiatives. **Sixty-one percent of institutions that responded to the national survey have engaged first-generation alumni in philanthropic giving.** At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a donor is funding an academic cohort program. At Loyola Marymount University, a donor has endowed funds to support the First To Go program, which is open to all first-generation students. At the University of Cincinnati, a local donor has endowed funds to support first-generation students with graduate school exam fees and internship travel, and the Gen-1 program has partnered with local government to support first-generation students who graduate from local high schools. Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota has created a unique development campaign raising over \$18 million to support its First Generation Initiative. Many institutions also noted receiving grants from major corporations investing financially into education programs, but they cautioned against beginning programs with these funds in the event the university cannot continue support once the grants end.

Q21 | Please identify the primary funding sources for first-generation programs at your institution.



To harness fundraising opportunities, leadership and practitioners should work closely with their development office to determine a strategy to solicit first-generation support from individual donors. Data and insight on first-generation students on campus serve as important fundraising tools. The inspiring stories of first-generation students are powerful and personal tools to mobilize donors. At the University of Florida, students who receive scholarships meet with interested donors and give campus tours. According to Natalie, a first-generation student at the University of Florida, “the opportunity to give a campus tour to a donor and his son was awesome. It was a great networking opportunity for me, and I also got to thank him in person.” At the University of Maryland, College Park, students can apply for small emergency aid grants as long as they submit a donor note in the online system.

Institutional funding for first-generation efforts often comes in the form of supporting the salaries of first-generation professional staff, graduate assistant support, and programming expenses. An exception is at Northern Arizona University, where the university has invested institutional funds to increase the capacity of its TRIO programs to serve nearly double the students than the federal grant allows.

The key to collaborative, cost-saving measures is creativity and a willingness to build relationships with colleagues. Many of these approaches require partnering with campus resources to extend the bandwidth of human and financial resources, identify opportunities to utilize existing technologies and systems, and to foster targeted development campaigns specific to first-generation initiatives. By having a set program mission and vision and the appropriate data to support needs, positive outcomes to requests for partnerships or funding may be realized. The end results are new avenues for scaling programs to serve more students, improved campus narratives regarding first-generation student success, and a prepared strategy for donor engagement.

CONCLUSION

With an anticipated 65 percent of the workforce requiring education beyond a high school diploma by 2020 and the prevalence of first-generation students attending college, avenues for engaging and supporting these students are being explored across four-year institutions. The landscape analysis uncovered innovative and creative approaches to supporting the academic, social, emotional, and financial well-being of first-generation students at institutions of varying sizes, selectivity, and geographic regions. The approaches were underscored by the presence of caring communities of practitioners striving to offer programs and services that meet the needs of the largest numbers of students possible. Reciprocally, the landscape analysis found institutions often approaching the first-generation student experience reactively as a result of limited staffing and financial resources, and in institutional silos rather than collaboratively. Across the landscape, institutions vary in the progress being made for first-generation students on their campuses—from those with great success and decades long institutional commitment to those who are trying to merge standalone programs from across campus to those attempting to launch an inaugural initiative.

The collection, dissemination, and application of data were common targets of necessary improvement. While the federally recognized definition of first-generation remains the most popular, institutions are grappling with whether this definition best applies to their students, how to formalize data collection using this framework, and how to create a climate more conducive to student self-reporting. Commonly reported barriers to success are access to quantitative institutional data and resource constraints with regards to attempting to collect qualitative data on student experiences. Yet, data remains key in institutional ability to serve larger numbers of students, and there is a need for leaders to make improved processes an institutional priority. Moreover, improved institutional data collection sets a foundation for improved reporting and the development of national benchmarks for first-generation student programs and outcomes. Through quality data management, the ability to name peer institutions and create evidence-based communities of practice around first-generation student success become realized.

The breadth of both program delivery approaches and the content being covered is a reminder of the challenges institutions must overcome in order to serve first-generation students. Through these approaches, practitioners are striving to shift unfair campus perceptions of first-generation students as being stunted by challenges while also providing opportunities

for first-generation students to see themselves through an asset-based, rather than deficit-based, lens. Concurrently, practitioners are striving to grow programs beyond the traditional cohort structure to serve larger numbers of students and to expand support over the duration of the student experience. The intersectionality of the first-generation identity creates both challenges and opportunities for institutions as they utilize programs to shift from traditional college-ready models to progressive student-ready strategies. However, in order to see improved outcomes, including completion, for these students and the associated benefits for institutions, new approaches and dedicated resources are imperative.

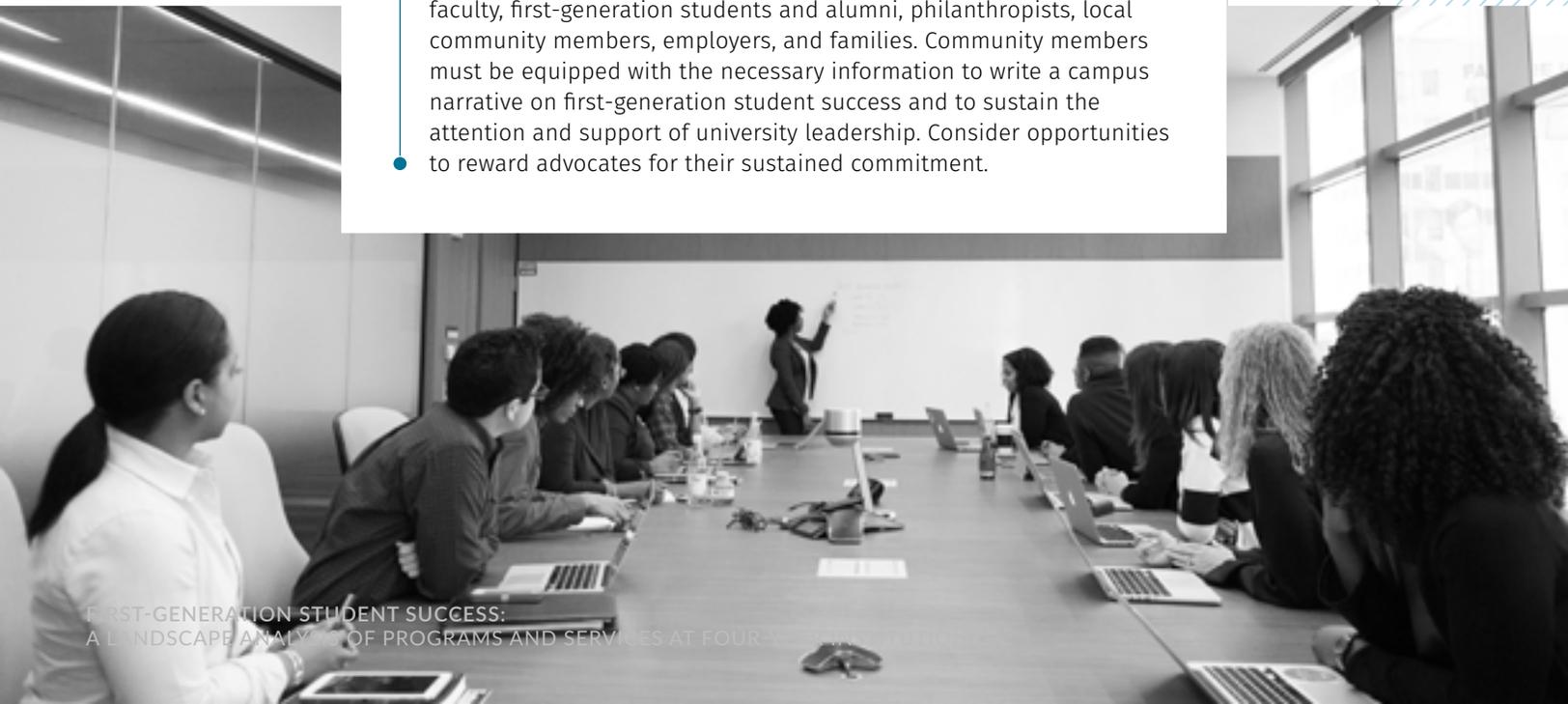


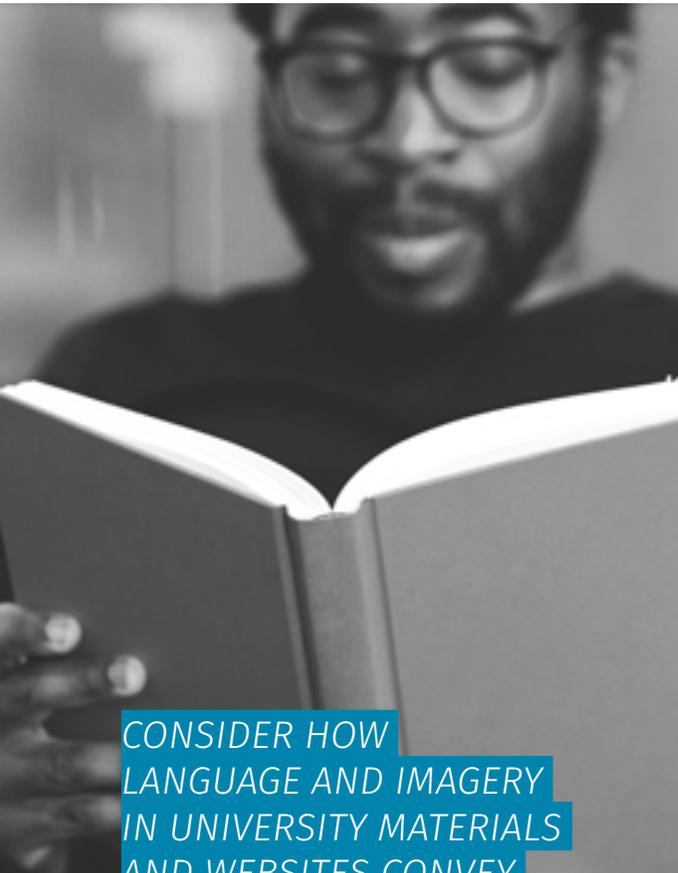
**IMPROVED INSTITUTIONAL
DATA COLLECTION SETS
A FOUNDATION FOR
IMPROVED REPORTING
AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF
NATIONAL BENCHMARKS
FOR FIRST-GENERATION
STUDENT PROGRAMS
AND OUTCOMES**

RECOMMENDATIONS TO INSTITUTIONS

As the landscape analysis findings uncovered insights from first-generation students and practitioners who work directly with them, recommendations and approaches emerged that institutions should consider as they undertake or expand proactive first-generation student support.

- **Establish a common first-generation definition early.** Varying definitions of the first-generation identity make it difficult for institutions to benchmark data against other institutions or even compare notes among stakeholders on the same campus. Consider the specific characteristics of the institution's first-generation students when formalizing a definition and then set systems in place for the formal definition to be used consistently across programs and services. This definition should be clear and concise to encourage self-reporting.
- **Mobilize for institutional change, not just another program.** Faculty and staff are often inundated with information about new programs and initiatives, and suffer from "initiative fatigue" that dampen action. The level of enthusiasm and mobilization around first-generation initiatives in this study, however, indicates that these are not niche initiatives, but rather opportunities for broader institutional change that promote student success and benefit first-generation students and beyond. Because many faculty and staff personally identify as first-generation, there is support for institutional commitments and a desire to be more actively involved.
- **Engage a community of advocates to lead sustained change.** While having a single advocate focused on first-generation initiatives is important, having a community of advocates is imperative to sustained success. In addition to campus practitioners who provide services or facilitate first-generation programming, an engaged community includes faculty, first-generation students and alumni, philanthropists, local community members, employers, and families. Community members must be equipped with the necessary information to write a campus narrative on first-generation student success and to sustain the attention and support of university leadership. Consider opportunities to reward advocates for their sustained commitment.





CONSIDER HOW
LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY
IN UNIVERSITY MATERIALS
AND WEBSITES CONVEY
THE SUPPORT OF FIRST-
GENERATION STUDENTS

- **Conduct a comprehensive institutional assessment of the first-generation student experience.** To achieve a student-ready environment for first-generation students, utilize a community of advocates to deeply assess how current policies and procedures create supports and barriers specific to first-generation student success. Consider how language and imagery in university materials and websites convey the support of first-generation students. Investigate how data is being collected, analyzed, shared, and applied. Determine how existing technology and institutional systems hinder or enhance the ability of first-generation students to persist and complete. Identify how programmatic approaches meet the needs of students.
- **Dismantle silos for a networked approach.** As institutions are mobilizing for change and assessing current practices, there is an opportunity to dismantle the administrative silos currently serving first-generation students and eliminate inefficiencies and duplicate resources. Strive to better understand how campus resources and programs currently serve students or where improvements are needed, and identify creative collaborations for sharing resources and opportunities for scaling offerings in order to present a unified, streamlined approach to students.
- **Create systems for actionable data and advancing research.** Having readily accessible data are critical to identifying, tracking, serving, and reporting on first-generation students. To achieve this, a charge from institutional leadership to designate the appropriate resources and a sustained relationship between first-generation advocates and institutional research staff is necessary. Collect actionable data from various outlets (e.g., application for admission, student information system, program assessment) and share it with stakeholders and use it in decision-making and program application. Engage faculty in research on first-generation student success to advance the scholarly knowledge base. Interview themes revealed some practitioners did not feel comfortable with requesting or interpreting data, and this is especially difficult if institutional research services are not available. Offer training for utilizing data and applying it in practice to bridge gaps and advance first-generation collaborations.
- **Foster an asset-based campus culture for first-generation students.** Often, the barriers to success faced by first-generation students are equated to character shortcomings and lead to the use of deficit-based language throughout the student experience. This can stunt a student's ability to develop a sense of belonging, feel connected to faculty and staff, or seek assistance. Train faculty and staff on methods for using asset-based approaches in classrooms, advising appointments, and program offerings, and infuse this throughout websites and marketing materials. A cultural shift will emerge that allows students to begin understanding how their strengths can support success. Eliminate the pervasive use of deficit-based language and approaches to create a welcoming community for first-generation students that can lead to increased persistence and completion.

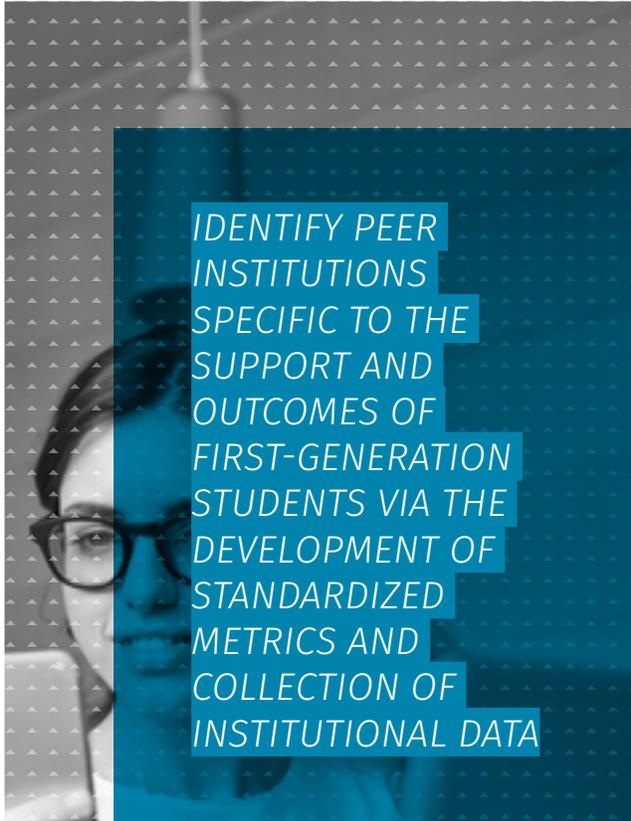


- **Weigh the balance between broad reach and meaningful, sustained engagement.** While supporting first-generation students at scale is important, institutions should consider which programmatic approaches best meet strategic goals. Conduct a comprehensive assessment of needs and proactive planning in order to design complementary program components that leverage both the cohort model and the networked model to help achieve that balance. Leverage both models to optimize opportunities for students while improving sustainability of programs and promoting collaboration and resource sharing.
- **Offer appropriate first-generation involvement opportunities with intentionality.** Having students actively engaged in building identity pride, serving in program leadership roles, and sharing experiences for program and service improvement is an ideal means of engagement. However, an engaged student community actively involved in first-generation efforts does not replace the necessary investments in time, money, and staffing from institutions. Invest adequate resources to ensure students do not disengage because they feel used as a recruitment tool or staffing solution.
- **Consider post-completion engagement from the time of admission.** Building relationships with first-generation students that reinforce their assets and abilities to succeed from the time they arrive creates graduates who feel more connected to their experience. Utilize post-completion engagement to open up opportunities to engage first-generation alumni as mentors, internship supervisors or employers, advocates, and donors. Through sustained engagement, collect longitudinal data to better inform post-completion outcomes, job placement, and earnings, as well as feedback for improving experiences while enrolled.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Interview themes and survey findings surfaced a number of gaps in resources for practitioners as well as opportunities for broad improvements across the higher education community.

- **Isolate key drivers and intersectionality to advance first-generation research and understanding.** Current higher education literature often considers first-generation through a “first-gen plus” lens—one of many factors or controls in a larger narrative. Isolate key drivers in first-generation student success or look at first-generation independent from other identity characteristics to uncover new useful insights that can shape practice. While the complexities of being first-generation can never be separated in practice, utilizing this unique lens to expand scholarly knowledge may offer new perspectives on the student experience.
- **Develop standardized metrics to collect and track data on first-generation students.** In addition to the data challenges faced by institutions, there is minimal coordination of institutional data at the national level. In order get a clearer picture of student outcomes within institutional context, identify how first-generation is being defined, develop standardized metrics, and establish a clearinghouse for collecting institutional data. These metrics and tracking processes offer an evidence-based framework for university leaders to make overarching decisions and for practitioners to make informed decisions on offerings.
- **Establish a network of peer institutions that serve first-generation students.** Peer networks build communities of practice around first-generation programming, position first-generation student success as a sustained priority, advance collaborations for research, and provide necessary professional development for practitioners. Identify peer institutions specific to the support and outcomes of first-generation students via the development of standardized metrics and collection of institutional data.
- **Reinforce a data-driven national narrative for first-generation student success.** Develop a data-driven, evidence-based national narrative on first-generation student success to highlight institutional struggles and successes, and advance solutions to new audiences.



IDENTIFY PEER
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FIRST-GENERATION
STUDENTS VIA THE
DEVELOPMENT OF
STANDARDIZED
METRICS AND
COLLECTION OF
INSTITUTIONAL DATA

- **Seek opportunities to promote the first-generation identity prior to matriculation.** Today's college students are learning about their first-generation identity near the end of high school and often while applying to college. This awareness begins a process of understanding and exploring a new identity and often prevents a student from self-reporting or taking advantage of beneficial opportunities. Consider opportunities to expose first-generation students to this term earlier in the K-12 experience, and do so with an asset-based approach to foster a greater sense of pride, lessen reluctance of students to own their first-generation identity, and build better communication between students and institutions.
- **Recognize and reward institutions that are leaders in the first-generation space.** While some institutions have been on the cutting edge of first-generation student success for decades, others are taking risks and making significant commitments today. Collect institutional and qualitative data in order to recognize institutions experiencing success or reaching particular milestones. Recognizing and rewarding institutions not only improves opportunities for resources but sustains awareness of first-generation topics.
- **Build a culture that celebrates first-generation student success.** In addition to recognizing institutions, identify outlets to celebrate the successes of first-generation students in order to help lessen the prevalence of deficit-based narratives, highlight programs or services attributing to successes, and provide first-generation students with a deserved platform for recognition. Fostering involvement in a coordinated event, such as National First-generation College Celebration on November 8th each year, promotes a culture of first-generation support.
- **Advance opportunities to share research and effective practice across higher education.** There remains a significant push for improved data collection, research, and evidence-based practice accompanied by a need to keep the first-generation student success narrative at the forefront of higher education. Offer targeted opportunities for scholars to share scholarship information and practitioners to share effective practices to increase incentive for progress in these areas, increase professional development opportunities, provide institutions with greater recognition for successes, and advance the narrative. These efforts could be achieved through public scholarships, conferences, peer-reviewed journals, reports, invited talks, symposia, and a host of other approaches.





As university leaders, practitioners, scholars, and first-generation students and families continue the tireless work of advancing first-generation student success, the Center for First-generation Student Success aims to be a partner and resource in every endeavor. The Center's [website](#) offers open access to scholarly literature and current media, professional development events and trainings, and connections to a growing number of programs and resources. The landscape analysis provided evidence that building a community of practitioners across institutions can help develop ideas, solve problems, and cross-pollinate successful programmatic functions that could be customized to an individual campus environment and serve students in larger numbers. To support this, the Center will launch First Forward, a recognition and professional development program that will create a national network of institutions and colleagues committed to advancing first-generation student success. Additionally, the Center will offer First Scholars® toolkits, turnkey approaches to implementing first-generation programs, as well as campus assessment tools, implementation guides, and technical assistance opportunities for institutions seeking assistance. In addition to this landscape study, the Center will advance additional landscape projects and knowledge creation through research and scholarship to provide higher education with the tools necessary to best support first-generation students and their goals.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS AND AFFILIATIONS (PHASE 1)

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Bates College

Jessica Perez, Assistant Dean of Students for Transition and Support
Julisa De Los Santos, Interim Director in the Office of Intercultural Education

Boston University

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Natalie Verge, Senior Associate Director of University Service Center

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Julio Reyes, Program Director of First-Generation College and Low-Income Student Center

California State University, Fullerton

Ariel Davis, Associate Director, Outreach, Recruitment, and Orientation
Rebecca Gutierrez Keeton, Professor of Educational Leadership

Champlain College

Angela Batista, Interim Vice President of Student Life and Special Advisor to the President for Diversity and Inclusion

Chapman University

Crystal De La Riva, Academic Advisor & Program Coordinator, Promising Futures Program

Clark University

Hayley Haywood, Director of Multicultural and First Generation Student Support

Clemson University

Sherry Dorris, Director of the FIRST Program

Colorado State University

Oscar Felix, Associate Vice President for Diversity

Davidson College

Ernest Jeffries, Associate Dean of Students

Dickinson College

William Durden, President Emeritus

Florida State University

Tadarrayl Starke, Director, Center for Academic Retention & Enhancement (CARE)

Fort Hays State University

Brett Bruner, Director of Transition & Student Conduct

George Washington University

Bridgette Behling, Director, Community Support and Leadership

Georgia Gwinnett College

Charmaine Troy, Student Success Advisor

Loyola Marymount University

Ashley Watterson, Program Coordinator, First to Go Program
Sarah Maynor, student (pseudonym)
Alex Castillo, student (pseudonym)

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Alice Rugoletti, Staff Associate, Undergraduate Advising

North Central College

Julie Carballo, Director of First-generation Programs & Military/Veteran Services

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Jakora Holman, Director of Planning and Operations
Jason Moore, Director of Student Support Services & Paul Robeson Leadership Institute

Southern Illinois University

Karla Berry, Director, Center for Teaching Excellence

Southern Methodist University

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Barbara Brown Herman, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Dean of Student Development
Keri Cyr, Director of the Sophomore and Junior Year Experience
Timeka Gordon, Director of Inclusiveness & Intercultural Services and Community Scholars Program
Jamartae Jackson, Program Coordinator for Community Scholars and First Generation
Mark Kamimura - Jimenez, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Multicultural and International Student Services
Cynthia Montes, Director, Student Support Services
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Darryl Wyrick, Coordinator, Leaders for Life

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Truman State University

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University of Arkansas

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University of California, San Diego

Belinda Zamacona, Program Manager, Chancellor's Associates Scholars Program

University of California, San Francisco

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University of Cincinnati

Suzette Combs, Director, Gen-1 Program
Deana Waintraub Stafford, former Education
Advisor, Gen-1 Program

University of Colorado Boulder

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University of Florida

Leslie Pendleton, Senior Director of Retention and
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University of Illinois at Springfield

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University of Memphis

Jaclyn Savell Rodriguez, Program Coordinator, First
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University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Carmen Huerta-Bapat, Counselor and Carolina
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University of Portland

Matt Daily, Assistant Director, Special Populations
and Learning Assistance

University of Rochester

Dawn Bruner, Director of Parent and Family
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University of Virginia

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University of Texas at Arlington

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Jennifer Sutton, Director, TRIO Student Support
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Soli Ghirmai, Academic Bridge Program Director
George Fair, Vice President Diversity and
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Mary Jane Partain, Director, Living-Learning
Communities

University of Texas at San Antonio

Rhonda Gonzalez, Associate Vice Provost for
Strategic Initiatives

University of Wisconsin at Madison

Claudia Mosley, Director, Center for Educational
Opportunity
Todd Reck, Divisional Manager for Student
Experience

Virginia Commonwealth University

Daphne Rankin, Associate Vice Provost for
Strategic Enrollment Management

Wake Forest University

Thomas O. Phillips, Director of Scholars Program
Nate French, Director, Wake Forest Magnolia
Scholars

Washington University in St. Louis

Matthew Newlin, Assistant Director of Financial
Aid, The Brown School

Wichita State University

Kaye Monk-Morgan, former Program Director,
Upward Bound Math Science

Williams College

Rosanna Ferro, former Associate Dean of the
College

Student Focus Groups

Cornell University
Georgia State University
Kansas State University
North Central College
Texas Christian University
University of Florida
University of Michigan
University of Texas at Arlington

ADDITIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Achieving the Dream

Mei-Yen Ireland, Director of Integrated Student
Support Strategies

AdmitHub

Kirk Daulerio, Co-founder

**American Association of State Colleges and
Universities**

Jo Arney, Program Director of Re-Imagining the
First Year of College

Beyond 12

Adam Rosenzweig, Director of Business
Development and Partnerships

Bottom Line

Courtney Ng, Success Team Manager

College Transition Collaborative (CTC)

Natasha Krol, Executive Director

Excelencia in Education

Deborah Santiago, Co-Founder, Chief Operating
Officer and Vice President for Policy

Gates Foundation

Sarah Bauder, former Senior Program Officer

I'm First

Matt Rubinoff, Founder

ScholarMatch

Diana Adamson, Executive Director
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Sixup

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