

Current Research Update – First Generation Student Interest Group

Collier, P. J., & Morgan, D. L. (2008). "Is that paper really due today?": Differences in first-generation and traditional college students' understandings of faculty expectations. *Higher Education*, 55(4), 425-446. doi: 10.1007/s10734-007-9065-5

Peter Collier and David Morgan examine the “tacit understandings” of the college environment to understand how students master the college student role. Their conceptual model indicates that academic ability is not the only factor that impacts student success. Students must also master their professors’ expectations.

Jehangir, R., Williams, R. D., & Pete, J. (2011). Multicultural learning communities: Vehicles for developing self-authorship in first-generation college students. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 23(1), 53-73.

Rashne Jehangir, Rhiannon Williams and Judith Jeske sought to determine how a multicultural learning community impacted first generation college students. They focused on how whether or not critical pedagogy developed students to examine themselves. Their theoretical framework brings together learning community design, multicultural education and critical pedagogy. The multicultural learning community (MLC), created by three faculty members, focused on “themes of identity, community, and social agency” (p. 272). One of the findings was that students experience “disequilibrium” based on varying aspects of their identity. The researchers found that the MLC helped students make sense of this “dissonance,” as they termed it, and allowed the student to give voice to their anger and frustration. This dissonance can be further mitigated if institutions were intentional in framing curricula that further allowed students to connect lived experience with the academic pursuits.

Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A., Markus, H. R., Johnson, C. S., & Covarrubias, R. (2012). Unseen disadvantage: How American universities' focus on independence undermines the academic performance of first-generation college students. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(6), 1178-1197. doi: 10.1037/a0027143 Stephens,

The purpose of Nicole Stephens et al’s study is to determine if the university is truly a place of upward mobility or if it reproduces social inequality through its cultural norms. First generation students not only have fiscal challenges that hinder their ability to do well, but social and cultural challenges as well due to not being aware of middle-class and upper-class values and norms. Stephens et al assert that academic performance is contingent on “cultural match,” i.e. students who match well with the environment do well, and those that are “culturally mismatched” do not. Their literature review shows that middle-class cultural norms emphasize independence, choice, and individual entitlement based on access to resources, geography, etc. However, the working-class student’s norm is interdependent with a focus on the needs, and behaviors, of others.

Overall, the researchers find that first generation students are capable if the cultural norms of their institution matches their own. They suggest that universities incorporate both independent and interdependent cultural norms into their literature and everyday interactions.

Stuber,

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Majer, J. M. (2009). Self-efficacy and academic success among ethnically diverse first-generation community college students. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 2(4), 243-250. doi: 10.1037/a0017852

Majer asserts that his research shows that college success programming should include work on self-efficacy for education. In addition, sociodemographic information changes outcomes and should be considered. However, this study is limited in that it only addresses a diverse, urban community college, and the results cannot be generalized beyond that demographic.