

First Generation Students

Stony Brook University is very proud to have a large number of first-generation college students. In fact, incoming students can now voluntarily indicate that they are the first person in their family to go to college. Across the country, the number of first-generation college students is on the rise. First-generation college students account for almost half of the student population in colleges and universities today (Choy, 2001). There are a few different definitions of what constitutes a first-generation college student, but generally can be defined as having no parent or guardian that has graduated from a college or university. Given the fact that no parent or guardian has completed the college process, there are many areas that the parent or guardian cannot aid their student with simply because there is no personal frame of reference or experience, thus creating some barriers and challenges to first-generation students that their peers with parents who went to college might not face.

Research has shown that first-generation college students are more likely to hold part-time jobs, take fewer credits, and have lower cumulative grade point averages than students whose parents graduated from college (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Additionally, first-generation college students have lower graduation rates than students who have had parents/guardians that have graduated from college (Pascarella, et al., 2004). It is not because first-generation students are not as smart or capable as their peers, rather they are most likely unaware of the appropriate resources available to them to aid in their success. For instance, if a student is not properly advised on the classes needed for their major and/or to graduate, it is possible that the student could be a semester or year behind, which could lead to an increase in unforeseen education costs.

Students are more successful in college when they are more involved (Astin, 1993). Whether it be holding a part-time job, commuting to campus, or not knowing where to start, research has indicated that first-generation college students are less involved in extracurricular activities and have less outside of class interactions with peers (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Here at Stony Brook University there are almost 350 recognized student clubs and organizations. Check out SB Life (<https://stonybrook.collegiatelink.net/>) for a full listing. Also, at the beginning of each semester there is an involvement fair where students can interact with all the clubs and organizations on campus to see what they are doing and how students can become involved.

Are you a first-generation college student? Want to know what other first-generation students say about their experience here at Stony Brook? Check out the video below!



References:

Astin, A. W. (1993). What matters in college? Four critical years revisited. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Choy, S. (2001). Students whose parents did not go to college. Postsecondary access, persistence, and attainment (NCES Statistical Report 2001-126). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics.

Pascarella, E. T., Pierson, C. T., Wolniak, G. C., & Terenzini, P. T. (2004). First-generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes. *Journal of Higher Education*, 75(3), 249