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First-Generation College Students: Sense of Belonging on Campus

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AUTHOR: Elizebeth Salazar

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As a first-generation college student and graduate, this paper holds a special place in my heart to process my experiences and the experiences of other first-generation college students who I have met in my educational journey.

Abstract

This if from the policy track for the Community Engagement capstone pathway. First-generation college students have grown in numbers on college campus' but continue to be a population that has lower completion numbers for their bachelor's degree. TRIO and other first-generation college programming on college campus' can contribute to better success of this population. However, first-generation college student's sense of belonging should be added to campus' initiatives to promote better retention of students.

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Problem Statement

Going to college has been found to have more benefits in today's society. Those that are college graduates earn $1 million more over their lifetimes as opposed to high school diploma holders (Cheeseman & Newburger, 2002; Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). In addition, 33.3% of first-generation college students drop out of by their third year of college. (Carenvale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). Within the job force, 14% of jobs require some college education and 30% require a bachelor's degree (Carenvale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). For the vast array of minority students, being retained in college until completion requires more assistance then an admissions acceptance (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018; Strayhorn, 2014). The United States continues to face issues of attrition within their colleges (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018; Strayhorn, 2014).

First-generation college students are one group that are identified as a concern for lacking degree attainment after entering college (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). First-generation college students are defined as individuals who are the first in their family to go to college. The term was first coined in the 1965 Higher Education Act (Higher Education Act, 1965). This can be one or both parents who have not attained a degree themselves. College Board defines first-generation students as those who "come from families with low incomes or from middle- or higher-income families without a college-going tradition" (College board). College Board states that first-generation students can come from any income background, but because of the college going tradition not in their family, they later become a group that is disadvantaged. 75% of students with college educated parents attained a college degree in comparison with 48% of first-generation college students attaining a degree (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics,

2004). There is a discrepancy between students who have parents who went to college and those that did not, showing a 27% difference in degree completion and this statistic shows their need for more support. In addition, they face difficulty being retained before their last year of college; of students with parents who have a degree dropped out by year three (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). More college students that are not first-generation complete their degree.

Students who do not have a parent that completed college face different obstacles. As cliché as it is, first-generation kids are trail blazers. No one else in their family knows where they are going through. They have guidance from outside sources, but their internal support system likely lacks an awareness about what they are going through. Often, students who are first-generation college students lack the social capital to navigate or understand the structure of higher education institutions (Brand & Hooker, 2010). They face obstacles of belonging, just as every college student does on campus, but they also face belonging obstacles in their families. Social belonging, academic readiness, and understanding their social capital are just a couple of needs for this population (Brand & Hooker, 2010). Navigating college academics is also challenging, as they do not have anyone in their family who has gone through the tough courses they are going through. In addition, the college climate and system are difficult to navigate, leaving students lost as to where to find resources. First-generation college students may struggle with navigating the campus physically, locating their classes or their professor's offices. They also may encounter having seeking help, knowing when to contact a tutor or their course's teacher's assistant or their professor. Sometimes those that identify as first-generation are minorities, people with disabilities, or low income also, bringing other factors that interact with being first-generation. Finding a support system on campus, faculty or staff to guide them, and

furthering their education can be difficult when a university does not provide a program for them to take part in.

As colleges attempt to increase the diversity and demographics of their campus, by admitting a greater number of first-generation college students to their student body, then they must make greater efforts to incorporate programming and resources that supports the success and completion rates of those students. Universities and colleges will be adept with the resources and understanding of how to retain students who come from first-generation or minority background to ensure them the best support system to have achievement. However, requiring universities to implement programming regardless of funding from the Higher Education Act will allow success of these institutions and allow them to better serve their students. One existing program, the TRIO Student Success Services, needs further funding to better serve college first-generation students entering. In addition, the wider campus needs to increase students sense of belonging, which can be done through the Culturally Engaging Campus Model.

Literature Review

The term "first generation college student" was coined in federal policy through the institution of the TRIO program by the 1965 Higher Education Act (Higher Education Act, 402A. 20 U.S.C. 1070a–11). First-generation college students are the new wave of students trying to access higher education. College degree attainment is found to be necessary in the growing workforce. First-generation college students would benefit from the attainment of a college degree.

While a college degree is important for improving income, colleges were not seeing high levels of first-generation college students completing their degrees. There is a 15% gap in third year persistent rates in first and second-generation college students, for bachelor's degree attainment (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez 2001). This means that students who are first- and second-generation college students, are less likely to complete their first three years of college. The student's decision not to continue and not completing their degree is important because if first- and second-generation college students do not complete their degree, they are not eligible for a more skilled job. Today, further implications of not completing their degree means that these students may have debt with no degree to help them achieve a better job. Helping first-generation students not only stay within college but attain their degree would allow for these students to have numerous social and societal gains.

To begin, the history of student support focused primarily on academics rather than overall college preparation. People saw that first-generation college students were coming into higher education with less academic preparation and lower scores on standardized tests (Mulvaney Hoyer & Redford, 2017). First-generation college students were shown to come from families with less income and as a result had to learn to be acculturated (Terenzini et al.,

1996) and students who are first-generation tend to come from an ethnic minority background (Feng & Balemian, 2013). The thought, first noted by Tinto, was that students needed to learn how to blend into academic systems and social systems within higher education, to be acculturated to speak the new world of academics they were entering (Museus, Saelua, and Yi, 2016). The federal government offered TRIO, beginning in 1965, a government funded college access program, as a method of giving students support (Thayer, 2000). Students who were identified to be needing support for degree completion early on, participated in academic and social preparation early to give them tools for use within the classroom when the school year began. College preparation began to expand beyond academics when this model was working (Thayer, 2000). College preparation that included personal skill building, peer interaction in a cohort model, or early introduction to professors are examples of additional programming that was added beyond academics. Bridge programs gave exposure to college campuses and encourages honours programs (Thayer, 2000). These programs, the TRIO programs and summer bridge, began to place importance on personal interaction, which is where researchers began to focus next.

The campus climate, the college politics, course navigation, and extracurricular involvement, are what make being a first-generation college student challenging Personal interaction affects a student and their degree attainment. Social factors that influence a student can be their peers and family. As the student continues college, peers and their college campus become a more significant social factor for first generation college students. first-generation college students are usually less engaged or do not socially integrate within the college environment (Pike & Kuh, 2005). College students endure a social and academic juggle while in higher education. Students grapple with how to maintain relationships with family, making new friends, peers to support them with their academic goals, interacting with faculty, and navigating the college structure. Social capital can benefit first-generation

college students and engaging in healthy interaction with their social system can give these students more resources to utilize.

Student retention and degree completion is a complex issue. Finding exactly what elements colleges should change to make this successful allows for not just first-generation students to thrive but non-first-generation students also. College is a time when students grow to know more about their identity, the environment around them, and how they fit within both. Because first-generation college students tend to statistically be minority students (Rothwell, 2015), identity development and awareness might bring tension to their fit in the campus climate. Students while in college also gain more self-efficacy (Phinney & Haas, 2003). Retention and degree completion have become a priority for most universities, and for first-generation college student programs on primarily white campuses, success of minority students is becoming a concern. First-generation college students need a wider support system, in this case the college campus can make strides toward better engaging and valuing their identity.
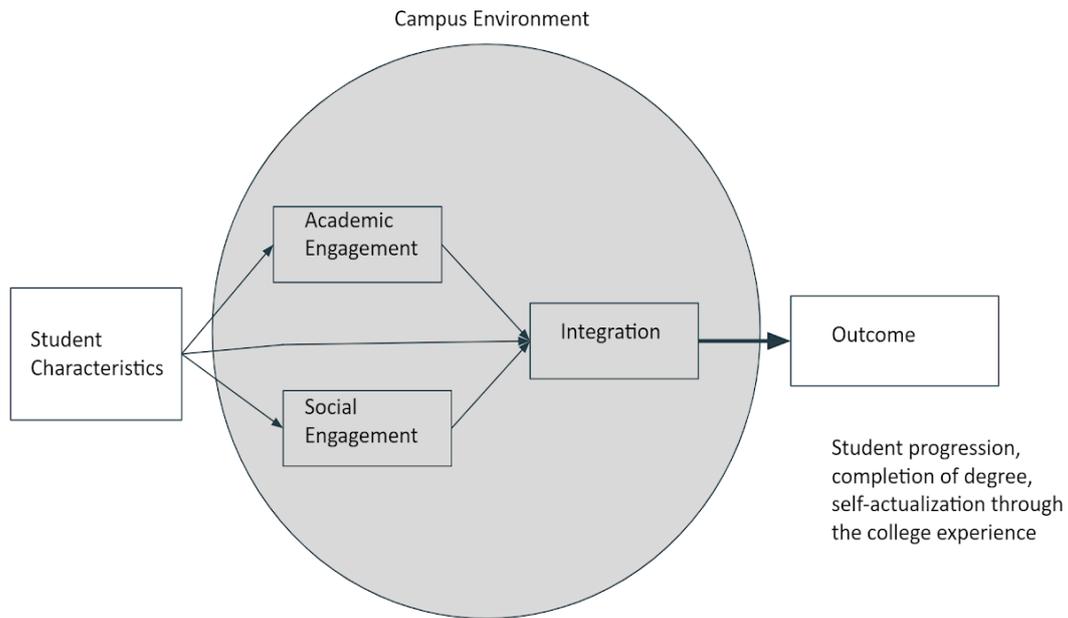
What is belonging?

Belonging should become a wider priority for colleges to retain first-generation college students (Cohen and Walton, 2007). Colleges believed access, granting college admission, was enough to ensure retention of first-generation college students. The argument was that once the first-generation population gained access, they would succeed after: "Tinto's theory... suggests that students must dissociate their cultural communities and adopt the dominant values and norms of their respective campuses in order to succeed" (Museus, Saelua, and Yi, 2016). Tinto created awareness for the need for first-generation students to gain access to higher education, however his earlier work states that these students, who are primarily minority races, must assimilate to succeed in the higher education climate (Tinto,

1993; Museus, Saelua, and Yi, 2016). Colleges have adopted this model in the past, noting that giving access to students was enough and whether they completed or not was their choice, since they still gained the numbers.

Tinto has been advocating for degree completion for minority students, recognizing that enhancement of supports such as TRIO and other college programs lead to better belonging of students, enhancing their experiences and giving the campus full experience of the student's diversity capital they offer it (Tinto, 2004).

Acculturation is a challenge for first-generation college students and not easy to manage, however second-generation students understood this and transitioned better (Terenzini et al., 1994). Acculturation was not an easy adaptation for first-generation college students and Tinto's later work proved that these students sense of belonging was important (Tinto, 2004). Pike and Kuh (2005), argue that student characteristics factor is the first step towards student gains, and academic engagement and social engagement contribute to their integration. The acculturation model separates college engagement from the campus, making it an issue of personal adaptation when sense of belonging by the college is shown to increase students positive experiences (Pike and Kuh, 2005).The college environment cannot be separated since student experiences and place factor into their sense of belonging. Because the college environment is such a large factor of both academic and social engagement and the integration of students, sense of belonging on this college campus is a key influence. The graphic below demonstrates that campus environment is an all-encompassing aspect of student engagement, that leads to their outcomes.

Campus Environment

Academic Engagement

Student Characteristics

Social Engagement

Integration

Outcome

Student progression, completion of degree, self-actualization through the college experience

If a student does not feel like they belong within the campus environment, they will not engage socially or academically, leading to an inability to integrate to the college environment. The shift, now that access has begun, has been to campuses creating efforts that offer students more worth and belonging, this can be by the campus hosting cultural nights or creating a diversity center for students to go to or making evening classes flexible if most students are commuters. Through this increase in belonging within the campus environment there will be an increase student's retention and degree completion. Belonging will lead students to better integration (Pike and Kuh, 2005), so they can focus on their outcome of completing their degree.

Belonging ties students to their college, increasing a greater sense of worth in their education, their college community, and in their endeavours. School Belonging is described as "an important factor contributing to the psychological adjustment of college students" (Gummadam, Pittman and Ioffe, 2016). When college students are well adjusted, they perform better, and increase their sense of belonging further increases their devotion to the

campus (Pike and Kuh, 2005). To feel like you belong is to feel respected and included on a college campus (Goodenow, 1993). Many students face psychological adjustment and socio-emotional transitioning when entering college, and for minority students they are more likely to have poor psychological adjustment (Smith, Chesin, & Jeglic, 2014). Because a large percentage of first-generation students are minority students, psychological adjustment as a result of lack of belonging (Gummadam, Pittman, & Ioffe, 2016), can lead to lower attrition for this population. Psychological adjustment comes in many forms, which can be from understanding one's own identity to learning how to navigate in a classroom where you are a minority background. For students within the first-generation college student population, belonging on campus can drastically alter whether they remain in college (Butler-Barnes, Perkins, Walker, & Wolf, 2017).

Sense of belonging is linked to wider perceptions of how students feel on campus. Increasing students' sense of belonging can decrease their association of social class and adjustment on a college campus (Ostrove and Long, 2007). If students feel like they belong, they are more likely to leave behind the societal structure they are often put within, allowing for them to feel less pressure or marginalization on campus (2007). When students feel like they belong, they can grow within the campus rather than feeling like they are up against obstacles or constantly trying to defy the odds or "prove themselves". Sense of belonging can improve students' general participation in classes and involvement in the campus community (2007).

Students who do not feel that they belong can have lower levels of self-efficacy (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001). Self-efficacy is described as the "belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is a social capital that first-generation college students can apply to both

social and academics to involve oneself on the college campus. Higher levels of self-efficacy

are shown to have effects on problem solving and persistence in educational endeavours.

"self-efficacy is able to improve performance in specific cognitive areas" (Chemers, Hu, &

Garcia, 2001). It was also found that self-efficacy affects planning and regulation (Chemers,

Hu, & Garcia, 2001). self-efficacy was shown to interact indirectly and directly to personal

adjustment and academic performance in students who were in their first year (Chemers, Hu,

& Garcia, 2001). When students have a greater sense of belonging, their self-efficacy

increases.

Sense of belonging on a college campus was also identified as being the highest

indicator for "students' psychological sense integration" (Hurtado, Guillermo-Wan, and

Ruiz-Alvarado, 2015). The figure below shows the relationship between discrimination/bias,

validation, and sense of belonging for students' overall inclusivity.

Figure 1. Mediation model between Discrimination/Bias, Validation, and Sense of Belonging
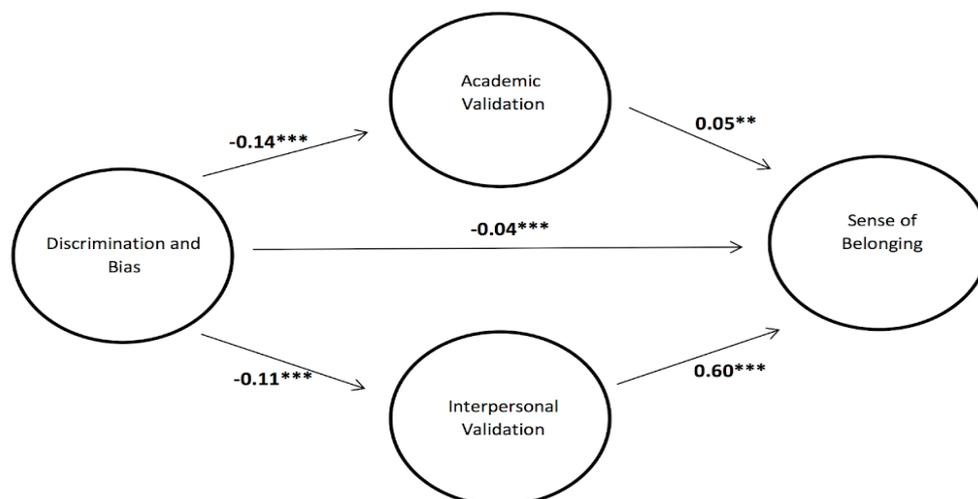
Research findings showed that students sense of belonging was a result of many factors,

narrowing down to discrimination bias, interpersonal validation, and academic validation

(Hurtado, Guillermo-Wan, and Ruiz-Alvarado, 2015). Each of these factors were observed

within students to see which has the greatest effect on students sense of belonging. Academic validation is one where students believed they were strong academically had little effect on their sense of belonging (Hurtado, Guillermo-Wan, and Ruiz-Alvarado, 2015).Discrimination and bias lowered students sense of belonging, and interpersonal validation, feeling that others saw them for who they were was the strongest relationship (Hurtado, Guillermo-Wan, and Ruiz-Alvarado, 2015). Institutions who focus on heightening their effects on students sense of belonging will increase their retention. By focusing on students belonging they can reach the stage of self-actualization, leading to greater fulfilment, contributing to the college environment, and desiring to stay to continue to grow.

When students socially adjust to the campus climate they academically adjust (Grant-Vallone, Pohlert, Reid, and Umali, 2004). Social Adjustment gave students higher levels of self-efficacy and led to better peer interaction, leading these students to better focus on degree completion and commitment to college (Grant-Vallone, Pohlert, Reid, and Umali, 2004). When students feel like they belong, they adjust better to the campus and are more likely to complete their degree. For first-generation college students, an increase sense of belonging through social adjustment will create more support for completion of their degree.

Why is it important for these populations?

A sense of belonging on a college campus can make all the difference for first-generation college students. First-generation college students have a different structure of social capital backing their determination within college. First-generation college students do not have a parent that has knowledge of the college atmosphere and may come from communities where the only person they know with a college degree is their teacher. These students are a minority population on the college campus, and often come from ethnic or racial minorities. First-generation students are 30% of all college going attendees as reported,

showing increase in this population by the National Center of Education Statistics (Our Opportunities and Our Challenges).

As minority students, they may face racial tension if their campus is ill equipped to integrating these students. 70% of first-generation college students are non-white, with 14% identifying as black and 27% identifying as Hispanic (Mulvaney Hoyer & Redford, 2017). With campus climate, tension, or underrepresentation, students may lack a feeling of belonging on the college campus. Students may also just not feel like they belong. Some students may express their lack of connections on the campus, "I did not have many personal connections with people who went to college", a phrase that leaves many students, like LaKresha Graham, feeling underprepared as both a minority student and first-generation student (Graham, 2011). A similar response came from a Hmong American student, Michelle, who stated in Jahangir's "Stories as Knowledge Bringing the lived experiences of First-Generation College Students into the Academy" (2010), "The only thing that interfered with my learning is that I felt left out from the groups and everybody else. I feel like I don't belong there or here. I guess I don't fit with them" (Jehangir, 2010). If students do not feel they belong they will not want to go to the campus, will lack their college social support system, and may not complete their degree.
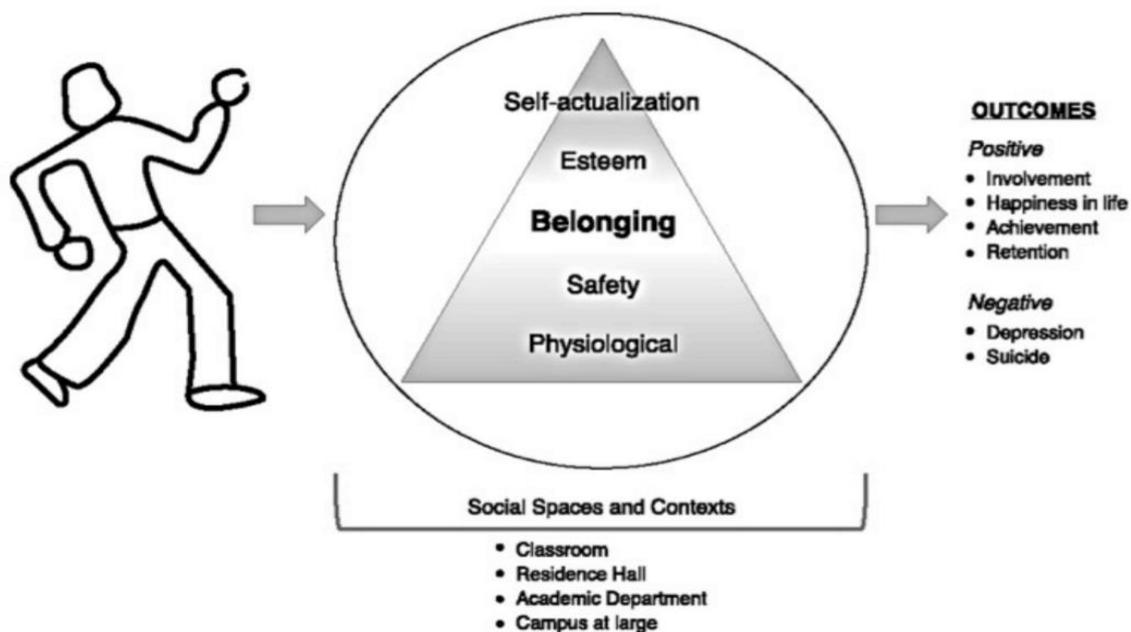
First-generation students come into college with different experiences than non-first-generation students, some of which are socioeconomic or ethnic related. First-generation college students may face challenges relating to their peers because of their socioeconomic status. One first-generation college student, Audrey Olmos-Govea, recounts an experience in her sociology class, stating that the guest speaker assumed everyone in the room had been to Europe before (Skibell, 2015), this experience may not give complete representiveness to first-generation students but issues of not feeling belonging among their peers are similar to

this.. Many students experience an adjustment like this, creating a social barrier to relating to peers beyond one experience because it indicates the uncomfortable barriers in socio economic or cultural differences. Social belonging is a central human need to have positive relationships (Walton & Cohen, 2007), this relationship can begin by students feeling comfortable to express their differences and find relational steps between them, but without these first-generation students do not feel like they belong.

Latino students are one minority that are often first-generation college students, they account for 61% of the first-generation college student population (Balemian, and Feng, 2013). Ethnic identity and how it plays into the wider campus population and climate will have effects on minority students. "Ethnic minority college students can experience a sense of belonging to a larger group through at least two ways: feeling connected to their college or feeling connected to their ethnic group" (Gummadam, Pittman, and Ioffe, 2016). Belonging to an educational setting can come from these two places. Minority students understanding and identity of self-factor into belonging if this is weak (Gummadam, Pittman, and Ioffe, 2016). When students have a strong sense of ethnic identity, they rely less on belonging on a college campus. "Sense of school belonging at the university level is associated with the psychological adjustment of ethnic minority college students" (Gummadam, Pittman, and Ioffe, 2016). For first-generation college students and first-generation minority college students to succeed their feeling of belonging on the campus should extend beyond the Student Success Services, coming from the wider college institution.

For students to enter college spaces, places that should be social and allowing them to interact in a healthy way. Minority students hope to enter physical campus spaces and continue to thrive socially. Some social spaces on campuses are dorms, dining halls, the library, classrooms, and professor's offices. While campuses are often viewed as places for

purely education, the social aspect of the campus is something that comes regardless of intention. Through these spaces first-generation students can have their needs fulfilled or not. Having a safe and physically up-kept campus are some of the first steps, however when belonging is not considered for students, they cannot achieve a positive self-esteem or self-actualization.

Self-actualization

Esteem

Belonging

Safety

Physiological

OUTCOMES

Positive
- Involvement
- Happiness in life
- Achievement
- Retention

Negative
- Depression
- Suicide

Social Spaces and Contexts
- Classroom
- Residence Hall
- Academic Department
- Campus at large

First-generation college students face larger issues of belonging than their non- first-generation peers. As seen in figure 2, the student enters the campus spaces, which they then go through the stages of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, with social being the concept of belonging. They have a more difficult time adjusting to the physical spaces of a college since they often come from low income or minority populations. Adjusting to the prestige of the college campus Achieving the safety piece of being on campus, feeling safe with being different in a new place allows for students to find spaces of belonging. Once they feel like they belong, they can academically thrive (Hurtado, Guillermo-Wan, and Ruiz-Alvarado, 2015), get involved on campus, feel positive about their experience (Grant-Vallone, Pohlert, Reid, and Umali, 2004), and complete their degree. The article this was used for was to

describe Asian American women's sense of belonging in a college campus. When minority students do not feel they belong on a campus, they cannot fully immerse themselves in the college campus. Universities that call for an increase in diversity but do not lay the groundwork for these populations to feel a sense of belonging lose out on the contributions these students could make to the campus. When students do not feel a sense of belonging, they often chose to leave.

The First "first-generation college student" program

The TRIO college program that serves students in college is the Student Support Services program. Students must first be eligible for the programming, by being first-generation college students, a student with a disability, or low-income students (TRIO Website). First-generation students are defined by TRIO as "students whose parents have not received a bachelor's degree" (US Department of Education, 2019 n.phe). Because there are three different criteria, there is not a full understanding as to how many students TRIO serves that are first-generation. Eligibility varies by institution. Students who participate receive:

> academic tutoring; guidance in selecting postsecondary academic courses; information for students regarding public and private scholarships and financial aid programs; assistance with completing financial aid applications; counseling services to improve students' financial and economic literacy; assistance with students' applications to graduate and professional programs (for four-year grantees); and assistance with students' applications to, and obtaining financial assistance from, four-year programs (for two-year grantees)"

(US Department of Education, 2019 n.phe) These are the cornerstone programming to give qualified students access to more educational support to succeed in the college setting in hopes of leading them to degree completion. The SSS program provides academic support for both two year and four-year students who are within the program, but also strives to provide more outside of academic programming too. TRIO SSS programs may customize the additional programs based on the makeup of the students they serve.

Each TRIO Student Support Services offers various additions for students. TRIO programs are mandated to providing academic support, but other support outside of academic are optional. Some programs provide mentoring, cultural nights, career advising, housing options, or other non-academic services (US Department of Education, 2014). Although program enhances student experiences, these additional programs are limited to funding and staff at these institutions.

TRIO SSS is grant funded. Institutions must apply to be funded. Institutions apply for the grant funding based on their percentage of students needing the service, either by racial, socioeconomic, or students with disability diversity numbers and enrolments. Universities and colleges may be identified as "Hispanic-serving institutions", "historically Black Colleges and Universities", "Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander serving institutions", "Tribally controlled colleges and universities", or other racial minority serving status'. Funding must be requested if they serve a large enough percentage of eligible students, their endorsement of serving minority populations only further advances their chances of being able to get the grant to have staff members, resources and programming support. Colleges who receive this funding then must reapply for subsequent funding. Their ability to receive further funding is determined by the success of their program. Currently there are 1,069 institutions with 202,880 participants for the Fiscal Year of 2018.

TRIO SSS supports large numbers of first-generation college students. First-generation college students have been identified as a group that needed college access, furthering certain populations to gain education, access, and thrive in ways that underserved students might not be able to without advocacy. TRIO SSS has provided its services to 197,663 students in 2013 (US Department of Education, 2014). There are also 1,027 total awards with $274,739,441 in funding. 16% of participants are Hispanic or Latino, 28% Black

or African American, 45% are white, 5% are Asian, 3% are American Indian or Alaska

Native, and 2% are more than one race or other (US Department of Education, 2014). TRIO

has over half of its students who identify as students of minority background. Even in their

early years, TRIO SSS supported 60% of students who were both low income and first-

generation, and 19% of students were first-generation only, accounting for 79% of all

participants being first-generation college students in the 1997-1998 funding (US Department

of Education). TRIO continues to support first-generation college students' years after its

beginning cohorts, transforming from a college access program to Student Support Services

to be sure students are retained on the campus and complete their degree.

For some TRIO SSS programs, they fulfil the students' need for validation by having

cultural nights that all of campus can attend. Another would be if the institution itself

celebrated certain milestones or holidays for minority students, such as celebrating Black

History month or creating a week for Latinidad artists to express their various Latino

heritages. Previously, it was argued that minority first-generation retention came from other

variables than campus engagement and cultural competency. There are three important

identified variables affecting minority student attrition as argued by Bennett and Okinaka,

satisfaction, GPA and "less trauma" (1990). Students who were more satisfied, or less

traumatized by racial/interracial contact, specifically Black students as identified by Bennett

and Okinaka in this article, were assumed to succeed. This does not address how the wider

campus creates an issue of lack of belonging for students, just their response to the campus.

The population TRIO serves, first-generation college students are now needing

support for retention and degree completion. First-generation college students enter college

with less social and cultural capital to navigate the college environment. There are many first

for first-generation college students- from navigating the campus physically to picking

classes to knowing college terminology, such as "bursar's office". TRIO SSS helps students navigate some of these new experiences, teaching and guiding students with their fundamental services. However, beyond college navigational tools and literacy of higher education students strives to attain their degree, facing some obstacles of statistics and understanding of self that should be offered beyond TRIO SSS. While TRIO SSS serves an ample number of first-generation college students, the National Center for Education Statistics states 30% of college entering freshman are first-generation college students (Our Opportunities and Our Challenges). TRIO while a great model, does not have the capacity to serve all first-generation college students on a college campus.

Recommendations

First-generation college students encounter more challenges than their peers and more difficult transitions to college, self-efficacy training would allow for a better college adjustment utilizing this essential social capital. Students coming into college without a role model or clear understanding of what a college campus is like means that they will be turning to the programming offered to meet their needs. When these first-generation college students do not know their goals clearly or cannot self-evaluate what their goals could give them, their confidence in college, overall, decreases. In programs that aid to help first-generation college students gain a degree, it is important to consider how valuable realistic goal setting is and evaluation of how that degree attainment will come. Self-efficacy evaluation for first-generation college students as well as faculty and staff training for self-efficacy evaluation and student goal setting would make college degree attainment more successful.

There are several reasons first-generation college students come into college with different struggles than traditional college students; "differences are evident in the lack of parental experience with the college application process, how these students prepare for college both personally and academically, why they choose to attend college, and in their personal experiences and overall personality" (Gibbons and Shoffner, 2004). There are many studies that look at community and two-year first-generation college students however further studies should be done on bachelor's degree attainment from a four-year college start perspective. Because a bachelor's degree attainment would benefit students in the job market and allow for societal mobility, research on self-efficacy in first-generation college students at a four-year college or university should be done.

Preparation for college students is more than just academic preparation and more than just social. For first-generation college students, the learning curve is greater. To prepare

these students with positive attainable goal setting and developing their understanding of how they fit in the world around them gives them the personal ability to make achievements in college. To give students more viable resources and cultural capital to adapt to college, and through these students are more likely to complete college.

Schools are said to be a microcosm of society, meaning colleges are one micro unit where students practice how they will interact with society (Battalio 2005). In the rest of the United States, diversity exists, first-generation college students should have access to opportunities of inclusion.

Expansion of TRIO Campus Collaboration and Funding

The TRIO SSS program has been doing well with helping first-generation college students navigate campus and can be a major factor in student comfort on campus. TRIO students have more staff to engage with, that serve as coaches for their success. In addition, TRIO SSS often puts forth a cohort model for students to have peers to connect with, these peers with attend programming with them throughout their time in college. TRIO SSS staff engage with students multiple times a year in a very intentional way to provide students a support system on campus. The staff also go above and beyond academics on some campuses by putting on cultural events, celebrations, and mixers for TRIO students. Not only does funding need to expand to meet the needs of staff but also so further research as to TRIO programming variation can be done.

TRIO SSS should not only be a resource to students who are in the program but serve as a wider resource to the campus. TRIO SSS serves as a second academic advisor, and often hosts the campus tutoring programs. The campuses should collaborate with TRIO and assure accurate funding and support of first-generation and minority first-generation students before

increasing efforts to enroll more students. The TRIO staff have been trained to put students first, meet them where they are, and ensure their success. The staff work with goal setting and interact with various offices on campus to better support students. When the campus begins to turn to TRIO for guidance on serving students who are needing more support, TRIO can be a resource to coordinating this support and engaging collaboratively with parties that can influence these student's success. TRIO SSS cannot, with the current funding and staffing, serve all the first-generation college students going to American colleges and universities. Campus' need to be better engaged in retention and attrition for first-generation college students, from every level of campus personnel.

Belonging through a Culturally Engaging Campus Environment model

Campus climate and the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments model (Museus, 2014) change the focus of first-generation college students to adapt to the college campus, focusing the efforts on how the campus can be more engaging, and inclusive. The Culturally Engaging Campus Environment Model allows institutions to further evaluate their improvements in various areas students engage within (Museus, Saelua, and Yi, 2016). This is a framework for college success that emphasizes the importance of social belonging for student's success and degree completion.

Through this model, the campus can better engage diverse students by making a systematic change. The campus environment has many factors; below you can see the elements of their engagement. A first-generation college student needs more than just support from the TRIO staff and family, because sense of belonging has many more components than just support system from one department. When the college adapts its method for student success, reframing the importance to be student belonging as a major influence of their overall success at the college students become a greater priority. For first-generation college

students, belonging is an influence on their success at a college because they are more likely

to reach out to staff or their peers for support, making their social barriers lessen.

Students who engage with the TRIO SSS program go through an indirect approach to

this model, but TRIO SSS is unable to serve all first-generation students. The wider campus

can utilize this model to reach all first-generation college students, to better serve this

increasing demographic. As numbers grow and TRIO SSS funding and staff do not, there

must be a larger effort from the campus to engage students, not just a specialized group.

Because many first-generation college students are of minority background, having a campus

that embraces culture and looks toward this to have students integrate, they can feel more

belonging. Restructuring away from acculturation can help first-generation students who are

of minority background better relate, feel empowered, and embrace themselves.

The Culturally Engaged Campus Model of success focus' on how the environment

creates the students experience. The model can be an adaptable model for assessing the

campus' balance of student sense of belonging and engagement. Cultural familiarity is a

backbone of the model, requiring college staff to get to know the demographics of the student

population. Cultural familiarity is the understanding of self, that is one part of it, that gives

minority first-generation and first-generation students the ability to navigate the world, but

this only factors in partly to the students' cultural relevance, a foundational point of a

culturally engaged campus. Through the model, campus' must place a deeper understanding

of students to increase their engagement. When staff become more invested in students,

beyond academics, students validated by their community, seeking more investment from

cross-campus. As staff become better trained with understanding their engagement of

students on the college campus, they will be able to humanize student experiences when they

are facing a difficult transition and provide more holistic support. Students can begin to focus

on their academic performance and goals, they will also feel more comfortable reaching out

to face academic faculty when they are struggling with their academics because the
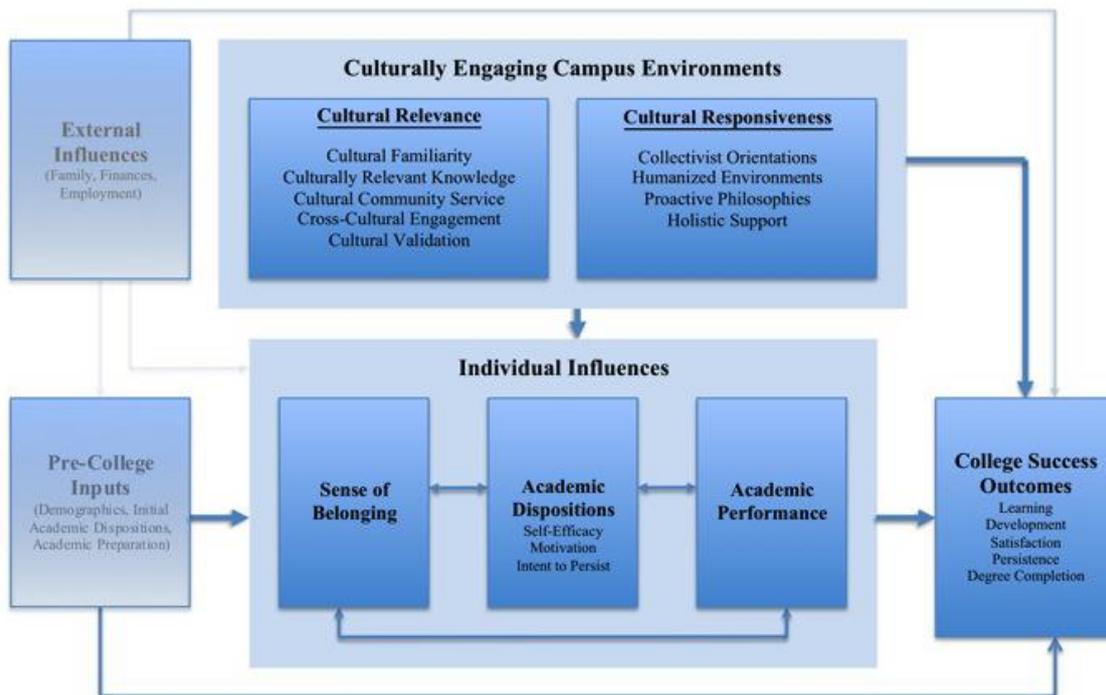
relationship is built.

Figure 1: The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model of College Success

When the wider institution gets involved in students belonging, there is a wider support

network for students coming in with less social capital, and even academic readiness.

Students will also feel more culturally validated if the staff engages with cultural competence

and has knowledge of where students are coming from, again being beneficial since many

first-generation college students are from a minority background. With all of these

environmental factors being adjusted toward a different method of seeking student success,

sense of belonging naturally increases to allow proper balance of academic dispositions and

performance.

The shift, now that access has begun, should be for campuses to offer students more worth and belonging, to further enrich the cultural of the school. Through the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments Model, campus' can further evaluate how their environment is doing to increase students sense of belonging. Campus' who better understand their impact are better equipped to helping first-generation college students complete their degree and enter the workforce after this milestone.

Conclusion

As we begin to evolve as a culture that requires college degrees for skilled and technical jobs, colleges will have to continue to find ways to widen their mission to serve more first-generation college students. Within the first-generation student population is untapped talent, diversity in ability, socioeconomic class, race and ethnicity, and various experiences that can enhance a university. Education has been long rumoured to be a tool for success, but with jobs needing education rising, this is no longer a tool but a necessity. First-generation college students have been granted access to higher education but will greatly benefit from campus' increasing their sense of belonging. Expansion of the wider campus embracing student success and belonging, and further funding and development of TRIO SSS programming will ensure greater success of not just first-generation college students but all students in a university setting.

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