Sources of Disadvantage among First-Generation Students

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What do we know about first generation students?

- Definitions vary – most often either neither parent has attended college OR neither parent has graduated from college, most often – baccalaureate

- Research on first generation students has shown that:
  - 1st Gen students are disadvantaged by:
    - Lacking basic knowledge about PS education
    - Tend to be from lower income families
    - Lower degree expectations
    - Less HS academic preparation
  - Have more difficult transitions from HS to college
  - Attend Less Selective PS Institutions
  - Are less engaged in academia
    - Work more hours
    - Less likely to live on campus
    - Completed fewer credit hours
What do we know about first generation students?

- College experiences have more positive effects on 1st Gen Students’ Cognitive and Motivational Outcomes
  - Academic
  - Extracurricular
- 1st Gen students have less favorable college retention and graduation
  - Lower 2nd year retention rates
  - Less completion rates
  - Less likely to attend graduate or professional school
- But conditional on college graduation, have comparable earnings
Sources of Disadvantage based on Parents’ Education Level

- **Social Capital**
  - Degree of ease and familiarity with dominant society
  - Tie into Strayhorn’s concept of Feeling of Belonging

- **Cultural Capital**
  - Relationships among individuals that facilitate transaction and transmission of different resources

- **Academic Capital**
  - Social processes that underlie family knowledge of educational options, strategies to pursue them, and career goals that require a college education
Sources of Disadvantage based on Poverty

- Insufficient funds to attend college
- Living in impoverished neighborhood
  - affects cultural and social capital
  - schools poorly resourced
  - more likely to be high crime area
Goals of Study

1. Determine if first generation students in Illinois appear to have less academic and cultural capital than non-first generation students.

2. Determine if college outcomes are different for first generation and non-first generation students, taking into account their college readiness and high school preparation.

3. Determine the effects of being first generation and living in poverty on college outcomes and the interaction of these effects.
Population

- Illinois class of 2009 graduates from public high schools ($n = 109,031$) who filed a FAFSA ($n = 72,244$) for 2009/10 year (66%)

- Of the FAFSA filers,
  - 43% were first generation (neither parent completed college) and 29% were poor
  - 57% were female
  - 84% enrolled in 09/10

- Of the enrollees
  - 60% enrolled in a 4-year institution and 40% enrolled in a 2-year institution
  - 74% enrolled in a public institution
1st Gen Population

Demographics and Enrollment

- More African Americans and Latinos (20% & 16%) than non-1st Gen (13% & 3%)
- More females (60%) than non-1st Gen (55%)
- More poor (42%) than non-1st Gen (18%)
- Less college enrollees (80%) than non-1st Gen (88%)

College Readiness

- 1st Gen much less prepared
  - English - 61% vs 82%
  - Reading - 40% vs 64%
  - Math - 32% vs 58%
  - Science - 19% vs 41%
Different Expectations and Aspirations

1st Gen students had

- Lower educational aspirations (to obtain Bachelor’s or higher (88% vs. 96%)
- More confidence in their major (85% vs. 80%)
- Less expectations to live on campus (48% vs. 69%)
- Higher expectations to receive financial aid (91% vs. 87%)
- Higher expectations to work in college (83% vs. 73%)
- Higher expectations to need help in reading, writing, math, and study skills (e.g., for study skills 62% vs. 55%)
- Less plans to be involved in extracurricular activities (in 11 of 13 activities)
  - Highest disparities were for instrumental music (26% vs. 32%) and community service (55% vs. 64%)
  - More plans for involvement in racial organizations (21% vs. 19%) and broadcasting (36% vs. 34%)
Prediction of Associate’s Degree Completion in 4 Years: 2-Year Entrants

● College readiness in math and English are significantly related to associate’s degree completion.

● Controlling for college readiness, poverty is a significant predictor of associate’s degree completion. For every 8 students in poverty who graduate, 10 students not in poverty will graduate.

● First-Generation status does not contribute to associate’s completion over and above poverty and college readiness.

● Poverty has a consistent effect on associate’s completion for both 1st generation and non-1st generation students.
2 Yr Entrants: 1st Generation Status and Poverty on Associate's Completion

- **NOT 1ST GEN**
- **FIRST GEN**

POVERTY

- Not Poor
- Poor

Associate's Completion in 4 Years

Values:
- 1.00
- 0.80
- 0.60
- 0.40
- 0.20
- 0.00
Prediction of Bachelor’s Degree Completion in 4 Years: 2-Year Entrants

- College readiness in math, English, science, and reading are significantly related to bachelor’s degree completion among 2-year starters.

- Controlling for college readiness, poverty is a significant predictor of bachelor’s degree completion. For every 45 students in poverty who graduate, 100 students not in poverty will graduate.

- Controlling for both college readiness and poverty, first-generation status is a significant predictor of bachelor’s degree completion. For every 52 students who are 1st generation and graduate, 100 students who are not 1st generation graduate.
Prediction of Bachelor’s Degree Completion in 4 Years: 4-Year Entrants

- College readiness in math, English, science, and reading are significantly related to bachelor’s degree completion among 4-year starters.

- Controlling for college readiness, poverty is a significant predictor of bachelor’s degree completion. For every 63 students in poverty who graduate, 100 students not in poverty will graduate.

- Controlling for both college readiness and poverty, first-generation status is a significant predictor of bachelor’s degree completion. For every 81 students who are 1st generation and graduate, 100 students who are not 1st generation graduate.
4 Yr Entrants: 1st Generation Status and Poverty on Bachelor's Completion

Bachelor's Completion in 4 Years

POVERTY

- NOT 1ST GEN
- FIRST GEN
Level 2 variables effect on Bachelor’s Degree Completion in 4 Years: 4-Year Entrants

- Admission rate was negatively related to completion but did not differ by poverty level or 1st generation status.
- Students enrolled in the public sector had lower completion rates than those in the private sector.
- The negative effect of poverty on completion was more dramatic for students at public institutions.
4 Yr Entrants: Interaction of Sector and Poverty on Bachelor’s Completion

- Private
- Public

Bachelor's Completion in 4 Years

POVERTY

Not Poor
Poor
Summary of Findings

● First-generation students have
  - lower aspirations for college degrees,
  - less expectations to live on-campus, and
  - less expectations to be involved in extracurricular activities.

● Both poverty and first-generation status have a depressing effect on graduation rates, controlling for college readiness. Clearly, there are other factors than high school preparation that reduce their chances for success.

● Notably, 1st generation status has a depressing effect on completion, above and beyond poverty.

● The difference in completion between public and private-school students seems limited to poor students.
Concluding Remarks

- Clear indications of lower cultural, academic and economic capital for 1st generation students. What resources can we provide to help 1st generation students live on campus and get more engaged?

- Poverty is a strong factor in lack of completion but for bachelor’s degree completion, the other disadvantages of 1st generation status also contribute to completion.

- Need to explore whether private institutions use different strategies to promote success among low income students.

- Is there an effect of sibling exposure to college on college outcomes?
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