

Shattering The Glass Ceiling: Meeting the Challenges First Generation College Students Face

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Abstract

My proposal focuses on bringing awareness to the various challenges and issues that many first generation college students face in their everyday lives. My proposal takes part in a larger conversation about how the challenges that first generation college students encounter can be linked to mental health issues, poor academic performance, and poor socializing skills. I have researched this topic by exploring many sources about authors who have performed studies and surveys in universities and colleges. Many studies and sources (Goldman, White, Potter, and Kalkbrenner) support and verify the accurateness of my thesis. However, there has been a gap in the literature in regards to informing others about the many issues FGCS face. By surveying the Nicholls State University community I will enact my project by proposing to survey both first generation and non first generation college students about their college experiences and also faculty and staff to see how informed they are about the first generation college students population on this campus. With all of this, I hope to educate non first generation college students and faculty and staff at universities about the many obstacles first generation college students face and all of the effects of those issues. Through my work, I hope that more courtesy and sympathy arises for first generation college students and that methods and ways on how to minimize these issues will become commonplace, making this issue nonexistent for generations to come. The status of being a first generation college student should not affect how a student feels emotionally, mentally, and physically throughout their college experience.



Kaczor, G. (2017). *Gwenda Kaczor For The Chronicle [Digital Art]*. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/closing-the-gap-for-first-generation-students/>

Literature Review

Researchers such as Goldman, White, and Potter have approached this topic by further studying how some of the struggles and challenges that first generation college students encounter can be linked to poor academics, mental health issues, and poor social adjustment. Many different authors such as Kalkbrenner, Manzoni, and Schwartz have further researched this topic and tried exploring ways to help in minimizing them. There have been multiple studies and surveys presented to prove how these challenges can affect the career path of a first generation college student.

- Researcher Goldman (2021) proposes in his study that many FGCS miss out on so many things throughout their college experience because of the burden that their status holds. This one factor can affect a student's social adjustment and skills in college and even after graduating and entering the real world.
- Potter (2020) points out in his source that "both financial anxiety and first generation student status have been linked to negative academic outcomes, mental health issues, and poor social adjustment among college students" (Para.1). If a FGCS comes from a family whose economic background is poor and not as wealthy, they may have to work a job or two despite being a full time student. This can often cause a student to lose focus from their school work which can result in poor academic performance.
- Researcher White (2017) has also presented a study that "found that approximately 50% of students whose parents never attended college were from low income families" (Para. 5). It is often known that for students who do not have parents that can help them financially, it is a lot more difficult for them to get through college and actually earn a degree. Additionally White (2017) says that those FGCS "may have to work long hours to cover educational costs, or they may take out loans and feel pressure to finish college to pay back their debt" (Para. 5).
- Kalkbrenner (2021) mentioned in her article that "the lack of research supporting first generation college student mental health is troubling as mental wellness is an essential factor in students' well-being as well as their retention and completion rates" (Paragraph 2). A FGCS mental health is often overlooked and not really given the attention that it needs to be given.

Major takeaways: Being a first generation college student is linked to mental health issues, poor academic performance, and poor socializing skills.

Study Participants

"For me, being a first generation college student means that I have beat the odds while being able to pursue my goals, make my parents proud, and set an example for my younger brother."

Sierra Allemand



"Some challenges that I face as a first gen college student are things like my parents not being able to help me with homework, them not knowing the whole financial aid process and the urgency of getting it completed early. Being a FGCS feels good, definitely with setting the standards for those who are younger in my family."

Lance Jones

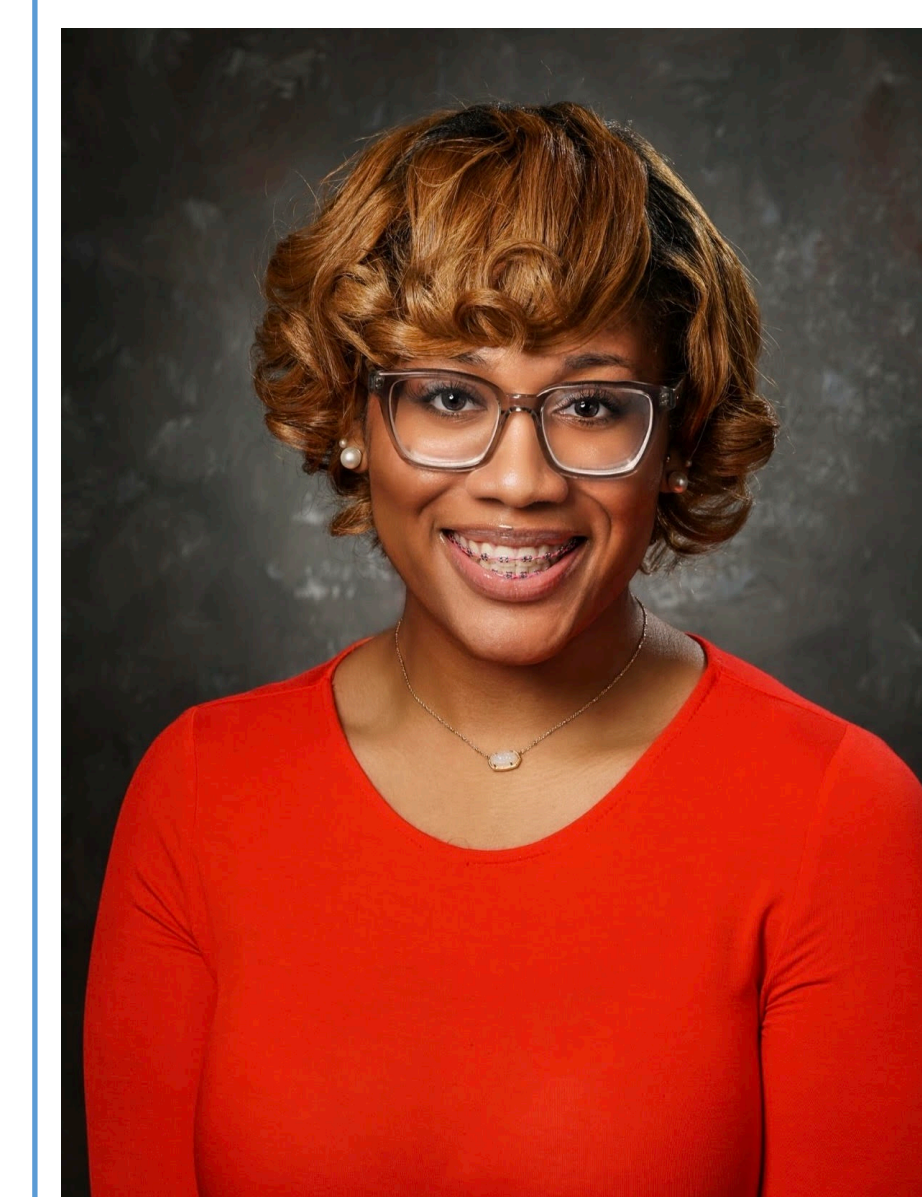
"Being a first generation college student is one of my greatest achievements of my academic career so far. It's humbling to know I stand on the shoulders of my parents who tried their very best to build a firm foundation for my future. Education is truly the great equalizer and as a FGCS I feel like I now have an easier way to build a career."

Jax Badeaux



"Being a first generation college student, means that I have to go hard to be the best I can aspire to be. It means that I set the goals and am the role model for for my siblings and younger cousins. Some issues I face are not really knowing how to explain certain college situations to my family or not being able to apply for certain scholarships because of my status."

Le'Mon Smith



Future Directions for Research

In future, I hope to propose a survey at Nicholls State University. Both first generation college students and non first gen students and faculty and staff will participate. With this we will get information about their college experiences with their own status of either being a FGCS or not and also know how informed the faculty and staff is about this population on campus. I hope to spread awareness of the many issues and challenges many first generation college students face. I hope to educate non first generation college students and faculty and staff at universities specifically. With this, I hope to eventually minimize the existence of these issues making them nonexistent for many generations to come.

Works Cited

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