

Communicating Opportunity Value and Information During Crisis

Research Series

Brief #4: Retaining First-Generation Students



Retaining First-Generation Students

COVID Research Series

The COVID research series reports on a national survey of college and university students whose institutions transitioned to remote learning in response to COVID 19

Focus:

- Plans for Fall
- Who are They?
- Academic Preparation
- Post-COVID Challenges

Plans for Fall 2020

First-generation students are more likely to change institutions or plan to drop out for a semester or more.

First-Generation Students

- **57%** plan to stay
- **36%** plan to change or contemplate change
- **7%** plan to drop out for a semester or more



■ Stayer (57%)
 ■ Changer (36%)
 ■ Leaver (7%)

Continuing-Generation Students

- **78%** plan to stay
- **16%** plan to change or contemplate change
- **6%** plan to drop out for a semester or more



■ Stayer (78%)
 ■ Changer (16%)
 ■ Leaver (6%)

Who Are They?

First-generation students were more likely to be male, more racially diverse than continuing-generation students, and with a higher financial need profile.

	First Generation	Continuing Generation
Gender		
Female	37%	51%
Male	62%	49%
Race		
African American	54%	46%
Asian	43%	57%
Hispanic	64%	36%
White	47%	53%
Financial Need		
Pell Eligible	79%	42%
Federal Loans	68%	60%

Where Were They?

After the disruption of the spring semester, first-generation students were more likely to stay on campus or at a friend's home. However, first-generation students were unlikely to have a permanent address more than 300 miles from campus.

	First- Generation	Continuing- Generation
Location after COVID		
At a Friend's Home	8%	3%
At Parent's Home	56%	62%
Off-campus Housing	14%	26%
On-campus Housing	22%	9%
Distance from Home		
Less than 50 miles	65%	63%
50-300 miles	30%	24%
More than 300	4%	14%

Academic Preparation

First-generation students were less likely to report that they had mastered their course work in the spring.

They also felt less prepared to advance in the fall.

Agree/strongly agree:
“I mastered my coursework this year”

First Generation	70%
Continuing Generation	76%

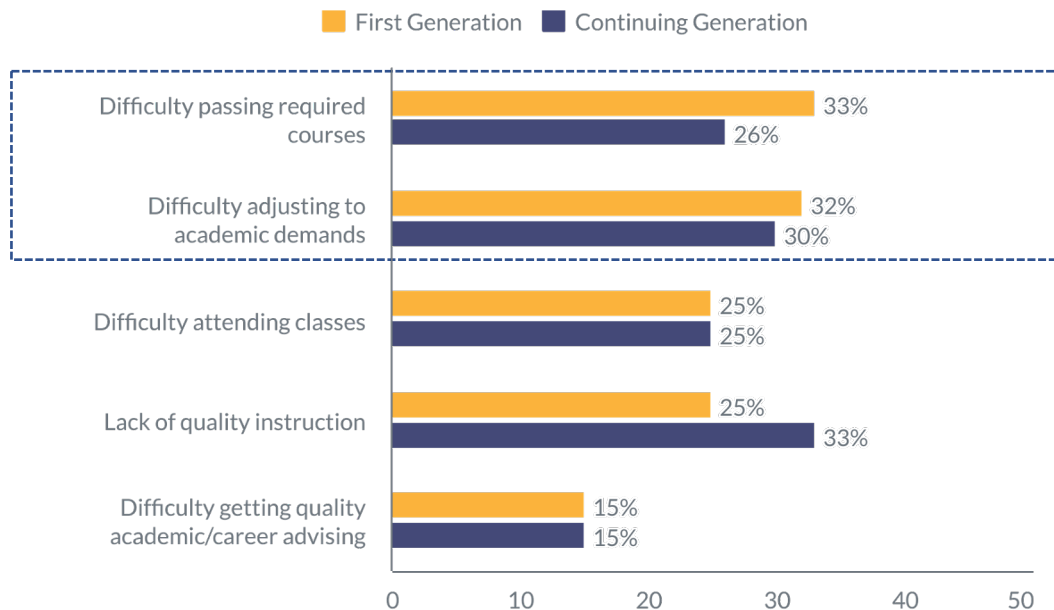
Agree/strongly agree:
“I am prepared to advance next year”

First Generation	71%
Continuing Generation	74%

Academic Challenges

First-generation students reported difficulty passing required courses and adjusting to academic demands as primary challenges.

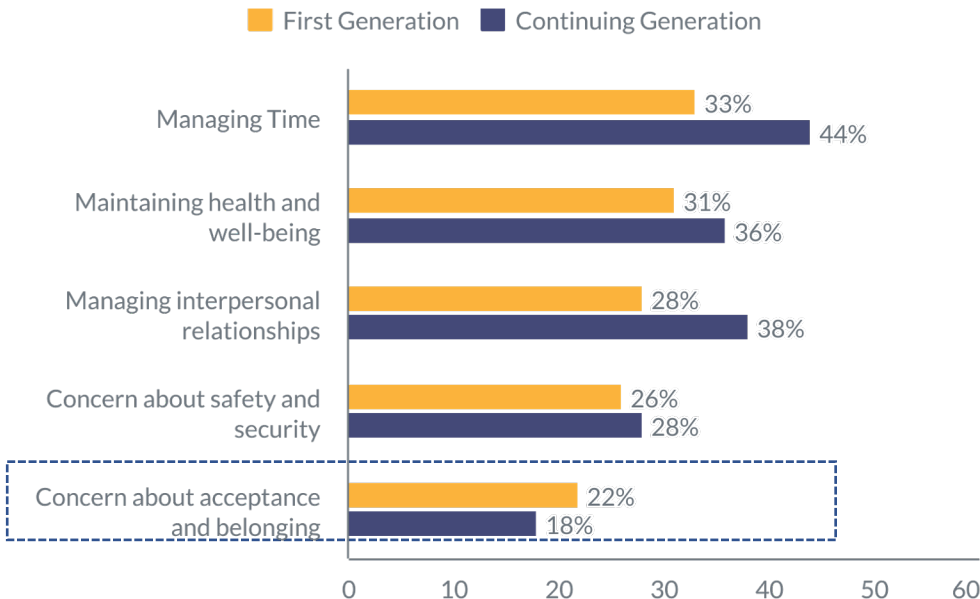
Major/Medium-High Academic Challenges (Post-COVID)



Personal Challenges

First-generation students expressed fewer personal challenges than continuing-generation students with the exception of concern about acceptance and belonging.

Major/Medium-High Personal Challenges (Post-COVID)

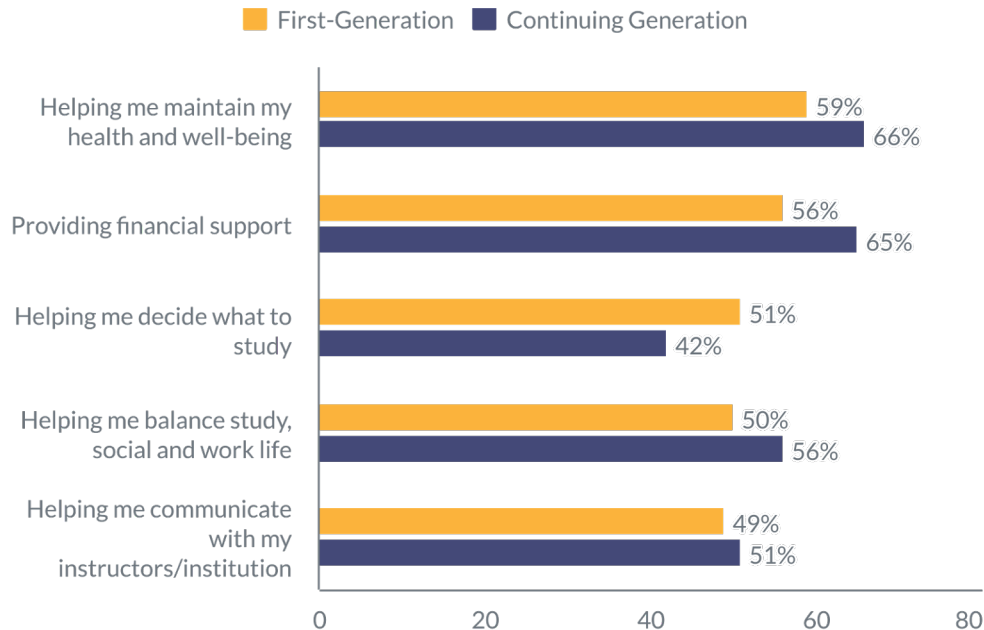


Family Support

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First-generation students had less family support in every area except direction about what to study.

Important/Very Important Family Support (Post-COVID)



Strategies for Fall 2020

More than half of first-generation students plan to stay at their current institution in fall.

Program planning and summer communications can be used to re-recruit those who are planning to leave.

CAMPUS EXPERIENCE

- More than twice as likely to have stayed on campus after COVID, but overall experience not positive
- Message how campus will be more welcoming and supportive in the fall
- Share mitigation plans in the event of online transition, including plans for housing

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

- Address academic preparation concern
- Emphasize access to academic support services, improved instructional experience
- Evaluate spring outcomes and provide opportunities to address gaps

PARENT/FAMILY SUPPORT

- Improve parent and family outreach and engagement
- Communicate to parents of first-generation students about available services in areas of support needs/ gaps (example- well-being, financial assistance)

Survey Methodology

Data were collected from April 29 to May 4, 2020. More than 500 participants were traditional-aged college students (18-25) located in the United States whose campus had transitioned to remote instruction during spring of 2020.

Demographics:

- 55% male, 45% female
- Average Age: 22
- Residence: 45 of 50 States

Institutions:

- 46% four-year publics
- 34% four-year privates
- 20% two-year institutions

Additional information on methodology available upon request.

TorchStar Education

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