

## Exploring the Expectations and Experience Gap in the First College Year: How do First-Generation Students Fare?

31<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference on the First Year Experience, Feb 2012

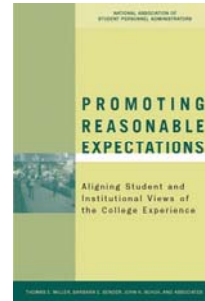


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## Expectations Matter



**Consequences for unmet expectations are high. Disappointed students fail to optimize their college experience, leave institutions, and sometimes abandon higher education all together.**

Miller, T., Bender, B., Schuh, J., & Associates (2005). *Promoting Reasonable Expectations: Aligning Student and Institutional Views of the College Experience*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

## Expectations and Student Success

**Students set in place in their first semester of college patterns that will serve them across their years in college.** Schilling & Schilling (2004), in *Challenging and Supporting the First-Year Student*

**Institutions must:**

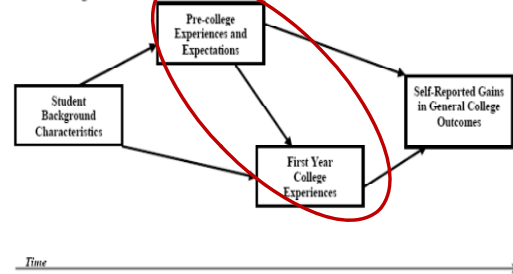
- explore students' expectations
- focus more on *communicating* expectations of students than on meeting student expectations

Miller, T., Bender, B., Schuh, J., & Associates (2005)

## Conceptual Model: Expectations and Experiences



Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Relationships between Student Background Characteristics, Pre-college Academic Experiences and Expectations, College Experiences, and Self-Reported Gains in Selected College Outcomes during the First Year of College



## Student Engagement Expectations & Experiences in the First Year of College



## Expectations: BCSSE

–BCSSE designed for **entering first-year students** as a companion to NSSE

–Measures:

- **pre-college** academic and co-curricular experiences
- **expectations** for educationally purposeful activities during college



## BCSSE Instrument

- Launched in 2007 after three pilots
- Provides information about incoming students' experiences and expectations
- Pair with NSSE administration to examine gap between expectations and engagement

2012 Registration Open NOW!!!

## Experiences: NSSE

- Research based on effective educational practices
- Designed and tested for validity & reliability
- Stable over time
- High credibility of self-reported data
- Over 275,000 students at 600+ institutions annually

## Expectations & Experiences: BCSSE-NSSE

Many BCSSE questions match NSSE

## BCSSE-NSSE shared items

- Hours: Preparing for class (studying); Working for pay (on & off campus); Participating in co-curriculars; Relaxing, socializing
- Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
- Made a class presentation
- Discussed grades with faculty
- Worked with other students on projects during class
- Worked with classmates outside of class on assignments
- Discussed ideas from readings/classes with faculty outside class
- Discussed ideas from readings/classes with others
- Received prompt feedback on your academic performance
- Worked with faculty outside coursework (committees, student life, etc.)
- Serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity and those who differ from you - religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values
- Paper project requires integration
- Put ideas together
- Tried to better understand others' view
- Learn something that changed

## Expectations for Studying

1. What percent of entering students expect to study, on average, more than 15 hours per week?

(a) 29% (b) 38% (c) 46% (d) 60%

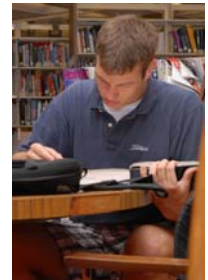
d. 60% BCSSE

What percent actually do this in their first year?

**41%**

## Worrisome Gap? Time spent studying

- First-year students average about 13-14 hrs. per week studying
- 60% of entering students expected to spend more than 15 hrs per week preparing for class
- Entering first-year students EXPECT to study more than they actually do in college





## Do Students Experience High-Impact Practices To the Extent they Expect?

# Nope.

In fact, High-Impact Practices Only Reach A Fraction of Students.

*Variation by First-generation, racial-ethnic, and major*

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## Inventory Interest in HIPs



- Tulane's NSSE FY "expect to do" results showed high levels of interest in 3 HIPs: Internships (71%), Undergraduate Research (44%), Study Abroad (62%)
- Used results to make the case to expand opportunity
- Created Center for Engaged Learning & Teaching to foster HIPs



## Overall: Student Engagement Expectations-Experience Gap

- Less than a quarter of FY students report experiences that are **HIGHER** than they expected
- About 30% experiences **MATCH** expectations
- The majority (45-60% of FY students) report experiences that are **LOWER** than what they expected

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## To Ponder...

- What's your response to the mismatch?
- What does this suggest for FYE?



## First Generation Student Concern

For most of the 4.5 million low-income, first-generation students enrolled in postsecondary education today (approximately 24% of the undergraduate population), the path to the bachelor's degree will be long, indirect, and uncertain.



– Engle & Tinto, 2008

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## Defining First-Generation Students

**NSSE & BCSSE definition: No parent or guardian having graduated with a 4-year college degree**

consistent with US Dept of Ed definition – neither parent has earned a BA degree, but may have some post-secondary education



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## First-Gen Students Entering Disposition

- Parent encouragement to go to college high, double since 1971
- Reason to go to college “to make more money” 77% first-gen vs. 70% non-FG; being “well-off” more important to FG
- FG lower self-rating on leadership ability, self-efficacy is an issue for most FG students (beliefs about their abilities)



Source: CIRP, 40 years of trend data

## First-Gen HS Experience

What % of beginning college students spent 5 hrs. or less per week studying in HS?

- a) 20%   **b) 36%**   c) 45%   d) 58%

**b) 36% Do FGs study more or less?**

**Less.** 43% vs. 33% non-FG

**FG expect to work for pay in college; 51% work 10+ hrs, vs. 34% non-FG**



Source: BCSSE overall results 2011

## First-Gen HS Experience

- First-Gens study less, and work for pay more, than non-FGs
- FGs have significantly *lower* perceptions of their academic preparation, and lower expectations to persevere in face of academic difficulty vs. non-FGs



Source: BCSSE overall results 2011

## Expectation/Experience Gap Comparing FG to Non-FG

- First-Gen and Non First Gen mostly similar

- Differed on the following:

+ FG more than non-FG  
- FG less than non-FG

Item	Expect	Exp
Make class presentation	+	+
Work with peers during class	+	+
Discuss grades/assgn w/ fac	+	=
Discuss ideas w/ others outside class	-	-

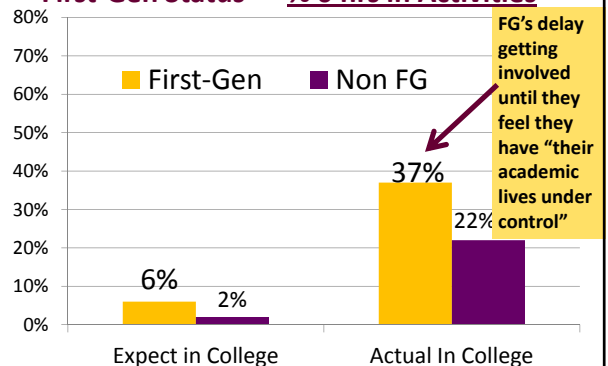
## First Gen and the College Experience

- First-generation students spend less time in co-curricular activities (such as campus organizations or publications, student government, etc.).



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## Co-curricular Involvement FY Students First-Gen Status – “% 0 hrs in Activities”



## First-Gen Student Educational Experiences and Expectations

- Which enriching experiences are First-Gen students *less likely* to have **done** in their first year or “plan to do” than non-FGs?
  - Learning community (done)
  - Service-Learning, and community service (done)
  - Attend art exhibit, play, dance, music, theater, or other performance
  - Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op
  - Study Abroad
  - Undergraduate Research



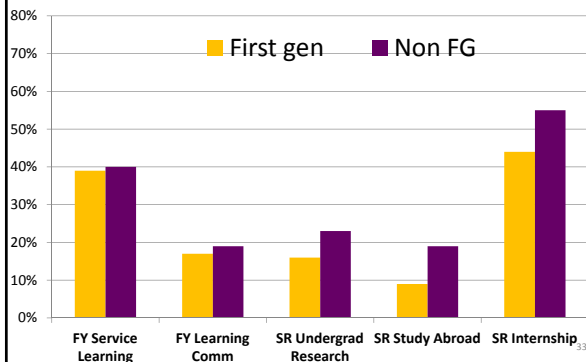
## First-Gen vs. Non-FGs



- **FG Less Likely:**
  - Undergraduate Research
  - Study Abroad
  - Attend an art exhibit, play, dance, music, theater, or other performance
- **FG Equally Likely:**
  - Participate in a learning community
  - Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment
  - Service-Learning, Community service

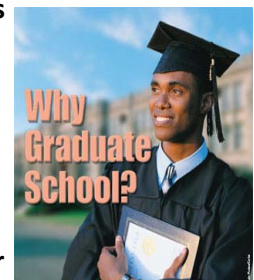
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## Percentage First-Gen vs. Non First-Gen: High-Impact Practice Experiences



## Advanced Education Aspirations

- FG have lower aspirations for advanced degrees from the outset
- FG students made significantly smaller increases in the highest degree they planned to obtain than Non-FGs over their years in college



Source: Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004

## What to Do?

- *Colleges and universities, for all the benefits they bring, accomplish far less for their students than they should.* -- Derek Bok
- *The first year presents a unique opportunity to engage students in the habits of learning.* -- John Gardner



## Responses to Minding the Gap

1. Increase institutional fit. (*what about students with limited college choice?*).
2. Institution must adjust, better meet expectations.
3. Be mindful of how expectations shape behavior, find ways to learn about students' expectations, articulate expectations for students.
4. *What else?*

## Effective Practices for First-Gen, Students

- Strategies that work to support first-generation students are successful for the general population as well (however, the reverse is not always true).
- Must tailor and target practices for first-generation students
- Develop FG responsive pedagogy, practices



## Affirm First-Generation Status, Dedicate Resources



THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA at CHAPEL HILL

Nearly 20% of undergraduates at UNC-Chapel Hill are first generation college students. We proudly call our first generation college students "Carolina Firsts." View the videos below to learn about the stories of Carolina First students, faculty and staff...



<http://firstgeneration.unc.edu/facultystaff/>

## Mentoring



- FG paired with trained mentor who facilitates integrated support for academic, career, and personal growth.
- Mentor serves as a student's point person.
- Meetings with mentors include discussions on academic progress, self-management, character development, career exploration, mock interviews, internships, and networking.

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## Culture of Academic Success & Support

- Communicate high expectations for success
- Teach students how to "do the college student role" – be more explicit about how to study, assignments, office hours...(Collier & Morgan, 2008)
- Faculty should motivate students to aspire to high academic standards through feedback about their academic performance, and do so sensitively, such that students do not become discouraged

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## Facilitate Peer Support

- Leverage the power of peers
- Link peers to FY seminars, advising programs, gateway courses, formal & informal mentoring, tutoring...Peer mentors can be older, first-generation students



University of St. Francis (IL) University Success Scholars Program (USSP) – first generation summer academy, peer mentoring, leadership institute

## Historically underrepresented students benefit substantially from High-Impact Practices

- *Must introduce HIPs early and often -- get experience on students radar*
- *Explore students' assumptions about practices (who participates, cost, demands, etc.) – debunk myths*
- *Expose students to "mini-HIPs" (short term study abroad, research in a course)*

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## First Generation Student Success

- College is within reach of virtually all students, but not all are equally likely to succeed.
- Institutions can't change the lineage of its students – but can implement interventions that increase the odds that first-generation students get in, get the most out of the experience, and get through.



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## Discussion and Comments

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