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The First-Generation Latinx Experience and How Families Hold the Key to Retention

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**The First-
Generation
Latinx
Experience
and How
Families Hold
the Key to
Retention**

STATS ON FIRST-GEN STUDENTS

- Latinos are the **largest minority ethnic group** nationwide with the highest rate of undergraduate enrollment.
- **48% of Hispanic/LatinX** students are first-generation compared to 28% of white students. (PNPI**)
- According to a 2018 Department of Education study, **1/3 of First-Generation students drop out of college**, mostly between the first and second year.
- **Only 11% of low-income, First-Generation college students will have a college degree within six years of enrolling in school.** (PNPI**)

QUESTIONS WE NEED TO ANSWER

1. What challenges do First-Generation college students face that cause attrition?
1. What are the *unique* challenges for Latinx First-Gens?
1. What resources or initiatives can help surmount these challenges to help students persist to graduation?

UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Individualism stresses individual goals and the rights of the individual person.

Collectivism focuses on group goals, what is best for the collective group, and personal relationships.

LATINX CULTURES

COLLECTIVISM

Value:

- Group harmony.
- Interdependence
- Emotional attachment within family
- Family support, honor, obligation regardless of socioeconomic status.
- Family ranked above friends, religion and money
- Students spend more time with extended family
- Tutor younger siblings

LATINX FAMILIES

FAMILY INTERDEPENDENCE

- Connectedness
- Honor/Obligation
- Subjugate individual needs to the family
- Want to please the family.
- Especially strong in immigrant families.

LATINX FAMILIES

FAMILY INTERDEPENDENCE

- **Positive Aspects:**

- Families provide modeling – they see parents struggle. They want to do better.
- Families offer emotional support and advice.

- **Negative Aspects:**

- Families interferes with social and academic integration.
- Latinos from immigrant families are less likely to go to college, they live at home and work to support their families.

CHALLENGES FOR FIRST GENS

1. FINANCIAL (for parents and students)

- Do not understand how to apply for student loans or scholarships.
- Struggle to pay tuition
- Work long hours (affects grades and campus engagement)
- Some students have children to support
- Students unable to take unpaid internships that could lead to a more fulfilling career
- Students commute to save money (less engaged with campus life)
- Parents lack the social capital to understand the value of students committing to academics and campus life

CHALLENGES FOR FIRST GENS

2. UNPREPARED FOR COLLEGE

- Many come from poor performing high schools
- Many come from homes where English is not spoken
- No one to tell them how to navigate college life and academics.
- Lack of guidance towards majors and careers

CHALLENGES FOR FIRST GENS

3. LACK OF MENTORS

- 85% of jobs are found through networking.
- First Gens lack the social capital – and built-in network
- Lack role models
- Lack guidance towards majors and careers

CHALLENGES FOR FIRST GENS

4. FAMILY RELATED ISSUES

- Identity issues (When family is uneducated, you feel different, you ask, “who am I?” If you distance yourself you suffer from familial guilt. Leads to a sense of not belonging in either world.
- Imposter Syndrome (individuals doubt their accomplishments and they have a fear of being exposed as a fraud) – leads to low self-esteem.
- Students feel guilty about spending family money especially if it is limited.
- Students have pressure to do well. (Leads to Stress, anxiety and depression)
- Students often give up highly selective colleges to attend community colleges because they are close to home. High attrition at these colleges.

HOW TO HELP LATINX STUDENTS PERSIST TO GRADUATION?

UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES MUST WORK WITH

FAMILIES

WAYS COLLEGES/UNIVERSITIES ARE WORKING ON FIRST GEN RETENTION

- **Creating offices specifically focused on First-Generation students.**
- **Creating First-Gen clubs/peer groups / communities.**
- **Implementing Bridge programs – like Equal Opportunity Scholars.**
- **Monitoring grades (Beacon Alerts) and offering tutoring.**

Colleges that understand the crucial role of families and what they are doing to help student retention.

- 1. **THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO**
- Offers parents' orientation in addition to student orientation.
- Staff members provide families with detailed information—in Spanish and English—about the university's programs and expectations. The goal is to help family members support students in ways that go beyond providing financial help.
- The orientation session explains how the college experience differs from high school, and provides information about financial aid and academic and other support services available to students.

Colleges that understand the crucial role of families:

• 2. ELIZABETHTOWN COLLEGE IN PENNSYLVANIA

- Offers a 7-week interactive online video course for parents of freshman students (an extension of the school's freshman orientation.)
- Includes what to expect from campus life and how parents can talk to their children about their studies, financial situations and social lives.
- Over 200 parents enrolled – they could learn about tuition, campus services, midterms and finals when students are under the most stress.
- One video addresses separation anxiety.
- The difference between college and high school.
- Academic counseling

Colleges that understand the crucial role of families:

- **3. VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY**

- Since 2014 they also offers online video courses for parents.
- Starting in 2019, they host meetings over Zoom exclusively for First-Generation parents.

- **4. UCLA**

- Office for First-Generation students is working closely with parent and family programs.
- One example is that they opened a new residential floor specifically for first-generation students. When students move in, parents attend a reception with translators to answer any of their questions.

Colleges that understand the crucial role of families:

• 5. UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

- They have an EOS program that includes orientation for parents, receptions, one-one sessions with advisors which also offers insight into the student, and parent newsletters
- They conduct role playing scenarios with parents to teach them how to support their children. For example the faculty members give them a phone example – A student calls to say they did poorly on an exam. 1. One parent says they should come home and go to community college. 2. Second parent says they will call the professor and take care of it. 3. Third parent asks questions and tells the student to talk to the professor to find ways to do better in the next test. It teaches parents how to have a positive impact on their children's college experience.
- This program has a 95% first to second year retention rate.

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