

Resilience and Variation among First-Gen Students during COVID-19

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2020 Study of the Impact of COVID-19 on First-Gen College Students' Persistence in College

- **National study**
 - 5 universities
 - Public, private, HBCU, minority serving, and predominantly white settings
 - Good representation of low income and ethnic/racial minorities
- **Survey** regarding perceived barriers to college persistence
 - Retrospective perspectives of before and after pandemic started
 - Academic, Financial, Familial, Institutional, and Personal (mental/physical health) Barriers
 - Room for open-ended comments
- **Today**, focusing on perceived barriers after pandemic started, and *how the perception of barriers is influenced by race/ethnicity, income and gender—*
Do ALL FGCS experience the challenges of the pandemic in the same way?

Our research, and others' research, on the impact of COVID-19 on college students tells us:

- **Low income** students financially vulnerable in face of job insecurity and increased familial responsibilities
 - increased stress, anxiety, depression
 - food and housing insecurity
 - digital challenges undermining digital performance in classes
 - impaired academic performance
- **Ethnic and racial minorities** may suffer from a “cultural mismatch” between their family’s values of interdependence and academic values of “soft independence”
 - greater challenges to find and/or utilize help resources
 - undermining of comfort and belonging at college
 - greater challenge with academic tasks

Women

- disproportionately shouldering increased family, childcare, and homeschooling responsibilities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Increased stress and anxiety, worry, depression, disruptions
- But also increased resilience and adaptability

How do these different influences affect how FGCS respond to the challenges of the pandemic?

Academic Barriers

My grades are lower than expected

I have poor study habits

I am not concerned about my academic eligibility

I feel prepared for college

I like school

I have a great study environment

Lower income FGCS and **women** significantly more challenged academically during pandemic than higher income FGCS

Race doesn't affect how academic barriers are perceived

Financial Barriers

I will have enough funds for college next year
I am concerned about having enough funds to complete college
I am unable to borrow money for college

Lower income FGCS and women significantly more challenged financially during pandemic than higher income FGCS and men

Race doesn't affect how financial barriers are perceived

Institutional Barriers

At my university, I face inequalities because of my race

At my university, I face inequalities because of my proficiency in English

At my university, I face inequalities because of my social class

I have access to resources that will help me excel in school

On average my professors are knowledgeable in their field

Lower income FGCS and

Underrepresented Minorities

significantly more challenged by institutional barriers during pandemic than higher income FGCS

Gender doesn't affect how institutional barriers are perceived

Personal Barriers (Mental/Physical Health)

I have personal health problems not related to COVID-19
I have a mental health condition not related to COVID-19
I struggle with low self-esteem
I am experiencing loneliness
I miss my friends from college
I am homesick
I feel overwhelmed
I struggle with adjusting to college

Mental Health Issues during
COVID-19 exacerbated for FGCS
by
Lower Income
URM status (race/ethnicity)
Women

Family Barriers

My family obligations make it difficult to attend college

An immediate family member has a physical health problem not related to COVID-19

An immediate family member has a mental health problem not related to COVID-19

I am emotionally close to my family

I am physically close to my family

Family Barriers during COVID-19 exacerbated for WOMEN

Race and Social Class don't affect how family barriers are perceived

Summary

Not all FGCS' college education has been impacted in the same way by COVID-19

- **Academic and Financial Barriers during COVID-19** impacted most: **women** and **lower income** FGCS.
- **Institutional Barriers during COVID-19** impacted most: **URM** (under-represented minorities) and **lower income** FGCS.
- **Personal (mental/physical health) Barriers during COVID-19** impacted most: **URM** (under-represented minorities), **lower income** and **women** FGCS.
- **Family Barriers during COVID-19** impacted most: **women** FGCS.

In other words:

- **Lower income FGCS** were most vulnerable during COVID-19 to financial issues, mental health issues, academic issues, and institutional issues.
- **URM FGCS** were most vulnerable during COVID-19 to mental health issues and institutional issues.
- **Women FGCS** were most vulnerable during COVID-19 to mental health issues, family issues, financial issues and academic issues.

YOUR TURN

❖ Did **you** experience or witness any of these challenges getting harder to handle during the pandemic for FGCS at Rowan?

❖ Did **you** experience or witness that some of these challenges were exacerbated by lower income, URM status or by being a woman?

❖ **The impact of the pandemic is likely to be around long-term.**

How do you think **Rowan** could ease the impact of the pandemic

➤ For FGCS?

➤ For lower income FGCS?

➤ For FGCS of color?

➤ For women FGCS?

Adaptable services for pandemic situation (and its aftermath)

- Himmelgreen and Stern (2021) suggest
 - **Outreach and virtual services** needed for academic, social and mental health support
 - **Cooperation with local nonprofit food pantries** for students not on campus
 - **Virtual/socially distant structured interpersonal interaction** between students, especially those financially insecure with food and housing insecurities

How can FGCS be better supported during this pandemic and its aftermath? *(FGCS, in their own words)*

- Academically:
 - *Encourage professors to lessen the workload when conducting online classes.*
 - *Let students have the choice of being online*
 - *Allow old editions of a textbook and allow other options aside from requiring to have a learning software that costs a lot of money.*
- Financially:
 - *The University should financially support those students and people that step up to help them do better.*
 - *...by giving more funds to students who need them, funds that are NOT loans that need to be paid back*
 - *Health professionals need to be better at understanding needs of low income students specifically in regard to food and housing instability.*
 - *Quicker disbursement of financial aid, easier access to resources*

- Institutionally:

- *The University should turn its critical eye inward and reflect on how the issues of our larger society are reflected in their practices.*
- *...begin confronting the history of white supremacy and racism that continues to run rampant on the campus today.*
- *University administration also needs to make more of an effort to actually listen to the needs and wants of their students, learning that a student of color does not experience college life in the same way a white student does.*
- *Stop treating the students as problems.*
- *Better wifi and better food*

- **Family:**
 - *More resources for older students over 25, who juggle family and other responsibilities*
 - *Acknowledgement that the student body is diverse in age and responsibility during this difficult time (and all other times).*
- **Mental health:**
 - *Provide mental health resources, tips on how to destress, relax, and deal with a pandemic aside with all the issues going on in the world (especially to people of color).*
 - *Make mental health resources ... more advertised/more accessible*
 - *Provide more [non-academic] resources...for example, stress-free activities and mental health services*
 - *Create a therapy system that students can actually rely on long-term*
 - *Wellness days*
 - *Offer more counseling services, hire a black male counselor and an Asian counselor for starters. Fund the offices that work to make it a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive space, including hiring a full-time assistant for the Multicultural Student Services.*