

EXAMINING ATTITUDES IN TRANSITIONING TO COLLEGE: ACTION RESEARCH ON ATTITUDES OF FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS



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Introduction

One of the most interesting student populations to study in regards to experiences and transition into higher education are first-generation students. Within this population of students, first-generation students typically have more obstacles to overcome when it comes to beginning college. The first, and most obvious barrier for first-generation students is becoming familiar with the ways and means of higher education. This includes becoming fluent in higher education jargon, understanding financial obligations, degree options, and learning about different resources and programs to help with the transition, amongst other facets of higher education.

Although the transition into higher education may not be completely uncharted territory for first-generation students, prior knowledge and experiences may be limited due to shortcomings of college understanding. This can attribute and account for the unfamiliarity with how college works. It might seem imbalanced due to the lack of prior knowledge and experiences, but the outcomes of first-generation students entering and completing college is positive, as it increases the overall population of educated people in the country.

As discussed by Renn and Reason (2013), first-generation students tend to experience more difficulties in transitioning into college and less likely to be engaged in activities. Probably a large part of making a successful transition into college studies is survival, evidence by Clark (2005), when looking at skills that need to be developed beyond academic skills.

As is well-known, higher education has many positive outcomes in both professional growth and upward mobility that benefits society. However, first-generation students, who can be a fragile population, need additional support to help make that successful transition into higher education and for progress in degree attainment.

Objectives

The main objectives of this study is to investigate how experiences affect the attitudes of first-generation students in making the transition into their college studies. I am defining attitude with the following in mind for this case-study report. As students are enrolling and beginning their college experience, it usually brings forth many positive attributes and excitement. This leads to a positive attitude with positive elements towards retention, mainly with the hopes of undergraduate degree attainment. Factors that could hinder excitement might vary in nature, such as anxiety of transitioning to college, confusion of processes (e.g. financial aid or resources), or other difficulties with making a successful conversion to college, would negatively impact the attitude of the student. As a consequence, that negative attitude could impede retention and persistence. This research focuses on how these seemingly positive attitudes might change with various challenges or obstacles prior to and through the first year of college studies.

Methods

Mix-methods

Survey: 5 topics including motivation, guidance, challenges, support, and skills gained through a FYS course.

Quantitative: 5 questions using typical Likert scale

Qualitative: 5 open-ended questions for commentary

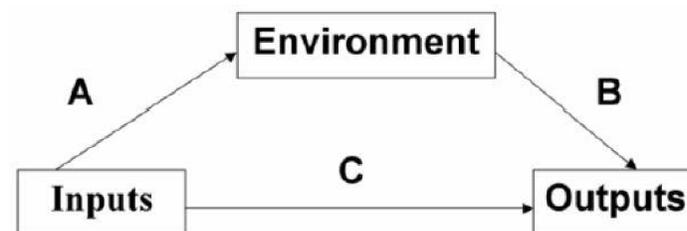
Analysis:

Focus primarily on the qualitative results using Reductionist method that included reviewing initial data, identifying variations and regularities, checking for congruence, and developing themes and subthemes

For themes: comprehensiveness, congruence, relevance, and uniqueness

From the participants, we utilized a sample of 110 total (aiming for representative of institution).

Figure 1 Astin's I-E-O Model



Inputs		Environment		Outputs	
Motivators	Parents Better Life Success Professional	Challenges	Transition Financial Personal	Freshman Seminar	Time Management Study Skills Personal Growth
Personal	New Places New People Sports Friends Personal Growth	Support	Professors Friends Coaches Advisors		
Guidance	Self-Research Parents Counselors				

Table 4
Population by Student-Athletes

Population	Sex	%
Female	12	30.0
Male	28	70.0
Total (N=40)		

Table 5
Population by Academic Area

Population	Total	%
Social Sciences	71	64.5
Natural Sciences/STEM	29	26.3
Humanities	10	9.1
Fine Arts	0	0
Other/Not-Declared	0	0
Total (N=110)		

Table 6
Population by In-State/Out-of-State

Population	Total	%
In-State	76	69.0
Out-of-State	34	30.9
Total (N=110)		

Table 1
Population by Sex

Population	Sex	%
Female	56	50.9
Male	54	49.1
Total (N=110)		

Table 2
Population by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Total	%
White	40	36.3
African American	20	18.1
Hispanic	22	20.0
Asian American	8	7.2
Native American	10	9.0
*Multi-Ethnic Identity	55	51.8
Total (N=110)		

Table 3
Population by Sex and Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Total	%
White, Female	25	22.7
White, Male	30	18.1
African American, Female	10	9.0
African American, Male	15	13.6
Hispanic, Female	14	12.7
Hispanic, Male	8	7.2
Asian American, Female	4	3.6
Asian American, Male	4	3.6
Native American, Female	3	2.7
Native American, Male	7	6.3
Multi-Ethnic, Female	22	20.0
Multi-Ethnic, Male	13	11.8
Total (N=110)		

Findings and Discussion

Consistent with the scholarly literature, this research aligns with the major themes of first-generation students at MSI institutions, and specifically in this study, incorporates with HSI designations.

the discussions around how to better serve and support first-generation students are important to any institution of higher education. Many scholars have written on this subject in different aspects, whether identifying why first-generation student experiences are different, to motivation, support and programs, smooth transitions, and other challenges (Renn & Reason, 2013; Clark, 2005; Harper & Quaye, 2015; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Pascarella et al., 2004; Wiggins, 2011).

Major recommendations that are evident from this research are institutions need to continue to help support first-generation students as best as possible. More specifically, institutions could be better at providing support in advertisement and recruitment that helps first-generation student populations with information with specific information for this group. As well, institutions can continue to advertise support programs that help first-generations students transition into the college environment. Further, colleges can continue to encourage faculty and staff to make connections with all students, which seems to have a positive and significant impact on students. Lastly, institutions can continue to provide additional resources for all students, such as freshman seminars, to create better equity in higher education in regards to student retention and persistence. These were the major themes dissected from the data collected, which also align with the existing scholarship on the subject.

If a goal of higher education is to better students through rigorous coursework that results in degree attainment, then obstacles that deter students, especially first-generation students, need to be broken down. However, at times, obstacles of all sorts can discourage first-generation students, resulting in negative attitudes. Negative attitudes result in adverse student attrition. Conversely, better experiences results in better attitudes, which leads to improved retention and bridging the gap with first-generation persistence and attainment.

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