

The Relationship Between First-Generation Status and Academic Success

Guadalupe Marquez, B.A. Candidate in Sociology
California State University, Stanislaus

Introduction

Attending a post-secondary institution is an important part of a person's life. Higher education not only guides people toward future careers but is also a key factor in determining financial independence, future success, life satisfaction, and comfort (House et al. 2020). However, not every student, such as first-generation students, has an equal opportunity nor the cultural capital to succeed academically. It is then necessary to research the unique factors that create differences between first-generation students and non-first-generation students to understand why there might be an achievement gap or any social inequalities between these two groups.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Suditi Gupta and Dr. Dana Nakano for their support and insight as I continue my research.

Contact

Guadalupe Marquez
California State University, Stanislaus
Email: gmarquez4@csustan.edu
Phone: (209) 421-1628

Research Question

Do first-generation college students experience greater obstacles that negatively impact their academic success than non-first-generation students?



Figure 1. Student Obstacles

Background and Literature Review

It is common for first-generation students to feel as if they don't belong at their institutions. In a study looking at a nationally representative survey of 23,570 first-year college students in the U.S, researchers found that first-generation students reported a lower sense of belonging at four-year institutions than non-first-generation students (Gopalan & Brady, 2020).

First-generation students experience more mental health issues that may impact their academic success. Jenkins et al. (2013) revealed that out of a sample of 1,647 participants, first-generation college students reported significantly stronger PTSD symptoms and significantly less life satisfaction than non-first-generation students.

Additionally, Stebleton and Soria (2012), used the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey to discover that out of 58,017 students across six, large public universities, first-generation students reported higher instances of feeling depressed, stressed or upset, as an obstacle to their academic success.

Method

Participants:

- At least 100 students from CSU Stanislaus who are 18 and older.
- Recruited voluntarily through social media

Materials:

- Demographic survey
- Altered version of the SERU asking close-ended questions regarding self-reported learning abilities, financial wellness and additional open-ended questions regarding sense of belonging and grade point average adapted from the SERU

Design:

- A non-experimental, correlational design will be utilized via a survey made available to California State University, Stanislaus (CSU Stanislaus) students through Qualtrics.
- Will assess correlation between number of obstacles first-generation students face and their academic success and the number of obstacles non-first-generation students face and their academic success

Procedure:

- Survey will be administered through Qualtrics available to Stanislaus State students in a link through social media with a brief description of the purpose of the study



Figure 2. First-Generation Students



Figure 3. First-Generation Students Under Pressure

Expected Results

Based on my non-experimental correlational design, I predict first-generation students will have a negative correlation between the obstacles they face and their academic success. Therefore, I expect to observe that first-generation students will have lower grades and a lower grade point average as well as a greater number of obstacles compared to non-first-generation students.



Figure 4. Obstacles to Graduate

Significance

First-generation students may be at a disadvantage in their academic success due to the number of stressors they encounter compared to non-first-generation students. Therefore, it is necessary to thoroughly research this topic to ensure that all students have an equal chance at prospering academically.

References

1. Gopalan, M., & Brady, S. T. (2020). College students' sense of belonging: A national perspective. *Educational Researcher*, 49(2), 134-137. <http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.csustan.edu/10.3102/0013189X19897622>
2. Jenkins, S. R., Belanger, A., Connally, M. L., Boals, A., & Durón, K. M. (2013). First-generation undergraduate students' social support, depression, and life satisfaction. *Journal of College Counseling*, 16(2), 129-142. <http://doi-org.libproxy.csustan.edu/10.1002/j.2161-1882.2013.00032.x>
3. Stebleton, M. J., & Soria, K. M. (2012). Breaking down barriers: Academic obstacles of first-generation students at research universities. *Learning Assistance Review*, 17(2), 7-20.
4. <https://www.npr.org/2019/11/08/776896753/first-gen-proud-campuses-are-celebrating-an-overlooked-group-but-is-that-enough>
5. <https://www.indwes.edu/adult-graduate/ng-blog/stories/so-youre-a-first-generation-student>
6. <https://theithacan.org/opinion/editorial-first-generation-students-should-have-program/>
7. <https://www.wbur.org/edify/2019/10/23/pine-manor-underrepresented-students-new-england/>