

The Experiences of First-Generation College Students at UNH

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Background

- Definition: "A student from a family where no parent or guardian has earned a bachelor's degree.
- Disproportionally racial minorities, female, and low-income
- Face significant challenges including academic, financial, and social
- Have lower college persistence and completion rates
- Make up 50% of undergraduates attending four-year private and public universities

Methods

- Qualitative data collected on the perceptions and experiences of UNH first-generation students
- Participants were recruited through the TRIO program at UNH.
- Sample size: 10 UNH undergraduates of first-generation status
- Conducted semi-structured, recorded interviews post IRB approval
- Data analysis: Transcribed interviews were analyzed using Grounded Theory Method for emerging common themes

Findings

Challenges in High School

- How to afford college
- Little to no help with FAFSA from high school
- Minimal help from guidance counselors
- Lack of support and knowledge from parents

High School Support

- College access programs (Upward Bound, Educational Talent Search, Dual Enrollment/Concurrent Enrollment)
- Teachers and mentors
- Courses on application process and scholarship help
- Outside resources (social workers, library)



Challenges in College

- Tuition
 - Constant struggle
 - Stressful
 - Must work and take out a lot of loans
- Lack of parent support
 - Emotional
 - Knowledge gap
 - Financial
- Freshman transition
 - Overwhelming
 - Struggled academically
 - Finding the right major

College Support

- CFAR (Center for Academic Services)
- TRIO (SSS, TRIO Scholar)



Motivation to go to College

- Want to earn good money
- Degree would increase job opportunities
- Do not want to struggle like parents
- Good at school and love learning
- Parents' expectations
- Want to give back to siblings and future children



Thoughts about being First-Generation

- Feelings
 - Proud, excited, set an example
 - Nervous, challenging, not confident
- Have more resiliency, awareness, and gratitude
- Feel different from other students
 - They have clear advantages
 - Have more privilege
 - Are under less pressure
- Term is not stigmatized by others
 - First-generations put stigma on themselves

Implications

- More support is needed at the high school level
 - Guidance counselors need additional time and resources to be more useful
 - Students need to be better prepared and have more knowledge about finances before entering college
- There are still some gaps in the support UNH provides
 - Increase CFAR resources and outreach
 - Provide more financial assistance through scholarships and advising
 - Better support for freshmen during transition (additional information, academic resources and expectations)
 - Increase awareness around first-generation students and their challenges

Limitations

- Findings cannot be generalized because the sample consists of students from only one university, UNH
- Responses may be biased due to volunteer sampling
- Since participants were recruited by TRIO, they are affiliated with them in some way. This means that they may be doing better in college and receiving more supports than the average first-generation student at UNH.