Blueprint for Student Attainment: The First-Generation Study

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Privacy Notice

Indiana University is dedicated to protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects recruited to participate in university-sponsored research. To protect the privacy of the human research participants who participated in the study and to maintain the confidentiality of the data, the data presented from the interviews and focus groups with first-generation students, program staff, and administrators is de-identified.
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Executive Summary

In fall 2011, 43 percent of all degree-seeking undergraduate students enrolled at Indiana University’s regional campuses were first-generation (University Institutional Research and Reporting (UIRR), 2011). When first-generation students begin to approach half of the undergraduate population, it is a significant proportion. Research suggests that first-generation students—students whose parents did not complete a four-year bachelor’s degree1—face a variety of challenges that make it more difficult for them to persist in college (Higher Education Research Institute, 2007; Indiana Project on Academic Success, 2005; The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Given the regional campuses’ commitment to enhancing student success through the Blueprint for Student Attainment, it is important to consider the needs and experiences of first-generation students and how programs and support services impact their success. In her assignment at Indiana University’s Office of the Executive Vice President for University Regional Affairs, Planning, and Policy, SPEA VISTA Fellow Julia Sorcinelli conducted research in support of the Blueprint for Student Attainment to examine which programs and support services had the most impact on first-generation student success.

Below is a summary of the study’s key quantitative and qualitative findings.

Summary of Quantitative Findings

The quantitative findings present UIRR regional campus data on enrollment numbers, retention rates, student demographics, and academic performance. These findings represent fall 2011 unless otherwise noted.2

- In fall 2011, first-generation students represented 43 percent of the total enrollment of degree-seeking undergraduate students on IU’s regional campuses. Note: The total proportion of first-generation students is most likely an underestimate since UIRR counts all students with missing information as non-first-generation (Figure 1).
- IU East had the highest percentage of first-generation students (50 percent), while IU South Bend and IU Southeast had the lowest percentages (41 percent, respectively). These differences are statistically significant (p<.001) (Figure 1).
- The retention rates of first-generation beginners in the fall 2009, fall 2010, and fall 2011 cohorts steadily decreased from the second semester to the third year (Table 2).
- IU Kokomo and IU Southeast had the largest negative differences between first-generation and non-first-generation retention rates for the fall 2009, fall 2010, and fall 2011 cohorts (Table 2).

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1 This report defines first-generation students as those students whose parents did not complete a four-year bachelor’s degree to conform to UIRR’s data collection methods.
2 The data come from five of the regional campuses: IU East, IU Kokomo, IU Northwest, IU South Bend, and IU Southeast. Please see the Methodology section for a description of the statistical significance tests that were conducted.
• First-generation representation on the regional campuses was higher among females (45 percent), students age 35 and over (50 percent), and Hispanic/Latino students (50 percent). These differences are statistically significant (p<.001) (Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4).

• There was no difference in representation of first-generation students by course load (43 percent for both full-time and part-time students) (Figure 5).

• The average high school GPA of first-generation students was slightly lower than that of their peers (2.94 versus 2.96); however, the difference is not statistically significant (p>.05) (Figure 6).

• The average SAT Verbal and SAT Math scores of first-generation students were lower than the average scores of their peers (469 versus 483 and 470 versus 481, respectively). These differences are statistically significant (p<.05) (Table 1).

• The Core 40 Tech diploma had the highest representation of first-generation students (53 percent), while the Academic Honors diploma had the lowest representation (41 percent). These differences are statistically significant (p<.001) (Figure 7).

• The average first semester GPA of first-generation beginners was lower than that of their peers (2.39 versus 2.44); the difference is statistically significant, although not strongly so (p<.05). Additional tests show that this difference is eliminated when controlling for differences between the two groups in average SAT scores (Figure 8).

Summary of Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings present data from interviews and focus groups conducted with 21 first-generation students and five program staff and administrators at two campuses.

• First-generation students identified four main factors that motivated them to attend college: parental expectations; education after a nontraditional path; an opportunity to improve their quality of life; and a desire to help others.

• When asked to reflect on their identity, many first-generation students shared contrasting perspectives. According to some students, being the first in their families to attend college made them more determined to succeed. Other students described the invisible nature of or negative stigma that was attached to being a first-generation student.

• First-generation students faced a variety of challenges, including being the first in the family to attend college; navigating the college culture and campus; developing academic, study, and time management skills; balancing work, employment, and responsibilities in the home; and paying for college and living expenses.

• First-generation students, program staff, and administrators identified a variety of helpful programs and support services. They included campus-sponsored summer bridge programs; comprehensive support programs; financial aid; first-year seminar; math and writing centers; peer mentoring; service-learning; student clubs and organizations; Supplemental Instruction; and tutoring.

• First-generation students, program staff, and administrators shared their suggestions for improving the quality and effectiveness of existing programs and support services. They
included promoting early awareness of programs and support services; designing a
more focused and engaging new student orientation; involving families in the college-
going process; providing additional support for nontraditional students; and extending
support beyond the first year.
• Although first-generation students attributed a good deal of their success to the
programs and support services on their campuses, they reported that it was the one-
on-one relationships and trust they developed with advisors, faculty, and program staff
that encouraged them to persist in the face of daunting challenges.

Recommendations

First-generation students, program staff, and administrators shared their perspectives on the
types of resources and support needed to enhance first-generation student success. Based on
the participants’ responses, the report offers specific recommendations for Indiana University.

The first, key recommendation is at the system-wide level:

• **Indiana University could benefit by adopting a consistent system-wide definition of
first-generation students.** Why is this important? It could streamline the process of
identifying first-generation students. It also could facilitate the collection of accurate,
consistent, and comparable data on Indiana University’s eight campuses. Finally, it
could assist the university in assessing the profiles of first-generation students to better
understand how they progress through the IU system. The Institutional Research
Offices and Offices of Admissions on the regional campuses could be involved in the
development of this definition. During the initial stages of research, the SPEA VISTA
Fellow and members of the Blueprint for Student Attainment discovered that the online
admission applications for IU’s eight campuses did not include a uniform question to
identify first-generation students. Members of the Blueprint for Student Attainment
made a request to University Student Services and Systems (USSS) to standardize the
question regarding first-generation status on the online admission applications to allow
for the consistent collection of data across all campuses. In April 2012, USSS and the
Admissions Council reviewed and approved the request. As of May 2012, IU’s online
admission applications use the same question to identify first-generation students. IU
could use the recent collaboration between USSS and the Admissions Council as the
starting point for developing a consistent system-wide definition of first-generation
students.

The next recommendations propose ways that the regional campuses can further enhance their
institutional commitment to first-generation student success:

• **Develop initiatives that foster a sense of pride in being a first-generation student.** In
the study, many participants described the invisible nature of or the negative stigma
that was attached to being a first-generation student. Given the high percentage of
first-generation students attending IU’s regional campuses, the campuses could
recognize these students’ accomplishments and honor their first-generation identity.
Fostering a sense of pride could be as simple as sending admitted first-generation students a welcome letter or e-mail that highlights the students’ perseverance, resilience, and hard work and the regional campuses’ commitment to their success. Another initiative could be the formation of a first-generation student learning community. IU Kokomo, IU Northwest, and Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW) already provide well-regarded learning communities for incoming freshmen; the regional campuses might designate one community expressly for first-generation students, especially since the necessary infrastructure and programmatic experience is already in place. The regional campuses also could highlight and share their best practices (see Appendix B for descriptions of existing programs and support services for first-generation students on the regional campuses).

- More intentionally connect incoming first-generation students and their families to the most helpful programs and support services. First-generation students, as well as their family members, were often unaware of what they needed to do to have a successful college experience. Many students said that they struggled for a semester or two before they found out about programs and support services that could help them address the challenges they faced. To ensure that incoming students receive the support they need as early as possible, the regional campuses could design an orientation session exclusively for first-generation students and their families. IU Southeast’s Office of Admissions hosts an evening program in the spring for admitted first-generation students and their families. Representatives from key university offices provide students and their families with information about the college-going process, how their families can best support them, and the resources the campus offers. Not only does the pre-orientation session help ease students’ transition to college, but it also helps family members gain a better understanding of the challenges their child or partner will face in college. Other campuses could develop similar orientation sessions to ensure that first-generation students are equipped with the resources they need to succeed during their first year.

- Develop strategies to improve the retention and graduation rates of first-generation students. According to UIIRR data, first-generation students are less likely to persist from their freshman year to their sophomore year and from their sophomore year to their junior year. Program staff persons suggested that retention issues could be related to the fact that many programs and support services focus almost exclusively on helping first-year students succeed. While it is critical to support incoming first-generation students, they continue to need assistance beyond their first year in declaring or changing their major, setting a career direction, sustaining important skills like stress and time management, reviewing financial need, and in deepening their connections to people and resources so that they can find the best pathway to academic success and an IU degree. To improve the retention and graduation rates of first-generation students, the regional campuses could develop a “roadmap to success” to help guide students as they make successful progress towards completing their degree. The roadmap also could serve as a guideline for faculty, staff, and administrators who
work directly with this population. As noted earlier, Appendix B includes a comprehensive listing of programs and support services already in place on the regional campuses. Such resources could be the starting point for developing a roadmap. Please see Appendix C for an example of a roadmap to success. In addition, there are a number of innovative ideas, programs, and support services for first-generation students at other universities that could inform the practices on the regional campuses. Please see Appendix D for descriptions and links to such resources. The aforementioned suggestions, along with further study of why first-generation students leave the regional campuses in their second and/or third year, could help to inform and enhance first-generation student retention and graduation rates.

- **Engage in efforts to make the existing programs and support services more responsive to the needs of a diverse population of first-generation students.** According to UIRR data, a large percentage of first-generation students are women, nontraditional age students, and minorities. These demographics also were reflected in the students who participated in the individual interviews and focus groups. To meet the needs of this diverse population, it is important for faculty, program staff, and administrators to be aware of the intersection of first-generation status, gender, race, and age. In addition, the regional campuses could shape programs and services in ways that are welcoming to and supportive of all students, but especially of underrepresentated and nontraditional students. IPFW’s Center for Women and Returning Adults (CWRA) provides a variety of programs and support services for women and nontraditional students who are age 23 and over, married, and/or parents. These initiatives include sexual violence/domestic violence prevention programs and social events for returning adult students and students with young families. CWRA provides an example of a customized instead of one-size-fits-all approach to program development and implementation. This focused programmatic model could go a long way toward making programs and support services more inclusive of and responsive to the diversity that exists among first-generation students.

- **Connect first-generation students with faculty, staff, and administrators who were themselves first-generation students.** In the study, many first-generation students reported that the personal relationships they developed with faculty, staff, and administrators positively impacted their success and motivation to persist in college. Faculty, staff, and administrators are in the unique position to serve as mentors to first-generation students. First-generation mentoring could take place in a variety of formats such as one-on-one or small group meetings, panel discussions, or workshops. IU South Bend’s Making the Academic Connection Office currently hosts a panel discussion for first-generation students and faculty, providing faculty members who were themselves first-generation students with the opportunity to share their experiences with students. Other campuses could replicate this type of event to help facilitate connections between first-generation students and faculty members. The SPEA VISTA Fellow has already contacted faculty senates and professional staff councils on all of the regional campuses to identify faculty members and professional staff who were themselves first-
generation college students. Many faculty and staff responded positively and expressed their interest in meeting to discuss first-generation student success. The regional campuses could follow up on and commend this level of interest. The regional campuses also could consider recruiting retired faculty, staff, and administrators because they may be able to devote more time to mentoring first-generation students.
Introduction

In recent years, Indiana University’s regional campuses have focused increased attention on first-generation college students. According to research, first-generation students—students whose parents did not complete a four-year bachelor’s degree—face a variety of challenges that make it more difficult for them to persist in college (Higher Education Research Institute, 2007; Indiana Project on Academic Success, 2005; The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). As part of its efforts to improve completion rates on the regional campuses, the Blueprint for Student Attainment has examined ways to expand teaching and learning directed toward nontraditional students, including first-generation students. Given that 43 percent of all degree-seeking undergraduate students enrolled at IU’s regional campuses are first-generation, the Blueprint for Student Attainment recognizes that enhancing first-generation student success is vital to the social and economic well-being of Indiana (University Institutional Research and Reporting (UIRR), 2011).

Due to the increasing level of attention on this population, it is important to consider the needs and experiences of first-generation students and how programs and support services impact their success. In her assignment at Indiana University’s Office of the Executive Vice President for University Regional Affairs, Planning, and Policy, SPEA VISTA Fellow Julia Sorcinelli conducted a research study about the effect of programs and support services on first-generation student success. The purpose of the study was two-fold: (1) to examine the needs and experiences of first-generation students and (2) to assess the quality and effectiveness of programs and support services. The findings from this study aim to assist the regional campuses in evaluating and improving the programs and support services they provide to help first-generation students persist in college. The findings also seek to raise awareness and generate dialogue among the regional campuses about the impact of programs and support services on first-generation student success.

The report is organized around the key findings that emerged from the research study. The first section presents the SPEA VISTA Fellow’s research method. The second section provides an analysis of the quantitative data on first-generation students attending IU’s regional campuses. Then, the report examines the qualitative data from interviews and focus groups conducted with first-generation students, program staff, and administrators at two campuses. The report concludes with specific recommendations for Indiana University.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was two-fold: (1) to examine the needs and experiences of first-generation students and (2) to assess the quality and effectiveness of programs and support

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3 This report defines first-generation students and those students whose parents did not complete a four-year bachelor’s degree to conform to UIRR’s data collection methods.
services. The study design involved a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, which provided a solid framework for examining first-generation student success, allowing the SPEA VISTA Fellow to collect data from a wide variety of sources. The following sections provide an overview of the methods of data collection, the samples, and potential limitations.

**Data Collection and Samples**

In fall 2011, the SPEA VISTA Fellow gathered existing enrollment data on first-generation students attending IU’s regional campuses. Using the data, she conducted a quantitative analysis to identify trends in enrollment numbers, retention rates, student demographics, and academic performance. The SPEA VISTA Fellow conducted statistical significance tests to determine if the observed relationships between the variables and differences between means in the sample reflected a likely difference in the population rather than a chance occurrence resulting from sampling error. Results are reported as statistically significant if the probability that the observed relationship between variables was due to chance was less than five percent (p<.05). If the probability was greater than or equal to five percent (p≥.05), results are reported as not being a reliable indicator of a relationship between the variables in the population.

Next, the SPEA VISTA Fellow gathered information on first-generation student success on six of the regional campuses: IU East, IU Kokomo, IU Northwest, IU South Bend, IU Southeast, and Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW). She reviewed these campuses’ websites and program materials, contacted appropriate staff and administrators via e-mail, and conducted informal telephone interviews. In addition, she researched programs and support services for first-generation students at higher education institutions across the country to identify best practices and innovative approaches to programming. At the end of the fall semester, the SPEA VISTA Fellow submitted a request for Institutional Review Board approval for Human Subjects research at two campuses.

In February and April 2012, the SPEA VISTA Fellow and a Ph.D. student conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups with first-generation students, program staff, and administrators at two campuses. The non-student sample included five program staff and administrators who worked directly with first-generation students. The interviews addressed several key areas, including the challenges and/or opportunities first-generation students faced; effective programs and support services; program evaluation; and ways to improve existing programs and support services.

The student sample included 21 first-generation students. Student participants included a balance of traditional and nontraditional age students. They included African American, Hispanic, and White students. The majority of students were female. The SPEA VISTA Fellow and Ph.D. student conducted approximately three individual interviews and six focus groups consisting of two to five students each. The interviews and focus groups addressed several key areas, including the challenges and/or opportunities first-generation students faced; helpful programs and support services; how students found out about programs and support services;
perceived differences between first-generation students and their peers; and ways to improve existing programs and support services.

Limitations

Due to the compressed time frame for data collection, this study relies on small samples of first-generation students, program staff, and administrators. Since the SPEA VISTA Fellow selected the samples from two campuses, the findings could be context specific and less generalizable. In addition, the study does not include first-generation students who failed or dropped out of college, which could limit the range of student experiences and perspectives. Finally, the report includes a limited amount of longitudinal data because only recently did IU begin to identify and document first-generation students. Tracking first-generation students as they progress through the IU system will help facilitate the collection of longitudinal data in the future. Despite these limitations, the study provides useful insights into the effect of programs and support services on first-generation student success.

Quantitative Findings

This section presents the key quantitative findings from the research study. The section begins with an explanation of how Indiana University identifies first-generation students for data collection purposes. Using UIRR data, this section provides a quantitative analysis of enrollment numbers, retention rates, student demographics, and academic performance. Due to incomplete data, this section does not include information on first-generation students at IPFW.

Identifying First-Generation Students at Indiana University

To identify first-generation students, UIRR uses information available from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the IU undergraduate online admission application. UIRR flags a student as first-generation if the student indicates on the FAFSA that his/her parents’ highest level of education is a high school diploma or less. If no conclusive FAFSA information exists for the student, UIRR looks at the student’s response to the online admission application question regarding parental schooling. UIRR flags the student as first-generation if his/her parents completed some college coursework, but attained less than a four-year bachelor’s degree. It is important to note that UIRR counts all students with missing information as non-first-generation.4

Fall 2011 Regional Campus Enrollment Numbers

Figure 1 provides information on the percentages of first-generation students and their peers attending IU’s regional campuses in fall 2011.

4 For further information on UIRR’s reporting flag to identify first-generation students at IU, please use the following link: http://www.iu.edu/~uirr/resources/IRDSI/index.shtml.
In fall 2011, first-generation students represented 43 percent of the total enrollment of degree-seeking undergraduate students on IU’s regional campuses (22,529 students). IU East had the highest percentage of first-generation students (50 percent), with IU Northwest having the second highest percentage (45 percent). The other three campuses had similar levels of representation at about three to four percentage points below IU Northwest and eight to nine below IU East. Differences in the percentage of first-generation students by campus are statistically significant (p<.001). Note: It is important to reiterate that the total proportion of first-generation students is most likely an underestimate since UIRR counts all students with missing information as non-first-generation.

Retention Rates of Fall 2009, Fall 2010, and Fall 2011 First-Generation Beginners

The following tables present information on the retention rates of first-generation students and their peers who made up the incoming cohorts in fall 2009, fall 2010, and fall 2011.
The retention rates of first-generation beginners in the fall 2009, fall 2010, and fall 2011 cohorts steadily decreased from the second semester to the second year to the third year. While the majority of first-generation beginners in the three cohorts returned to the regional campuses for the second semester and the second year, only 38 percent (IU Kokomo) to 48 percent (IU Northwest and IU Southeast) of first-generation beginners in the fall 2009 cohort persisted to the third year. Although the differences between the overall (regional campus total) retention rates are not statistically significant, there are statistically significant differences between five of the 30 campus-level rates. Statistically significant differences exist for the following regional campus cohorts:

- Fall 2011 Southeast Cohort – retention to second semester (p<.05)
- Fall 2010 Kokomo Cohort – retention to second semester (p<.01)
- Fall 2010 Southeast Cohort – retention to second year (p<.05)
- Fall 2009 Southeast Cohort – retention to second year (p<.05)
- Fall 2009 Kokomo Cohort – retention to third year (p<.05)
Among the regional campuses, IU Kokomo had the largest negative differences between first-generation and non-first-generation retention rates (the differences range from -2.6 percent to -12.0 percent). IU Northwest was the only regional campus that retained a larger percentage of first-generation beginners from the three cohorts from the second semester to the second year (the differences between the retention rates range from 0.1 percent to 3.7 percent). In contrast, IU Southeast was the only regional campus that retained a smaller percentage of first-generation beginners from the three cohorts from the second semester to the third year (the differences between the retention rates range from -0.3 percent to -6.9 percent). It is also important to note that IU East was the only regional campus that retained a larger percentage of first-generation beginners in the fall 2009 cohort from the second year to the third year.

**Demographic Profile of Fall 2011 First-Generation Students**

The following figures present the demographic and background characteristics of first-generation students and their peers enrolled at IU’s regional campuses. All figures represent fall 2011 unless otherwise noted.

**Figure 2. Percent First-Generation by Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Enrollment</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14,310</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8,219</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Total</td>
<td>22,529</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First-generation representation was higher among females (45 percent) than among males (39 percent). These differences are statistically significant (p<.001).
First-generation representation was high among students in the 35 and over age category (50 percent), while the other age categories had similar levels of representation at about seven to eight percentage points below the 35 and over age category. These differences are statistically significant ($p<.001$).
First-generation representation was high among Hispanic/Latino students (50 percent), while it was comparatively low among Asian students (31 percent). First-generation representation was slightly lower among Black/African American students (41 percent) than among White students (43 percent). These differences are statistically significant (p<.001).

### Figure 4. Percent First-Generation by Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Enrollment</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>2,207</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>1,415</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Minority</td>
<td>4,353</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Resident Alien</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other/Unknown</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>17,452</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Total</td>
<td>22,529</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Figure 5. Percent First-Generation by Course Load

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Enrollment</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>15,288</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-Time</td>
<td>7,241</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Total</td>
<td>22,529</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There was no difference in representation of first-generation students by course load (43 percent).

**Academic Background Indicators of Fall 2011 First-Generation Students**

The following figures and tables compare the high school academic indicators of first-generation students and their peers attending IU’s regional campuses in fall 2011.

**Figure 6. Average HS GPA by First-Generation Status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-Generation</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-First-Generation</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Total</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average high school GPA of first-generation students was slightly lower than that of their peers (2.94 versus 2.96); however, the difference is not statistically significant (p>.05).

**Table 3. Average SAT Verbal and SAT Math Scores by First-Generation Status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Verbal</th>
<th>Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-Generation</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-First Generation</td>
<td>483</td>
<td>481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Total</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>476</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average SAT Verbal and SAT Math scores of first-generation students were lower than the average scores of their peers. First-generation students earned an average SAT Verbal score that was 14 points lower than that of their peers (469 versus 483). The average SAT Math score of first-generation students was 11 points lower than that of their peers (470 versus 481). These differences are statistically significant (p<.05).
The Core 40 Tech diploma had the highest representation of first-generation students (53 percent), while the Academic Honors diploma had the lowest representation (41 percent). The Core 40 diploma and the GED both had the second largest percentage of first-generation students (45 percent). These differences are statistically significant (p<.001).

Academic Indicators of Fall 2011 First-Generation Beginners

Figure 8 provides academic information on first-generation students and their peers who made up the incoming cohort in fall 2011.

The average first semester GPA of first-generation beginners was lower than that of their peers (2.39 versus 2.44); the difference is statistically significant, although not strongly so (p<.05). Additional tests show that this difference is eliminated when controlling for differences between the groups in average SAT scores.
Qualitative Findings

This section presents key findings from the interviews and focus groups conducted with first-generation students, program staff, and administrators at two campuses. The section discusses what motivated first-generation students to attend college; how first-generation students perceived their identity; the challenges they faced; programs and support services that helped first-generation students succeed; participants’ suggestions for improving programs and support services; and the relationships first-generation students developed with advisors, faculty members, and program staff. The italicized text in this section represents transcribed quotes from the interviews and focus groups with first-generation students, program staff, and administrators.

Reasons for Attending College

First-generation students identified four main factors that motivated them to attend college. They included:

- Parental expectations
- Education after nontraditional path
- Opportunity to improve quality of life; and
- Desire to help others

Parental Expectations

Many traditional age students cited parental expectations as one of the primary factors that influenced their decision to attend college. As one student explained:

For my family, education was the big thing. If you brought home bad grades, you were in trouble and lost privileges. My family inspired me to go to college because they kept saying education was important next to family.

According to this student, his parents instilled in him the values of family, hard work, and a college education. His parents’ high expectations coupled with the emphasis they placed on getting an education encouraged him to enroll in college.

Education after Nontraditional Path

Many older students returned to school after experiencing major shifts or changes in their lives. Although these students always wanted to attend college, certain life experiences and unforeseen events delayed them from enrolling in college when they were younger. Many nontraditional age students had to put off going to college until they had the necessary time, energy, and resources. As two students explained:
I got a divorce and moved back home. My children were older and I had time to focus on myself so I decided to go to college. I wanted to focus on building something for my life. The first part of my adult life was spent raising kids and focusing on my family. It was my turn to focus on myself.

My journey started back in ’74. I started at [another university]. Basically through life, some health issues, and some relocation, I ended up at [the university].

Despite their nontraditional path, these students were determined to pursue a college education.

**Opportunity to Improve Quality of Life**

First-generation students reported that the opportunity to improve the social and economic conditions in which they lived was an important motivating factor. Students described how earning a college degree would allow them to achieve a better quality of life than their families had or were able to provide for them:

> I just want to be able to get a good job, be able to support her [mother] and my brother and sister and my own family in the future, and be happy in life and not struggle and worry about being frustrated with bills and money, money, money.

> What made me want to go to college were my older cousins, who did not graduate high school and struggle and are not moving forward, working minimum wage. It made me want to sign up for college because I didn’t want to be like them.

According to these students, attending college would provide a direct pathway to a more economically stable and fulfilling future for both them and their families.

**Desire to Help Others**

In addition to wanting to improve their own lives, many first-generation students decided to go to college to serve as role models for others in their families and communities:

> Some people in my family don’t have high school diplomas so there’s a lot of poverty in my family. There’s a lot of illiteracy. You see this huge difference. I try to get to my younger cousins who are still in school and try to get them to understand that school is not a joke. It’s really important.

Other students described their desire to train for careers that would allow them to address pressing social issues in their communities:

> I look at the teachers today and a lot of them don’t care. My brother was passed through grades because of No Child Left Behind. I teach 6th grade now for volunteer, and
the kids can’t even read. How do you get to 6th grade without reading? There are kids that can’t speak English that are in regular classes and they don’t know what’s going on. They just sit there and mess around. I guess I just want to be one of the teachers to set them straight.

These students were motivated to attain a college education because it would provide them with the opportunity to improve the lives of others and give back to their communities.

First-Generation Student Perceptions of Identity

When asked to reflect on their identity, many first-generation students shared contrasting perspectives or viewpoints. According to some students, being the first in their families to attend college made them more determined to succeed. Unlike their non-first-generation peers, they did not take the opportunity to go to college for granted and put in a considerable amount of effort to earn good grades in their classes. As one student explained:

_I can recognize most first-generation students because they have more determination than some of the traditional students that come in. As a first-generation student, I think there is a lot more determination and drive whether it be that you want to prove someone wrong or that I want to prove to my kids that no matter how old I get, I am still willing to step up to the plate and make something of my life._

Other students described the invisible nature of or the negative stigma that was attached to being a first-generation student. One student explained how he never asked his peers if they were first-generation students:

_When you see someone, you don’t ask, “Are you a first-generation student?” That’s not something you talk about._

Another student expressed his dislike of the term “first-generation student” because, in his opinion, it was an artificial label that portrayed him as being different from his peers. According to this student, his success depended on his work ethic and abilities, not on whether his parents graduated from college:

_The first-generation student is only putting a label on something. Labels only work if you’re looking for those labels. I’m a student just like anyone else. It doesn’t matter if I’m a junior. It doesn’t matter if I’m a freshman. I’m still going to have the same opportunity as everyone else, limited only by my abilities. My abilities do not change in any way, shape, or form if my dad and mom went to college. First-generation students are only said that way because somebody wants to create a focus group and talk about them._

Both program staff and administrators reported that first-generation students and faculty who were themselves first-generation students were hesitant to embrace their identity. One
administrator described students’ resistance to labels and to using programs and support services that were associated with certain labels. She noted that the campus could do more to foster a sense of pride in being a first-generation student:

*I think our students resist utilizing our programs and support services because they’re a little resistant to being labeled in some way. I don’t know if they perceive it negatively. I don’t know if they know to be proud of it, but I think our campus could definitely help to shape a sense of pride. They may feel like ‘My parents didn’t go to college and I should be embarrassed of that.’ I think we could definitely help to foster a sense of pride.*

One program staff person commented on the negative stigma academia attached to being a first-generation student. In her interactions with faculty members, she found it difficult to discuss their first-generation status because the topic was somewhat taboo:

*It’s hard to know who first-generation faculty members are unless you’ve already built up a strong relationship. I think there’s a stigma in academia to being first-generation so people don’t talk about it. I’m hesitant to ask faculty members because I feel like I’m asking them something bad. I get the sense that in polite society you don’t probe that much...Right now, there’s a big stigma to poverty. Usually when people say first-generation it means that you’re coming out of a situation where there’s been less financial stability in your life. Those are really hard conversations to have out in a public setting.*

These contrasting viewpoints highlight the complex nature of being a first-generation student. For some students, their identity served as a source of motivation, while for others, it only served to differentiate them from their peers in an undesirable way. According to the program staff person, even faculty members who were themselves first-generation students were hesitant to talk about their experiences because they did not want to reveal that their families might have suffered financial hardships.

**Challenges**

First-generation students said they faced several potentially daunting challenges. These challenges included:

- Being the first in the family to attend college
- Navigating the college culture and campus
- Developing academic, study, and time management skills
- Balancing work, employment, and responsibilities in the home; and
- Paying for college and living expenses
Being the First in the Family to Attend College

Many first-generation students described how being the first in their families to attend college placed a tremendous amount of pressure and stress on them as they tried to fulfill their families’ expectations. As two students reflected:

It’s hard because I’m so stressed. I know my mom and dad will always be there for me, but they don’t understand this. I can’t talk to my family because I’m literally the first-generation. Nobody has attended college so they really don’t know what to expect. What stresses me out is that my family expects me to do well. They expect me to succeed. I’ve never failed them. And if I fail them now, I would just be disappointing myself.

You kind of feel like you can’t really turn to your family for help. They don’t understand. If you have a job, it’s like having two jobs and they [family] don’t understand that. It’s a lot of pressure though because they [family] put all of their effort into you being successful and you can’t let them down, so it’s a lot of pressure.

These students felt that they owed it to their families to perform well in school and succeed. However, it was difficult for them to achieve their families’ expectations because they could not turn to them for support or guidance.

Navigating the College Culture and Campus

First-generation students also struggled to navigate a college culture and campus that was often completely foreign to them. As two students explained:

I guess I didn’t really know much about college. I just knew it was to get you further into being successful, but other than that I was clueless. I didn’t know what a credit hour was. I didn’t know how to schedule for my classes. I didn’t know about financial aid. I was stressed. I was overwhelmed. I cried. I didn’t have anyone to lead me.

I was brand new to the whole school thing. I used to hear college terminology and thought I never really had to think about it or worry about it. Well, now I am getting used to terms like academic advisor and academic probation. Probation from what I remembered wasn’t academic. I am just trying to get adjusted to the thinking and the mindset of being in college and the responsibilities you have.

As the first in their families to go to college, most students could not turn to their parents or other family members for help or guidance in navigating the college-going process. According to students, both they and their families lacked important knowledge about how to apply for financial aid, register for classes, and adapt to a new environment that had its own unique terminology.
Developing Academic, Study, and Time Management Skills

In addition to having to learn how to navigate the college culture and campus, first-generation students struggled to develop the skills needed to succeed academically. Many traditional age students said that high school did not prepare them for college because their teachers did not assign rigorous coursework or set high expectations. As a result, many students felt that they lacked both the academic and study skills necessary to achieve success. As one student explained:

\[
\text{A challenge for me is staying focused because coming out of high school you’re so used to slacking. You can slack or skip school, but if you do that in college they’re not going to ask, “Where were you?”}
\]

In contrast, many older students reported that it was challenging to return to school after being outside of a structured academic environment for an extended period of time. As one student reflected:

\[
\text{Academically, the biggest challenge is coming back after being out of school for so long and having to catch up.}
\]

Other students identified weaknesses in their writing and math skills and issues with procrastination:

\[
\text{I struggle with my writing. I have strong ideas, but I have a problem with writing formally, keeping on topic, and writing the correct way. I would just put my ideas on paper.}
\]

\[
\text{Academically speaking, I’m not very good at math. I find math to be a challenge. I also procrastinate. I always wait until the last second to do everything.}
\]

As illustrated above, first-generation students faced a variety of obstacles, both academic and personal, that had the potential to negatively impact their academic achievement in college.

Balancing Academic Work, Employment, and Responsibilities in the Home

Beyond academics, many first-generation students had competing demands for their time, energy, and attention. Employment and household responsibilities figured prominently in the lives of nontraditional age students. As two students reflected:

\[
\text{I’ve got kids and when I started college, I was working and trying to balance the home life. I’m realizing that college is a weeklong situation. You’re studying and then doing things throughout the week so it takes some getting used to that scheduling. That’s probably been the toughest challenge for me.}
\]
The biggest challenge was understanding how to study and how to set time away from the family. The first identity is parent and then the second identity would be college student.

At times, it was extremely difficult for these students to balance their multiple roles and maintain a high level of academic performance. Many students described how their grades suffered when they had to deal with family emergencies or work extra hours to pay their bills and college tuition.

A number of traditional age students experienced a slightly different type of balancing act. These students reported that it was difficult for them to balance the academic and social aspects of their lives. In addition, some of them had to adjust to being away from home for the first time. As one student said:

My challenge is also with studying, finding your study environment, and time management. I cannot focus because there are too many distractions [in my dorm] and I’m also homesick. I’m the eldest out of my brothers and sisters and I was always there for them, and it’s hard not being there for them when I’m far away.

No matter their age, first-generation students had to deal with competing demands for their time, energy, and attention.

Paying for College and Living Expenses

First-generation students identified paying for college and living expenses as a significant challenge. Many students described the difficulties they encountered with completing the financial aid process. As one student reflected:

My freshman year, I had a really hard time with financial aid. It was basically a run around to get my financial papers from my mom to the financial aid office and then back to my mom to get more papers. My first semester of my freshman year was almost a disaster because I didn’t get my financial aid until mid-semester, and at that point, it was too late to buy books.

Like this student, many first-generation students struggled to navigate the financial aid application process. As a result, they submitted their forms late or failed to update their forms with their families’ most current financial information. After covering the costs of tuition, many students lacked the funds to pay for textbooks. For example, one student explained:

I had a lot of issues with books because I didn’t know how I was going to pay for them. I didn’t have books for maybe a quarter of the semester. I would sit there and try to figure out how it was going to work. I didn’t have a job, and I still had to pay for housing. I was freaking out.
Not only was paying for tuition and textbooks a concern, but many students worried about finding employment to cover their living expenses. As one student described:

*One of the biggest challenges is trying to find a job with my school schedule. Right now, I have two classes in the evening and it’s hard to find a job when you’re limited by your schedule. Especially in the local market, there’s not a demand for people unless they have a fairly open schedule. Job versus school is the biggest hurdle.*

For many students, going to college full time was not an option, and their school schedules impeded their ability to find viable employment. As the student above illustrated, finding a job was a top priority and the time he invested in searching for a job was time taken away from his studies.

**Programs and Support Services that Enhanced Student Success**

Despite the obstacles they faced, first-generation students were eager to talk about the programs and support services that had contributed to their success. They included (listed in alphabetical order):

- Campus-sponsored summer bridge program
- Comprehensive support programs
- Financial aid
- First-year seminar
- Math and writing centers
- Peer mentoring
- Service-learning
- Student clubs and organizations
- Supplemental Instruction; and
- Tutoring

It is important to note that IU’s regional campuses currently provide a number of programs and support services that first-generation students frequently mentioned as contributing to their success. Please see Appendix A for information on the programs and support services that the regional campuses currently provide for undergraduate students, underrepresented students, and first-generation students. In addition, please see Appendix B for a list of programs and support services that specifically target first-generation students at IU’s regional campuses.

**Campus-Sponsored Summer Bridge Program**

One of the first-generation students participated in a campus-sponsored summer bridge program. During the bridge program, the student had the opportunity to take two college courses for credit while living on campus for several weeks in the summer prior to her first year of college. According to the student, the bridge program helped her make a successful transition to college. Not only did the bridge program help the student improve her academic
and study skills, but she also had to opportunity to connect with her peers and learn about the various resources on campus. As the student reflected:

I found out about the [summer bridge program] my senior year in high school. I applied and got accepted. I took two courses: an introduction to writing course and a course that helps you transition from high school to college and know how you’re supposed to study and what things you’re supposed to do. I was assigned a peer mentor. They help you get your student ID, set up your e-mail account, and provide you with knowledge about the campus and services it provides.

Several program staff and administrators identified the summer bridge program as helpful for first-generation students. These individuals emphasized the multiple benefits students gained from participating in the program such as learning how to interact with faculty, staff, and administrators and becoming familiar with the campus prior to the start of classes. As one program staff person explained:

Students can face some of the challenges of the fall semester because they have gotten some college credit, had the experience of engaging with faculty members, and gotten to know professional staff, administrators, and students. Then, they dominate and rule the campus because they know where every hidden nook and cranny is.

According to the program staff person, the summer bridge program was an effective pre-orientation program because it provided students with the resources and support they needed to transition to college.

Comprehensive Support Programs

A number of students were involved in comprehensive support programs that provided a wide array of services. Students who participated in a federally funded program said that the program’s most helpful services included academic advising, counseling (academic, personal, and career), financial aid, and tutoring. According to these students, the assistance they received from the federally funded program helped them improve their academic performance and confidence in their academic abilities. For example, two students were able to overcome the obstacles they faced with learning disabilities and test anxiety:

[The support program] helped me discover that I had a learning disability, which I had never known before. That made a huge change in my ability to understand myself and overcome my weak areas. It’s opened up a whole new world that never would have opened up if I didn’t have that extra help or someone really paying attention or listening to me. It’s been life changing.

I was having problems in my public speaking class. The professor recommended that I go to [the support program] because she noticed that my test grades were really low.
Now I can take a test without freaking out. It’s still in the back of my mind, but I can get a good grade now.

In addition to receiving valuable support services, students who participated in the federally funded program said that they gained a sense of belonging and felt like they were a part of a larger community. For many students, it was comforting to walk into the program office and see other students who were facing similar challenges. As one student reflected:

*I feel like I’m a part of something. You walk in there [support program office] and there are people with the same kind of issues that you have. It’s just like your home. There are other students there so you might get help that way or you can go in to one of the counselor’s offices.*

Other students reported that it was helpful to have a comprehensive support program that resembled a one stop shop. Since many students worked and had household responsibilities, it was convenient for them to be able to go to one office to meet their personal, academic, and financial needs. As one student explained:

*One thing I like about the [support program] is that you use them for anything and everything. Their doors are open. If you ever need anything, you just go and find somebody and if they can’t help you, they find someone if their office or someone on campus who can and will. They are persistent until they get the result we’re after. If I ever have a challenge, I go to them and they give you suggestions on what you should do.*

Program staff and administrators also recognized the important role comprehensive support programs played in first-generation student success. One program staff person described how the campus-based support program with which she was involved served as a “bridge” between students and the campus. According to the program staff person, the support program helped students understand academic and administrative terminology, informed them about helpful resources, and connected them with faculty members who might serve as mentors:

*We provide different programs, one-on-one counseling, and sit down with them [students] and explain the things that other people either don’t or don’t have time to do. We explain financial aid and how that works and what terms like the bursar and the credit hour mean. All these different things that we use in the higher education and think everyone else understands. We break it down for them. We’re giving them extra resources, relaying them to other areas on campus, whether it’s tutoring or career services. We’re trying to be that bridge between the student and the campus, getting them in contact with faculty members whether it’s by conversation or just introduction.*

As the participants’ responses illustrate, first-generation students benefited from having comprehensive support programs on campus. The comprehensive support programs helped
students navigate the college-going process and develop a support network of trained adults and sympathetic peers.

Financial Aid

All of the first-generation students who participated in the interviews and focus groups had applied for financial aid. Many of the students were enrolled in a state-sponsored program that covered the cost of up to four years of undergraduate tuition. In addition, a number of students had federal work-study jobs that provided them with a modest stipend. The majority of students reported that they would not have been able to pursue a college education without financial aid. As one student reflected:

Working and financial aid both helped. I could not be a student without financial aid. I am thankful for that.

Other students expressed surprise and relief at the amount of financial aid they received. These students greatly appreciated the assistance they received to help them pay for their tuition and textbooks. As one student explained:

The financial aid is great. It’s been a long time since I had anybody pay for me to do anything. It’s almost embarrassing because I feel like I’m getting a free ride. But, they’ve literally taken care of everything. I haven’t had any problems with financial aid, knock on wood.

Without financial aid, many first-generation students would find it impossible to attend college. Financial aid in the form of grants, loans, scholarships, and work-study jobs helped students with limited resources afford college.

First-Year Seminar

Many first-generation students who enrolled in a first-year seminar reported that it helped them acclimate to college life and develop the study habits and skills needed for succeeding in college-level courses. As two students explained:

I took the U100 class and had an awesome professor. She knows how freshman are and how they’re going to handle college. She helped us realize that college is not like high school. She helped us manage our time, find our learning style, and find our study environment. She helped us study for tests. That’s why I’m where I’m at right now. My GPA is awesome and I have no stress.

The U100 class helped a lot with studying because I would try to memorize everything the night before because I procrastinated. [The professor] said to study in little chunks to retain more and wear a path into your long-term memory, which helps so much more than just trying to memorize it two hours before.
One administrator linked the first-year seminar to her campus’ success with retaining students. According to the administrator, the first-year seminar helped students acquire valuable knowledge about campus life and build a support network of adults and peers that they could turn to for guidance:

*I think our first-year seminar is the key to a lot of our success with retention. Our first-year seminar instructors are really good about making sure that students meet with their academic advisors. They’re good at letting them about events that are happening on campus. In addition to an academic piece, they’re building a sense of community and creating a network for these students to build on after the first semester. Even though the students don’t realize it, by the time they’re juniors they may say, “I get it. I didn’t know I needed that information then, but now I’m finding it useful.”*

As the students and administrator demonstrated, first-year seminars played a crucial role in students’ ability to succeed during their freshman year of college. Students learned how to study for exams, manage their time, and became part of a broader community of peers and adults.

**Mathematics and Writing Centers**

Students also mentioned receiving valuable academic support from the mathematics and writing centers on their campuses. Many students reported that their professors referred them to the math and writing centers or offered them extra credit if they went to the centers to seek help. As one student explained:

*Every professor that I’ve had has drilled it into our minds that we need to go the math center and the writing center.*

Students who used these services said that they benefited from the individualized support and improved both their math and writing skills. As one student reflected:

*Going to the writing lab and math lab have been good sources of support.*

Since many of the students noted that they entered college with weak math and writing skills, it was helpful for them to be able to go to centers that provided support in specific academic subject areas.

**Peer Mentoring**

Many first-generation students participated in peer mentoring programs on their campuses. Students reported receiving valuable support and guidance from their peer mentors when they faced personal challenges or academic milestones. As two students reflected:
I shut myself down from people around me. I went into my room and I didn’t really care. But, at the same time, I did. I wanted this [to be in college]. I talked to my peer mentors from the summer bridge program and they helped me. I am signed up for peer mentoring. I need the mentoring because I am facing graduation and all of that. It has been a big help.

Other students benefited from the opportunity to talk to upper-class students about which major they should select and which courses they should take. As one student reflected:

We have peer mentoring in the U100 [first-year seminar] classes. They also had the peer mentors at the new student orientation. You get to see somebody who is a junior or senior who was in your field of what you wanted to do so they already took the classes that you are going to take. That helped a lot. I think that’s a good thing.

One program staff person described how peer mentoring allowed students to develop a support network of friends who could help them overcome barriers to success. Not only did peer mentors provide students with a social outlet, but they also served as another set of eyes and ears to make sure those students were not falling through the cracks. As the program staff person explained:

[The peer mentoring program] gives incoming students that chance to meet with upper-class students as well as other incoming students so that when times get tough they have a support network around them that allows them to move forward. The best outcomes of the program are the student interactions, creating opportunities for the students to hang out with other like-minded students. I see a lot of students on campus who have no problems socializing, no problems being connected, but at the end of the semester they’re flunking or dropping out because none of their friends ever asked them how they were doing in class...The mentors in the program are trained to have a keen ear as to what is being said and what some of red flags are to be aware of.

According to the participants’ responses, first-generation students benefited from interacting with peer mentors who were trained to help them navigate the college-going experience.

**Service-Learning**

Students who participated in service-learning programs reported that they gained valuable academic and professional skills by working with community organizations. Students were able to apply the concepts they learned in the classroom to real world situations, as well as provide a direct service to the community. As one student said:

I’ve taken part in the service-learning program. I’m doing service-learning in the community where I’m doing tutoring at the Boys and Girls Club. I’ve gained experience from that and learned about my major.
Other students described how service-learning had increased their awareness of and interest in community service and volunteering. Through service-learning programs, students were able to engage with their surroundings and feel passionate about the work they were doing. As one student reflected:

*I had some service-learning programs with an instructor. That mode of learning got me passionate about a lot of things that I wouldn’t have really paid attention to or been aware of like different community work and volunteering things.*

For these students, service-learning was a high impact practice that extended their learning and engagement beyond the classroom.

**Student Clubs and Organizations**

In addition to using programs and support services to help them succeed in the classroom, many first-generation students participated in student clubs and organizations. These students said that participating in student clubs and organizations allowed them to meet new people and expand their social network. They benefited from interacting with students who had similar interests or who came from different backgrounds. As one student explained:

*It was helpful being a part of the student clubs and organizations. I’m a very social person so I like to have the safety net of having friends in college and being a part of different organizations.*

Other students reported that participating in student clubs and organizations provided them with the opportunity to develop their leadership skills. For many of these students, it was the first time they had assumed a leadership role, and they were excited to discover that they had strong leadership skills. As one student reflected:

*I am the President of the Honors Club this year so I’ve had the experience of showing some of my leadership skills. I’ve had the opportunity to use some of my skills that I’ve not had a chance to let shine until now.*

One program staff person reinforced the importance of engaging first-generation students in extra-curricular activities. According to the program staff person, students who participated in co-curricular activities were more likely to persist in college:

*Another opportunity is that we continue to have more extra-curricular activities for students to do and participate in. The more we can engage first-generation students in a variety of activities, the better off we’ll be in keeping them on pace and hopefully on track for graduation.*

First-generation students benefited from engaging in clubs and organizations that allowed them to pursue their interests, express themselves, and develop leadership skills.
Supplemental Instruction

Originally developed at the University of Missouri at Kansas City in 1973, the Supplemental Instruction (SI) program offers free academic assistance to students enrolled in historically difficult introductory courses. Faculty members recommend students who have successfully completed the courses to serve as SI leaders. SI leaders attend classes with the students and then conduct regularly scheduled study sessions each week (Arendale, 1994).

First-generation students who participated in the SI program reported that they benefited from the collaborative learning environment and support from their peers. According to one student, he struggled to keep up with the pace of his math instructor. When he did not have a clear understanding of the material, he went to his SI leader who was able to show him an easier and faster way to solve the homework problems:

*The Supplemental Instruction program is very beneficial. My math instructor goes through the lessons and doesn’t like to take a break. When we went over matrices, I had no clue how to do them because she breezed right through them. I went to SI and the instructor taught me how to do them [matrices] in a faster and easier way than the instructor was using. I found that very helpful. I aced the assignment.*

Another student commented on how the relationship she built with her SI leader and the small group format had a positive impact on her performance in her math course. By working with the SI leader and a small group of students, she was able to approach the material in a way that better suited her learning style. Instead of feeling self-conscious about asking questions, she felt more confident knowing that the students were there to mutually support each other:

*The direct support was helpful, especially in math. With SI, just knowing that there is a person that I can ask for help makes the learning a little bit easier. What might have worked in the classroom didn’t necessarily translate well, but the direct, interpersonal relationship that you build strengthens the weakness and really helps me learn a different way. SI has small groups so you can feel more secure. It makes a big difference. That is the success factor for me.*

One administrator highlighted the emphasis his campus placed on referring first-generation students to SI. If he found out that a student was performing poorly in a course that included SI sessions, he would strongly encourage the student to attend the sessions:

*Supplemental Instruction has been very beneficial for the campus and especially for first-generation students. We try to push our students to go to SI sessions every chance we get. Even if they don’t want to go, we send them kicking and screaming if we have to.*

With its peer-led review sessions and collaborative approach to learning, SI provided first-generation students with an interactive environment that enhanced their success in historically challenging entry-level courses.
Tutoring

In addition to SI, many students highlighted the importance of having access to tutors for a variety of academic subjects. Students who were enrolled in mathematics, statistics, biology, sociology, and Spanish courses reported using the tutoring services on their campuses. These students benefited from working one-on-one with a tutor to address learning gaps and strengthen their academic skills. Students also emphasized that it was helpful to have access to free tutoring services because they could not afford the cost of a private tutor. As one student explained:

[The comprehensive support program] provides you with a tutor free of charge if you’re struggling in a class. That’s a big plus. Being college students, we’re in debt because we have to take out loans. Having a tutor free of charge is kind of like free money.

Students who had access to affordable tutoring services were able to improve their academic performance in a variety of courses and complete their degree requirements in a timely manner.

Suggestions for Improving Programs and Support Services

Many first-generation students, program staff, and administrators shared their suggestions for improving the quality and effectiveness of existing programs and support services. These suggestions included:

- Promoting early awareness of programs and support services
- Designing a focused and engaging new student orientation
- Involving families in the college-going process
- Providing additional support for nontraditional students; and
- Extending support beyond the first year

Promoting Early Awareness of Programs and Support Services

Despite their positive experiences with programs and support services, many first-generation students said that their campuses needed to be more proactive in their approach to educating students about available resources. The majority of students reported that they would have taken advantage of programs and support services earlier if they had learned about them when they first entered college. Other students explained how many of their peers either were unaware of existing programs and support services or they did not know how these resources could help them. As one student reflected:

There needs to be more education about the support services the university provides. I felt like a failure so many times because I didn’t know the help was there. I struggled for three semesters before I figured out that the university could help me with so many different things. They have to educate their student population about all of the different
services they have. You can’t just give students a name or the phone number or the office to go to because if students think that [the program] is for disability or remedial services, students will think they are too cool for that. They need to educate and get the information out there to tell people what [the program] does.

To increase students’ awareness of programs and support services, students suggested creating a blog or using social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. Students also said that program participants should visit classrooms at the beginning of the semester to give a short presentation on the various services the programs offered. As one student explained:

_They should take a few minutes and go to each class at the beginning of the semester or go to the first-year seminar classes and say, “Hey, I’m from [support program]. Here’s what we offer. Have a nice day.” That’s what they did for SGA [Student Government Association]. You go in. You introduce yourself. You leave. It takes five minutes._

Several program staff emphasized the need to increase students’ access to information about programs and support services. These individuals discussed ways to reach out to incoming students who might not be aware of the resources available to them. For example, one program staff person recommended having open houses for different student populations at the beginning of the semester. The open houses would introduce students to the programs and support services on campus and give them the opportunity to meet program staff:

_We could find ways to have targeted open houses for different sub-populations of students. During the first two weeks of classes we could have informal meetings in the writing/tutoring center so the students can see who the players are, what’s the climate, and begin to put names with faces._

Another program staff person described the need to disseminate information to students in a clear and direct manner. Instead of expecting students to extract important information from dense campus e-mail messages, he pulled out the most crucial pieces of information and put them on a flyer or included them in brief e-mail messages to students. As the program staff person explained:

_One of the things that I like to do is called “putting information on blast.” We have campus e-mail systems where you have this page of 12-point Times New Roman single-spaced font and the most important piece of information is buried somewhere in there. Yes, they are college students. And yes, they need to learn to read on their own and do those kinds of things. Once you are a sophomore, junior, or senior, I expect you to do that. But for those first-time students that are coming in, they’re not doing that and so whether or not they should be, we can only go by what they are doing. If we’re going to just hold a blind eye to that and stay stubborn and firm and make them conform to our methods, we’re going to continue to have the same issues that we have now. I find that information, put it on a big flyer, or send it out._
Both first-generation students and program staff agreed that their campuses needed to invest more time and energy into increasing students’ access to information about programs and support services. Too often, first-generation students struggled to succeed because they did not know that help was available.

**Designing a Focused and Engaging New Student Orientation**

First-generation students who participated in new student orientation said that they valued the opportunity to meet and socialize with their peers and learn about student clubs and organizations. Despite the engaging social interactions, many students reported that the information sessions and presentations provided too much information and failed to engage them. Several students described how they sat in a room and listened to various university representatives discuss degree requirements and how to register for courses. For example, one student explained how the orientation resembled a traditional classroom lecture and lacked information about helpful programs and support services for students:

> We stayed in one room and didn’t do anything. They just talked to us. I paid attention some of the time but not all of the time because they were just telling us what classes we needed and they never told us there were all of these things to help us.

Another student expressed similar views about the length and format of new student orientation:

> It [new student orientation] was long. First, they had us come into the gymnasium where they did a PowerPoint presentation about all this stuff that I had already learned because I’d been to college once before. I thought that was a little boring.

Program staff and administrators echoed students’ complaints about the volume of information new student orientation provided within a compressed time frame. For example, one program staff person said that new student orientation should be an interactive, multiple day event that allowed students to engage in the campus community:

> I think we do a lot of talking to the students and provide them with too much information. It’s an overload of information throughout the day. I would like to see an orientation week where students were getting involved and felt more like there was a campus community.

To reduce the level of information overload, one administrator suggested more tightly focusing the orientation on what students needed to know to navigate their first weeks on campus. Other information could be presented during a first-year seminar or a mid-term event. By shifting parts of the orientation to later in the semester or year, the administrator believed that students would be better able to process and retain the information:
It’s hard because they [students] get overwhelmed at orientation. There are things that would be a good fit in orientation, but even though we think it’s a good fit, they may not retain it long enough. Maybe this is something we have to ask our first-year seminar instructors to incorporate at some point in the semester so they’re [students] a little more open to remembering it at the time.

Students, program staff, and administrators expressed an interest in redesigning new student orientation to include a combination of focused, interactive information sessions and social and community building activities. According to them, a one-day orientation was too short of a time frame to provide students with information about what they needed to do to succeed and build a sense of community.

**Involving Families in the College-Going Process**

Many first-generation students said that their family members and significant others lacked an understanding of the college-going experience, which often left them unprepared to help students overcome the challenges they faced in college. One student explained how her parents felt like they were unable to help her because they did not understand what she was going through:

*My parents don’t know anything about college. They think it’s like high school. They say, “We’ll try to support you, but we can’t help you in any way because we don’t know what’s going on.” That was hard at first, but I overcame it.*

Other students described how going to college placed a strain on their relationships with family members and significant others. For example, one student’s family accused her of thinking she was better than everyone else because she wanted to pursue a college education:

*My family looked at me as if I was too good for them. I have a farming family. Some people don’t even have high school diplomas. They were just all of a sudden, “Well, who do you think you are miss big pants?” I have kids. I have a three year old and I need to make sure that I can provide for her future. The world’s changed.*

Another student experienced multiple changes in her relationships with family members and her ex-husband when she enrolled in college:

*My ex-husband didn’t realize that college was such a big time commitment. It put a real strain on things. He didn’t understand that I was taking a full load of classes and had homework all the time. As far as my parents, it’s put more of a strain on my end. They think I know everything because I am in college. They ask me to fix their computer, even though I’m not studying computers. They haven’t pushed away from me, but my siblings have. They have disconnected and I don’t know why. I don’t know if they feel threatened, but they look at me different. It has been that way ever since I went to college.*
Both program staff and administrators recognized the importance of involving the families of first-generation students in the college-going process. One administrator described why his campus made a concerted effort to engage and educate the families of first-generation students:

*We try to bring family members to campus so they can see and experience what our students are doing and getting involved with. Research shows that the more family support the better, especially with first-generation college students because often there’s a disconnect on why they should be here and why a college education is important...I really like trying to involve parents. The more you create buy-in for parents and they understand the value of what their sons and daughters are going through the more it seems that those students persist.*

As the administrator illustrated, first-generation students were less likely to succeed if their family members and significant others did not understand or were not involved in the college-going experience. First-generation students on his campus benefited from programs and support services that encouraged the participation of family members and significant others.

**Providing Additional Support for Nontraditional Students**

Many nontraditional first-generation students reported that the existing programs and support services failed to fully meet their needs because they were designed for more traditional age students. One student said that nontraditional students often felt “lost” because the campus did not direct them towards the resources they needed to succeed. Although nontraditional students had acquired life experience, it did not always translate into college success:

*There are a number of nontraditional students that get lost in the loop because there is not that education out there saying that this is the program you can use...Just because we’re older, doesn’t mean we know it all. We have life experience, but it only takes you so far in college.*

Another student described how his campus’ website and publications rarely featured photographs of nontraditional students. The campus’ focus on traditional students gave him the impression that the university was more interested in recruiting and retaining younger students who enrolled in college straight out of high school:

*Whenever you go to the university’s webpage, you always see pictures of kids. You don’t see a picture of the full student range. You always see kids that have just come out of high school. They claim to pull quite a diversity of age and culture, but whenever you look through the pictures that they post online from student events and such, it doesn’t show any pictures of people like me in regards to age. Somebody my age or even older might look at that as intimidating when you see all these young kids that are right out of school and they can skip right through this. How am I going to get through this? I’m*
going to be pushed to the side. I’ve felt that at times. It would be more comforting to know that I was equally supported in that fashion. I am equally supported by staff, particular staff, but by the campus as a whole, not really.

Finally, one nontraditional student expressed her desire for a single parent support group. According to the student, she struggled to balance her role as a student with her role as a mother. She said that she would benefit from participating in a support group of nontraditional parents:

The best thing would be a single parent support group. It’s frustrating to balance two completely different identities sometimes. I quit my job because this is the hardest year I am going to have and I knew I couldn’t do all of these roles. It’s a battle sometimes knowing that I don’t have a lot of peers to turn to on campus who are nontraditional parents. That’s a battle for older students because a lot of times, home wins. It has to.

The students’ responses illustrated how age can amplify the challenges first-generation students face. Nontraditional first-generation students highlighted the fact that a one-size-fits-all approach to delivering programs and support services did not always work in their favor. Many times, they felt like their campuses were more committed to meeting the needs of traditional students.

Extending Support beyond the First Year

To improve the retention and graduation rates of first-generation students, both program staff and administrators suggested extending programs and support services for first-generation students beyond the first year. One program staff person reported that first-generation students often struggled to make a successful transition from the first to second year. He proposed expanding retention efforts to include a sophomore seminar that would allow students to explore their academic and career goals and prepare them for more advanced coursework:

I would love for our faculty senate to consider some related programming for first-generation students once they get through their first year to get involved with some sophomore exploration and a sophomore seminar. First-generation students who go through our first-year seminar come here in their second year and they’re adrift. They’re not taking classes with the same students that they had and the academics challenges have gotten harder. We tend to lose students in that interim period as they transition from the first year to second. That would be a suggestion I would love to see.

Another program staff person described how the majority of the programs and support services on his campus focused on retaining first-year students. Once students completed their freshman year, the university expected them to be more independent and self-motivated in terms of seeking help. Although the campus provided programs and support services for
sophomores, they were less intrusive and not as well publicized. As the program staff person explained:

_We’re much more front-loaded on the freshman than the sophomores. Sometimes, they get put on the back burner a little bit. In that first year, if they haven’t developed that knack for being self-motivated, there is really not much else on the campus. Don’t get me wrong, there are plenty of services out there that are willing to help, just not any that are going to come to you first. On some sides, it should be that way because as you get older you need to start taking responsibility. It’s just a fine line in balancing that and helping students get to that realization point._

These program staff persons highlighted the need to provide continuous and evolving support for first-generation students. While it was critical to support incoming first-generation students, they also needed assistance beyond their first year in declaring a major, strengthening their academic skills, and in deepening their connections to people and resources.

**Relationships with Advisors, Faculty, and Program Staff**

Although first-generation students attributed a great deal of their success to the programs and support services on their campuses, they said that it was the relationships and trust they developed with advisors, faculty, and program staff that allowed them to persist in the face of daunting challenges. Overall, first-generation students were able to develop relationships with these individuals because they were consistently available and supportive of them and deeply cared about their personal well-being and academic success.

**Relationships with Advisors**

Many first-generation students developed close relationships with their academic advisors. These students said that they responded well to advisors who used an “intrusive” approach to advising and engaged them in degree mapping and career exploration. For example, one student appreciated her advisor’s willingness to help her align her degree program with her academic strengths and personal interests. Beyond the academic advising, she also considered her to be a “good friend.”

_Before I switched majors, my advisor was amazing. She discussed different aspects of my [degree program] to see where my strengths were and where my passions would lie. She was a really good friend. I still talk to her even though that’s not my major anymore. She was a really helpful person._

Another student formed a close relationship with her advisor because she was interested in getting to know her both personally and academically and was invested in her success. As the student explained:
My academic advisor knows me by heart. She wants me to succeed and lets me know what I need to do ahead of time in order to graduate.

These students were able to develop constructive relationships with their academic advisors because they knew that they could rely on them to give them advice and support. Through the use of intrusive advising and roadmaps to success, academic advisors motivated students to persist in college.

Relationships with Faculty Members

First-generation students also identified their relationships with faculty members as a source of inspiration and motivation. Students reported gaining positive learning outcomes from professors who invested time and energy into their courses and made an effort to ensure that students mastered the material. Students also benefited from professors who incorporated high impact teaching practices in the classroom such as peer mentoring. As one student reflected:

Last semester, I had a professor who was amazing. He challenged you to your potential. He put a lot of effort into it. He coordinated us with peer mentors so we were in small groups with peer mentors. He really cared about us learning the material, which is helpful since you’re going to be working with that in your profession.

Other students received valuable support and guidance from faculty members who served as mentors. Students were able to turn to faculty mentors for advice on family issues, course registration, and professional development. As one student explained:

One of my professors has been awesome. I can go to her office if I am having trouble with a course or with which way I am going. She has been like a mentor/friend. She has helped me think through what I am going to do when I grow up and what I can do realistically. That has been a tremendous help.

According to students, faculty members played a key role in their success both in and out of the classroom. Students responded well to the use of high impact teaching practices and faculty-student mentoring.

Relationships with Program Staff

Many first-generation students developed equally important relationships with program staff. Students formed close connections with program staff persons who were willing to take the time to sit down with them and explain university terminology and procedures. When students were unsure of how to apply for financial aid or register for classes, they often turned to program staff persons for support. As one student explained:
I get a lot of help from the office and [the program staff member]. We have been talking since I started here. I was brand new to the whole school thing. Trying to get adjusted to the mindset of college and being in college and the responsibilities you have. The office simplifies a lot of it for you and they’ll relate it to everyday life terminology for me instead of me being overwhelmed with all the stuff I don’t know.

Other students turned to program staff persons for both academic and emotional support. In these instances, program staff persons connected students to helpful support services and communicated with professors to inform them of the issues students faced. As one student reflected:

[A program staff member] helped me with different aspects of school, my learning disabilities, and getting the appropriate learning aids that I needed. I had an issue with one of my daughters, and I didn’t know who to talk to. I went to [the program staff member] because it was interfering with school. She helped me a lot and made sure I was paying attention to myself.

Program staff and administrators also reported that the personal relationships they developed with students contributed to students’ success and motivation to persist in college. One administrator said that the program staff in her office strove to develop relationships with all incoming students to identify potential barriers to success as early as possible. Through individualized meetings, the program staff worked with students to identify potential obstacles and connect them to appropriate support services:

We’ve been meeting individually with all our new students during the first couple of weeks of classes. We really try to identify [first-generation] students, identifying obstacles early that could be barriers to success. We may find out that they’re working 35 hours a week, or that they don’t have adequate transportation, or that they haven’t completed something in their FAFSA, or [other] gaps. So we try to put out those fires early.

In addition to identifying barriers to success, one program staff person said that students needed someone to listen to them and help them brainstorm and articulate their goals. She believed that students benefited the most from one-on-one contact with program staff:

To me, the highest value contact that I have is that one-to-one or very small group contact with students because students are hungry for people to help them do brainstorming, optioning, to listen. [I] help students role-play different ways of hearing things that people say or different ways of responding and clearly articulating their goals and engaging in that brainstorming process. That one-to-one contact is what I think that I do best and what I think students need.

Based on the participants’ responses, it is clear that students’ relationships with advisors, faculty, and program staff played a pivotal role in their ability to overcome challenges and
achieve success. Students benefited from having a support network of adults who they trusted and could rely on for assistance and guidance.

Recommendations

First-generation students, program staff, and administrators shared their perspectives on the types of resources and support needed to enhance first-generation student success. Based on the participants’ responses, the report offers specific recommendations for Indiana University.

The first, key recommendation is at the system-wide level:

- **Indiana University could benefit by adopting a consistent system-wide definition of first-generation students.** Why is this important? It could streamline the process of identifying first-generation students. It also could facilitate the collection of accurate, consistent, and comparable data on IU’s eight campuses. Finally, it could assist the university in assessing the profiles of first-generation students to better understand how they progress through the IU system. The Institutional Research Offices and Offices of Admissions on the regional campuses could be involved in the development of this definition. During the initial stages of research, the SPEA VISTA Fellow and members of the Blueprint for Student Attainment discovered that the online admission applications for IU’s eight campuses did not include a uniform question to identify first-generation students. Members of the Blueprint for Student Attainment made a request to University Student Services and Systems (USSS) to standardize the question regarding first-generation status on the online admission applications to allow for the consistent collection of data across all campuses. In April 2012, USSS and the Admissions Council reviewed and approved the request. As of May 2012, IU’s online admission applications use the same question to identify first-generation students. IU could use the recent collaboration between USSS and the Admissions Council as the starting point for developing a consistent system-wide definition of first-generation students.

The next recommendations propose ways that the regional campuses can further enhance their institutional commitment to first-generation student success:

- **Develop initiatives that foster a sense of pride in being a first-generation student.** In the study, many participants described the invisible nature of or the negative stigma that was attached to being a first-generation student. Given the high percentage of first-generation students attending IU’s regional campuses, the campuses could recognize these students’ accomplishments and honor their first-generation identity. Fostering a sense of pride could be as simple as sending admitted first-generation students a welcome letter or e-mail that highlights the students’ perseverance, resilience, and hard work and the regional campuses’ commitment to their success. Another initiative could be the formation of a first-generation student learning community. IU Kokomo, IU Northwest, and IPFW already provide well-regarded learning communities for incoming freshmen; the regional campuses might designate
one community expressly for first-generation students, especially since the necessary infrastructure and programmatic experience is already in place. The regional campuses also could highlight and share their best practices (see Appendix B for descriptions of existing programs and support services for first-generation students on the regional campuses).

- **More intentionally connect incoming first-generation students and their families to the most helpful programs and support services.** First-generation students, as well as their family members, were often unaware of what they needed to do to have a successful college experience. Many students said that they struggled for a semester or two before they found out about programs and support services that could help them address the challenges they faced. To ensure that incoming students receive the support they need as early as possible, the regional campuses could design an orientation session exclusively for first-generation students and their families. IU Southeast’s Office of Admissions hosts an evening program in the spring for admitted first-generation students and their families. Representatives from key university offices provide students and their families with information about the college-going process, how their families can best support them, and the resources the campus offers. Not only does the pre-orientation session help ease students’ transition to college, but it also helps family members gain a better understanding of the challenges their child or partner will face in college. Other campuses could develop similar orientation sessions to ensure that first-generation students are equipped with the resources they need to succeed during their first year.

- **Develop strategies to improve the retention and graduation rates of first-generation students.** According to UIRR data, first-generation students are less likely to persist from their freshman year to their sophomore year and from their sophomore year to their junior year. Program staff persons suggested that retention issues could be related to the fact that many programs and support services focus almost exclusively on helping first-year students succeed. While it is critical to support incoming first-generation students, they continue to need assistance beyond their first year in declaring or changing their major, setting a career direction, sustaining important skills like stress and time management, reviewing financial need, and in deepening their connections to people and resources so that they can find the best pathway to academic success and an IU degree. To improve the retention and graduation rates of first-generation students, the regional campuses could develop a “roadmap to success” to help guide students as they make successful progress towards completing their degree. The roadmap also could serve as a guideline for faculty, staff, and administrators who work directly with this population. As noted earlier, Appendix B includes a comprehensive listing of programs and support services already in place on the regional campuses. Such resources could be the starting point for developing a roadmap. Please see Appendix C for an example of a roadmap to success. In addition, there are a number of innovative ideas, programs, and support services for first-generation students at other universities that could inform the practices on the regional campuses.
Please see Appendix D for descriptions and links to such resources. The aforementioned suggestions, along with further study of why first-generation students leave the regional campuses in their second and/or third year, could help to inform and enhance first-generation student retention and graduation rates.

- **Engage in efforts to make the existing programs and support services more responsive to the needs of a diverse population of first-generation students.** According to UIRR data, a large percentage of first-generation students are women, nontraditional age students, and minorities. These demographics also were reflected in the students who participated in the individual interviews and focus groups. To meet the needs of this diverse population, it is important for faculty, program staff, and administrators to be aware of the intersection of first-generation status, gender, race, and age. In addition, the regional campuses could shape programs and services in ways that are welcoming to and supportive of all students, but especially of underrepresented and nontraditional students. IPFW’s Center for Women and Returning Adults (CWRA) provides a variety of programs and support services for women and nontraditional students who are age 23 and over, married, and/or parents. These initiatives include sexual violence/domestic violence prevention programs and social events for returning adult students and students with young families. CWRA provides an example of a customized instead of one-size-fits-all approach to program development and implementation. This focused programmatic model could go a long way toward making programs and support services more inclusive of and responsive to the diversity that exists among first-generation students.

- **Connect first-generation students with faculty, staff, and administrators who were themselves first-generation students.** In the study, many first-generation students reported that the personal relationships they developed with faculty, staff, and administrators positively impacted their success and motivation to persist in college. Faculty, staff, and administrators are in the unique position to serve as mentors to first-generation students. First-generation mentoring could take place in a variety of formats such as one-on-one or small group meetings, panel discussions, or workshops. IU South Bend’s Making the Academic Connection Office currently hosts a panel discussion for first-generation students and faculty, providing faculty members who were themselves first-generation students with the opportunity to share their experiences with students. Other campuses could replicate this type of event to help facilitate connections between first-generation students and faculty members. The SPEA VISTA Fellow has already contacted faculty senates and professional staff councils on all of the regional campuses to identify faculty members and professional staff who were themselves first-generation college students. Many faculty and staff responded positively and expressed their interest in meeting to discuss first-generation student success. The regional campuses could follow up on and commend this level of interest. The regional campuses also could consider recruiting retired faculty, staff, and administrators because they may be able to devote more time to mentoring first-generation students.
Conclusion

In fall 2011, first-generation students represented at least 43 percent of all degree-seeking undergraduate students enrolled at IU’s regional campuses. Both qualitative and quantitative data suggest that these students face a variety of obstacles in their path to success and persistence in college. By presenting the words of first-generation students, program staff, and administrators, the report seeks to improve the quality and effectiveness of programs and support services on the regional campuses. In addition, the report seeks to raise awareness and generate dialogue among the regional campuses about the impact of programs and support services on first-generation student success. The SPEA VISTA Fellow is confident that the report will provide a framework that will guide the regional campuses as they oversee strategic planning and action for first-generation student success.
References


Appendix

Appendix A: Programs and Support Services for Undergraduate Students, Underrepresented Students, and First-Generation Students at IU’s Regional Campuses
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Appendix B: Programs and Support Services for First-Generation Students at IU’s Regional Campuses

Indiana University East

IU East offers two main programs for first-generation students.

Student Support Services

http://www.iue.edu/support/index.php

Student Support Services (SSS) is a federally funded TRIO program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The mission of the SSS program is to increase the retention and graduation rates of low-income students, first-generation students, and students with a disability. The SSS program has the funding to serve up to 200 students a year. The SSS program provides a wide range of programs and services such as academic advising, counseling, peer mentoring, and tutoring. The SSS program also hosts a variety of events and workshops. For example, the Parents, Partners, and Peers workshop allows students to bring their parents, significant others, and friends to the SSS program to gain a better understanding of college life.

Opportunity Pathway

http://www.iue.edu/it/opportunitypathway.php

Opportunity Pathway is an IU East technology outreach program that makes available surplus computer systems to disadvantaged students for a nominal fee. Each year, Information Technology Services reserves a minimum of twenty-five computers for the program. All students participating in the Student Support Services and Twenty-first Century Scholars programs are eligible to apply for the equipment.

Indiana University Kokomo

Currently, IU Kokomo provides no programs or support services that specifically target first-generation students.

Indiana University Northwest

IU Northwest offers one program for first-generation students.

The Office of Student Support Services

http://www.iun.edu/~nwstuden/supportn/
Student Support Services (SSS) is a federally funded TRIO program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The mission of the SSS program is to increase the retention and graduation rates of low-income students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities. The SSS program provides a wide range of programs and services, including academic advising, financial literacy education, and tutoring.

**Indiana University South Bend**

IU South Bend provides one program and a scholarship for first-generation students.

*Crucial Connections*

[http://www.iusb.edu/~sbmac/](http://www.iusb.edu/~sbmac/)

During the 2010-2011 academic year, the Making the Academic Connection (MAC) Office debuted Crucial Connections, a panel discussion for first-generation students and faculty members who were themselves first-generation students. The event, which takes place each semester, provides faculty members with the opportunity to meet and share their experiences with first-generation students.

*The Christine Pochert Ringle and Jerry Ringle Scholarship*

[http://www.iusb.edu/~scholar1/OSAlist.shtml](http://www.iusb.edu/~scholar1/OSAlist.shtml)

The Christine Pochert Ringle and Jerry Ringle Scholarship provides financial support to full- and part-time incoming freshmen students who are first-generation college students, either traditional or nontraditional, and who graduated from Plymouth High School with a Core 40 diploma. To be eligible, students must have a 2.0+ cumulative GPA.

**Indiana University Southeast**

IU Southeast offers two programs, a departmental scholarship, and a grant for first-generation college students.

*Access to Success*

[http://www.ius.edu/ccp/mentoring/files/MentoringPurpose.pdf](http://www.ius.edu/ccp/mentoring/files/MentoringPurpose.pdf)

The Access to Success program at IU Southeast is an intensive one year program that is designed to focus on three areas:

- To increase access to post-secondary education for four groups of IU Southeast's underrepresented students (Twenty-first Century Scholars, Minority Students, First-generation Students, and Adult Learners (ages 25-39)).
• To develop an academic support system that meets the special needs of these individuals.
• To increase their academic success, retention, and integration into the campus community.

The Access to Success program is composed of two major components, Access Peer Mentoring, an aggressive peer mentoring plan, and the Collegiate Summer Institute, a four-day summer expanded orientation program. Both programs work from the premise that learning is not a spectator sport. Students must be active learners and integrate what they learn and the Access to Success program provides the tools so that students are equipped to be active learners.

The Basics and Beyond

During the spring semester, IU Southeast’s Office of Admissions hosts The Basics and Beyond, an evening program designed for admitted students who will be the first in their families to go to college. First-generation students who participate in the program receive a copy of the book *First in the Family: Advice about College from First-Generation Students* by Kathleen Cushman. Representatives from key university offices provide first-generation students and their families with information about what students need to do to succeed and how their families can support them. The Office of Admissions sets up a resource table at the back of the room for student who would like additional information on the university’s programs and resources. Program presenters explain to students that they are not on their own and that it is “normal” for entering students to be unfamiliar with the college-going process.

*Jerrol Z. Miles Scholarship*


The Jerrol Z. Miles Scholarship provides $1,000 for first-generation students interested in business, economics, or nursing. Applicants must be an Indiana resident. The scholarship gives preference to African-American students.

*IU Southeast Persistence Grant*


The IU Southeast Persistence Grant provides $1,000 for first-generation college students.

*Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne*

IPFW provides several programs and support services for first-generation college students.

*Academic Student Achievement Program (ASAP!)*
In an effort to increase the retention rates and academic success of minority students, first-generation students, and low-income college students, including Perkins Grant, Twenty-first Century Scholars, and Summer Bridge students, the Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs has initiated the Academic Student Achievement Program (ASAP!). ASAP! is a student success initiative designed to retain a diverse group of students, including those of various ethnicities, ages, and socioeconomic statuses. The program focuses on three areas: academic monitoring (early intervention), student and leadership development, and career and professional development.

Office of International Education

The Living Abroad tab has a section on “Diversity Abroad—Is Studying Abroad for Me?” The section discuss how low-income students, minority students, first-generation students, students who have never travelled outside the United States, and students in fields such as education, health sciences, and engineering may assume that study abroad is simply “not for them.” The Office of International Education explains that it would like to dispel those myths because study abroad is a valuable experience for every socio-economic and academic background at IPFW. The Office of International Education encourages students to contact the office with any concerns they have about studying abroad.

Seminar: First in the Family?

On April 28, 2010, the IPFW Center for Women and Returning Adults hosted a seminar, “First in the Family?” to discuss the joys and complexities of being the first member of one’s family to attend college. The seminar was open to IPFW students, faculty, and staff. Four panelists from IPFW shared their experiences of being the first person in their family to go to college. The informal discussion included Patrick Ashton, Ph.D., associate professor of sociology; Janet Badia, Ph.D., associate professor and director of Women’s Studies; George McClellan, Ph.D., vice chancellor for student affairs; and Christopher Riley, assistant director of the Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs.

TRIO Student Support Services

IPFW’s Student Support Services (SSS) is a federally funded TRIO program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The mission of the SSS program is to increase the retention and graduation rates of low-income students, first-generation students, and students with
disabilities. The SSS program provides a wide range of programs and services, including academic advising, financial aid counseling, mentoring, and tutoring.

Appendix C: First-Generation Student Success Roadmap

The following four-year plan serves as a model that IU’s regional campuses could use to provide incoming first-generation students with key strategies for a successful college experience. The roadmap is based on the 30-60-90 formula outlined in Angelo State University’s 30-60-90 Road Map to College Success (http://www.angelo.edu/services/first_year_experience/four-year_plan.php) and in the University of Central Missouri’s 30-60-90 Student Success Roadmap (http://www.ucmo.edu/academics/roadmap/documents/rdMP_AHSS.pdf). The roadmap includes a mix of existing programs and support services at IU’s regional campuses to create an “ideal” route to a successful college experience and timely graduation.

Pre-College Preparation (spring/summer before freshman year)

• Attend a pre-orientation session designed specifically for first-generation students and their families (e.g., The Basics and Beyond at IU Southeast).
• Participate in a campus-sponsored summer bridge program to brush up on your academic skills and successfully manage the transition from high school to college (e.g., Leadership Academy at IU South Bend).
• Attend new student orientation to learn about academic majors, degree requirements, programs and support services, and co-curricular activities.
• Fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
• Apply for a Federal work-study job.

Freshman (0-29 credit hours)

• Take a first-year seminar or enroll in a freshman learning community (e.g., Freshman Learning Communities at IU Kokomo) to help you acclimate to the college environment.
• Find a peer mentor who can help you overcome the challenges of college life (e.g., Relay Program at IU South Bend).
• Talk to your instructors and do not be afraid to ask for help. If you need additional academic support, take advantage of the campus’ Supplemental Instruction program, tutoring services, and comprehensive support programs (e.g., Student Support Services at IU Northwest).
• Invite your family, significant other, and/or friends to attend an event designed exclusively for first-generation students and their families so they can gain a better understanding of the challenges you will face and how they can support you (e.g., Parent, Partners, and Peers at IU East).
• Get to know your academic advisor and begin to explore majors and careers.
• Plan an individualized four-year degree program with your advisor that reflects your personal, academic, and career goals.
• Get active on campus by joining a student club or organization, recreational sports team, or community service project.

Sophomores (30-59 credit hours)

• Focus on creating a healthy balance between your academic work, employment, social life, and responsibilities in the home. If you are feeling overwhelmed, take advantage of the campus’ counseling services.
• Declare an academic major and talk to a faculty advisor in your academic area of study to learn more about the requirements and career opportunities related to your major.
• Determine what motivates you and design an academic plan to achieve your goals. Discuss these plans with an advisor.
• Find a first-generation faculty member to mentor you or give you advice (e.g., Crucial Connections at IU South Bend).
• Participate in an alternative spring break trip, leadership development program, community service project, internship, or other experiential learning opportunity.

Juniors (60-89 credit hours)

• Meet regularly with your academic advisor to make sure you are on track for a timely graduation. Update your degree plan as changes occur.
• Participate in community develop activities that offer leadership and professional development opportunities such as service-learning and civic engagement.
• Consider applying for leadership positions within student organizations or social groups in which you are involved.
• Work with your academic advisor to develop and maintain your career or graduate school strategy.
• Participate in an undergraduate research project to improve your research and writing skills.

Seniors (90 or more credit hours)

• Get involved in additional academic and extra-curricular activities that compliment your career or graduate school plan.
• Ask faculty members, advisors, and others to write reference letters.
• Complete the undergraduate application for graduation when you register for your final semester.
• Make an appointment with the Office of Career Services to review your resume and participate in mock interviews.
• Attend the campuses’ career fairs to make professional contacts.
• Begin interviewing for post-graduation employment and/or applying to graduate school.
Appendix D: Innovative Programs and Support Services for First-Generation Students at Other Universities

Many universities across the country have developed innovative programs and support services to enhance first-generation student success. Appendix D provides an overview of programs and support services for first-generation students at California State University, Fresno, Clemson University, Notre Dame of Maryland University, University of Kentucky, University of Michigan, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Texas Tech University. IU’s regional campuses could use this information to improve existing programs and support services and inform future program development and implementation.

The First-Generation Stories Project at California State University, Fresno

http://firstgeneration.csufresno.edu/default.htm

According to President Welty, the purpose of the First-Generation Stories project is to “make our first-generation faculty and staff visible to students and to let them know that many of their professors, counselors and others have faced obstacles and challenges similar to the ones they are experiencing.” The organizers of the project collect stories from Fresno State faculty members, staff members, and administrators who were themselves first-generation college students for use in student support programs, classrooms, blogs and other venues.

Clemson University FIRST-Generation Success Program

http://www.clemson.edu/academics/programs/first/

The FIRST program provides a wide range of support services for first-generation students who plan to major in STEM fields. The main components of the program include the FIRST Summer Preview Program and the Mentoring Program.

First Summer Preview Program

During the summer, incoming first-generation students complete a three-credit Clemson academic course. Participating students have the opportunity to experience the academic rigor of college, get familiar with the campus, and build new friendships. Faculty and staff introduce the students to activities and resources. In addition, incoming first-generation students meet current students doing co-ops and internships, as well as FIRST graduates in successful careers. Finally, the summer programs hosts a FIRST family dinner night. Both the Director of the FIRST program and faculty members attend the dinner. The family members of first-generation students appreciate the opportunity to meet the adults who are involved in the program.
The Mentoring Program

The Mentoring Program provides incoming first-generation students with the opportunity to learn from older students who have had similar experiences. The program pairs FIRST participants with a junior or senior mentor in a similar field of study. Mentors are also students who are the first in their family to obtain a bachelor’s degree. Mentors meet with students weekly to give support, encouragement and advice about succeeding at Clemson. In addition to these two programs, the FIRST program also provides daily study halls, free tutoring, study skills and time management workshops, referrals to research internships, career exploration opportunities, off-campus excursions, and social activities.

Trailblazer Scholars Program at Notre Dame of Maryland University

http://www.ndm.edu/academics/womens-college/honors-and-special-programs/trailblazers-program/

The Trailblazer Scholars program provides a number of support services to help first-generation students transition to college life. Incoming students have the opportunity to attend Academic Success and College Transition workshops designed exclusively for first-generation students. The workshops cover topics such as studying, how to access campus resources, and how to write a successful paper. The program also offers social and wellness programming such as movie nights. Each student has a “Big Sister”—a junior or senior who is herself a first-generation student. Big Sisters serve as mentors to students to help them navigate the college experience and achieve academic success. Students also meet and network with Notre Dame graduates who were themselves first-generation students to begin exploring career opportunities. In addition, students participate in a required service-learning project to gain a deeper understanding of the issues facing their community. Finally, students work with a faculty mentor to complete a required research project.

The Office of First-Generation Initiatives at the University of Kentucky

http://www.uky.edu/1G/index.html

In 2011, the Provost created the Office of First-Generation Initiatives to direct campus wide efforts to recruit, retain, and graduate more first-generation students at the University of Kentucky. The office’s website includes information for prospective students, current students, families, and faculty and staff. The website also provides information about the UK’s programs and support services for first-generation students. They include:

- First Scholars—starting with an assessment-based selection process and specific next steps based on those results, scholars begin with an individual strategic plan for success. A program coordinator, peer mentors, programming, and scholarships address academic, social, emotional and financial needs. Participants maintain contact with the
program for four years, transitioning to a leadership role by supporting incoming students

- The First-Generation Living Learning Community (1G LLC)—the 1G LLC is a residential experience designed to support first generation students and assist them with their transition from high school into college life at UK. Academic success is encouraged through connected courses with their peers, increased faculty and staff interaction, as well as intentional programming efforts.
- Robinson Scholars Program—Robinson Scholars are preselected students from Appalachian Coal Counties who enroll at the University of Kentucky or any KCTCS community college and receive full scholarships (tuition and fees, room and board, and a book allowance), as well as extra services to help them achieve their academic goals.
- Student Support Services—Student Support Services is a federally funded program designed to work with students who are first generation, low income, and have a documented disability. They provide a holistic approach to working with students designed to aid in retention and graduation.

Students also have the opportunity to join the First-Generation Student Organization at UK. The organization seeks to support, educate, and promote the needs of students who are the first in their families to go to college. Finally, the Office of the First-Generation Initiatives and Academic Technology formed a partnership to create the 1G Stories Project, which highlights the experiences of first-generation students, faculty, and staff at UK.

First-Generation College Students at the University of Michigan

[http://sitemaker.umich.edu/firstgens/home](http://sitemaker.umich.edu/firstgens/home)

First-Generation College Students @ Michigan is a student organization dedicated to recognizing, raising awareness of, and resolving the needs of undergraduate first-generation college students at the University of Michigan. The organization hosts a number of events, including:

- Faculty Fireside Chat Panels—current UM faculty members join the student organization to share their personal stories and answer questions.
- Graduate Student Panel—current graduate students in a variety of programs discuss their experiences applying and preparing for graduate school and what graduate school has been like for them.
- First-Generation Graduation Celebration—this event celebrates the accomplishments of graduating seniors and features a keynote speaker.

The organization’s website also includes the Michigan Story Project, which features the personal stories of first-generation students and faculty members.
Carolina Firsts at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

http://firstgeneration.unc.edu/

Carolina Firsts is a campus-wide program that encourages the enrollment, retention, and graduation of first-generation students. Carolina Firsts includes university programs and initiatives, as well as a student organization. The program engages students and their families throughout the college-going process. The Carolina Firsts’ website includes information for prospective students, current student, families and faculty and staff. Students can access a Resources Guide via the website, as well as student stories. Peer mentors help incoming students acclimate to the campus’ strong cultural traditions by attending welcome week, homecoming, and football games with them. Twice a semester, a committee of faculty, staff, and administrators meet to discuss issues related to first-generation student success. The committee invites two student representatives from the Carolina Firsts student organization to participate. At graduation, students have the opportunity to wear a special “firsts” pin with their cap and gown. The program also invites students to participate in a graduation and pinning ceremony in their honor.

Texas Tech University PEGASUS Program

http://www.depts.ttu.edu/diversity/pegasus/

The Pioneers in Education: Generations Achieving Scholarship and Unprecedented Success (PEGASUS) Program provides a variety of programs and support services for first-generation students to help ease the transition to college. The PEGASUS program’s main components include:

- **Academic Advising**—PEGASUS staff work with first-generation students until they declare their academic majors.
- **Issues Advising through the Noel-Levitz College Student Inventory (CSI)**—students who participate in the program are required to take the CSI. Program staff schedule individual appointments with incoming students to discuss potential barriers to success and devise strategies to overcome them.
- **Mentoring**—professional staff mentor PEGASUS mentors to encourage personal and professional development. PEGASUS peer mentors meet with their assigned mentees at least once a week and attend various program events.
- **POWER (Positive Outcomes with Educational Resources) Sessions**—these interactive workshops help new students transition to TTU. Professional staff and faculty members lead discussions regarding TTU traditions, money management, preparation for final exams, asset building, selecting a major, etc.
- **Study sessions**—these sessions are open to all members of the program. Peer mentors and tutors assist students in a variety of academic subjects.
- **Community Building Events**—these events foster a sense of belonging at TTU. The events allow students to network with other first-generation students and peer
mentors. The events include a welcome back event, family barbeque, pool party, bowling night, and karaoke night.

- Community Service and Outreach—this component helps students gain a deeper understanding of the importance of giving back to their community. Students engage with local community organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club, Habitat for Humanity, and food banks.