Advising Needs of First Generation Students: Taking a Closer Look

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Overview

In an April 2015 NACADA Webinar, Academic Advising and Social Justice: Privilege, Diversity, and Student Success, Louis Macias (University of Wisconsin-Madison) began a discussion exploring the value of first generation student anti-narratives, specifically those of high-achievers, in enhancing professional practice and success-promoting psychological orientations among students. Since that webinar, Louis has become the Chair of NACADA’s First Generation College Student Advising Interest Group, and he returns to our webinar venue to build on his initial presentation, as well as the personal stories shared by our First Gen NACADA Leaders in our September 2015 webinar, Advising Needs of First Generation Students: NACADA Leaders Share their Experiences. He is joined by Heather Doyle (Dalhousie University), who will share the results of her work on a project providing support to first generation students through mandatory advising and student success programming. The results of Heather’s work was published through the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). In this hour, we consider the full spectrum of first generation student experience, from those who are high-achieving to those who enter college having not yet met the general entrance requirements for their program of study.

References and Recommended Resources


Advising Needs of First Generation Students: Taking a Closer Look

In a previous NACADA Webinar, NACADA First Generation College Student Advising Interest Group Chair Louis Macias (University of Wisconsin-Madison) began a discussion exploring the value of first generation student anti-narratives, specifically those of high-achievers, in enhancing professional practice and success-promoting psychological orientations among students. Louis returns to the webinar venue today to build on his initial presentation. He is joined by Heather Doyle (Dalhousie University), who will share the results of her work on a project providing support to first generation students through mandatory advising and student success programming. The results of Heather’s work was published through the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). In this hour, we consider the full spectrum of first generation student experience, from those who are high-achieving to those who enter college having not yet met the general entrance requirements for their program of study.

“Hello, duck”

- The term first generation college student applies to “any postsecondary student who comes from a family where neither parent/guardian has earned a bachelor’s degree”
- FGS accounted for about one-third of total college population in 2012
- 3 out of 5 FGS do not earn degrees within 6 years
- Two-thirds of FGS attend community colleges or for-profit institutions
- FGS are more likely to be enrolled part-time
- More than one-third of FGS are 30+ years old
- FGS are disproportionately African American (20%) and Hispanic/Latino (23%)
“Hello again, duck”

- First generation students:
  - Lower academic aspirations
  - Less academically and socially prepared for college
  - Greater difficulty adjusting to college
  - Less likely to persist and graduate
  - Disadvantaged in terms of social/cultural capital
  - More likely to come from low socioeconomic backgrounds
  - Academically outperformed by their continuing generation peers

“If it quacks, it’s a duck...right?”

Among high-scoring students who attend college, only 36 percent of Hispanics and 37 percent of African Americans complete a BA or higher, compared to 57 percent of white students.

My Study: An Introduction

- Research questions:
  - How has self-efficacy developed among high-achieving first generation college students?
  - How has the self-efficacy of high-achieving first generation college students influenced their academic achievement?
- “Unofficial” research questions:
  - Why me?
  - What does an anti-narrative look like?
- Focus on Latino/a identity was something that evolved over the course of the study

A Word About Qualitative Research

**The Good News**
- Inspires lots of questions and discussion
  - Often informs future inquiry, including quantitative studies
- Provides rich accounts of participants’ thoughts, experiences, opinions, orientations etc.

**The Bad News**
- Subjective and open to multiple interpretations
- Not generalizable and highly contextual
- Studies commonly have low participant numbers
Self-Efficacy: An Introduction

- Defined as “one’s perceived capabilities for learning or performing actions at designated levels”
- Ongoing process involving the individual, behavior and their environment
- Sources of self-efficacy:
  - Mastery/lived experiences
  - Modeled/vicarious experiences
  - Social/verbal persuasion
  - Emotional arousal

My Study: Methods

- Took place at a large four-year Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in the Southeast
- 16 participants sat for two structured interviews ranging from 40-75 minutes each
- Eligibility criteria:
  - Must be FGS
  - Enrolled in institution’s honors program
  - Must be eligible for Pell Grant
  - Classified as a senior
- Interviews were transcribed and themes were identified. An important part of the data analysis process was connecting participant responses to self-efficacy.

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<th>Honors Program</th>
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Themes:
First Generation Identity

Parental Influence

Personal Pride
Future Orientation

Adversity

Immigrant Experience
FGS and Continuing Generation Students

Themes: Self-Efficacy

Mastery/Lived Experiences
Vicarious/Modeled Experiences

Social Verbal Persuasion

Self-Efficacy Observations

- The Self-Efficacy “Circle”
- Mastery/lived experiences matter
- Self-efficacy is cumulative
- Confidence, motivation, and resilience make for beautiful minds
“How Did You Make It?”

Alexandra

“I just wanted to prove the statistics wrong that said I wasn’t supposed to do what I was meant to do. Just being different and doing things different from what everyone said I should have been able to do gives me some sort of satisfaction that maybe I can lead the way for other people. Especially with the career I’m going into, which is medicine. A lot of people are going to tell me, ‘You can’t do it.’ It would be awesome if someone that has overcome a lot of adversity [like me] can do it and share his or her story. That’s what drives me, being able to mentor someone when I get older.”

Pseudonym “Alexandra” used to protect student’s identity. Shared with permission.

Sebastian

“It’s that confidence that’s been building up for years. It’s almost like an aggression to prove people wrong. That aggression actually comes from my parents always pushing me forward to keep trying to do my best...motivating me to continue my education, to continue becoming successful in life. By them doing that, they’ve created...they’ve put the embers...and when people say something like that it’s just fuel. It just ignites the fire.”

Pseudonym “Sebastian” used to protect student’s identity. Shared with permission.
FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS IN CANADA

Definition

Students whose parents did not participate in post-secondary studies


Education in Canada

• Postsecondary education correlates positively with:
  – labour market success
  – individual earnings
  – citizen engagement
  – contributions to the economy
• 57.8% aged 25-34 years having post secondary education
• In Ontario, 40% of 18-24 year olds participate in post-secondary education or training

FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS IN CANADA

- 2-4 times less likely to attend college or university
- May face additional barriers such as:
  - Lack of community supports
  - Insufficient information about the benefits of attending college or university
  - Limited financial resources
  - Lower expectations and/or confidence about succeeding

May lack cultural resources and background information about higher education
- Limited awareness of how to perform “role” of student and of expectations
- Less support to help build knowledge base
- Cannot rely on parental advice
- Struggle to identify and resolve role based problems

Gateway program

Lakehead University

- Comprehensive graduate and undergraduate programs
- 8200+ student population; nine Faculties
- Large Aboriginal population
- Two campuses: Thunder Bay Ontario and Orillia Ontario

Background

- (MTCU) dedicated funding to post secondary institutions in Ontario to support first generation students
- Commitment to increase number of college and university students enrolled in postsecondary education
- Enhanced access for aboriginals, persons with disabilities, francophones, new Canadians and first-generation students” (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2005)
**Program Design**

- Students, who did not meet the traditional entrance requirements were admitted 'on probation'
- Signed contract, agreeing to:
  - Mandatory monthly advising appointments
  - Required Student Success course
  - Maintaining good academic standing to continue

**Goals:**

- Encourage the enrolment of non-traditional students
- Promote success, retention, and graduation
- Provide access to opportunities, resources and supports

**“Non traditional” student:**

- Delaying enrollment in post secondary education
- Attending part time
- Being financially independent
- Working full time while enrolled
- Having dependents

**Non traditional students may include:**

- Students with a disability
- Adult learners
- First Generation
- Low income

Literature Based

- Students are more likely to persist in college or university when they are able to successfully separate from their home life and become academically and socially integrated into the college or university (Tinto, 1993)
- The more successful at integration and engagement, the more likely they are to be successfully
- Non-traditional students are less likely to receive support from family members and more obligations, that limit ability to become fully integrated


- Provide students with pertinent information
- Aid in assisting with transition
- Focus on proactive advising to:
  - Help talk through fears and concerns
  - Establish educational and career goals
  - Increase empowerment in their decision making
  - Provide academic support

QUALITATIVE STUDY
• All students contacted for voluntary participation
• Entered in a draw to win iPod touch
• Small sample size (32% participation rate)
• Semi structured interviews
• Script of pre-determined questions/topics
• Once transcribed, coded and organized into themes

Sample of 26 students interviewed:
• 42% declared themselves to be first generation
• 19% considered themselves to be visible minorities/Aboriginal
• 58% were mature students and 15% declared some kind of disability (physical/mental/learning)
• Only 15% had none of these risk factors

• Prior to beginning university, students reported experiencing:
  – Anxiety
  – Uncertainty and apprehension
  – Lack of academic self esteem and capability
  – Fears over social transition
  – Poor study habits and writing skills, poor time management
  – Low levels of understanding of student role
  – Unsure of course and faculty expectations
Themes

- Social and personal difficulties
- Difficulties in separating and integrating
- Feelings of homesickness
- Difficulties juggling social and academic roles

Reported Program Benefits

- Helped to develop academic skills
- Assisted with integration into campus life
- Advisors provided motivation and helped keep them on track academically
  - Provided assistance with not feeling “overwhelmed”
  - Worked on developing realistic expectations
  - Helped to stay on “top of” academics
  - Encouraged student-faculty contact
  - Helped develop critical thinking skills

- Reported problems related to time management and placing priority on time on task
- Proactive advising and being accountable to someone paramount to their
- Connection to someone on campus who cared enabled them to be more involved in their role as a student

Having a connection with an academic advisor was reported as being beneficial for all students
Take Aways

• Program from an Appreciative mindset
• Consider Marginality and Mattering
• Incorporate continued future supports
• Focus on resiliency/grit

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