First-Generation Students


This article from Collier and Morgan discusses a study conducted at Portland State University. During focus group interviews, faculty expressed concerns about students failing to understand their expectations of finding appropriate sources for research papers, committing out of class time to homework, and students’ failure to communicate problems they encountered. The first-generation students in the study reported time management issues and wanting more detailed assignments compared to traditional students. The authors present valuable information that shows the difference between how traditional and non-traditional students view and deal with basic expectations of faculty.


Davis’ book provides a great overview of first-generation students and it will be useful to librarians beginning to work with this population group. Chapter 4, “In their Own Words” is a collection of narratives of first-generation students that provide wonderful insight into the thoughts and feelings of students.


This study will be very informative for instruction librarians working at a higher education institution that serves low-income, first-generation college students. The report is full of statistics, demographic information, risk factors, and financial constraints of these students. Of particular interest will be the chapters about promoting success, recommendations and list of references. Although this report does not focus on library instruction, the data contained in the report will be useful in helping instruction librarians understand their patrons.


The author offers a deep understanding of the overall higher education experience by first-generation students. Divided into three parts, this book relies on data from a study that began in fall 2001. Jehangir explores the experiences of first-generation students, their isolation and marginalization during college and participation in a multi-cultural learning community. One of the most interesting elements of the book is the author includes parts of her interviews with first-generation students.
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This case study examines a “small, liberal arts college in Southern California with a predominant Latina population who are first generation college students.” Razafar found the use of technology helped the students think more critically about course material, encouraged peer-to-peer interaction and helped them “communicate their ideas more effectively in writing.” This article provides a great example of how to effectively integrate technology into an instruction setting to enrich the educational experience of first-generation students.

Tyckoson describes the characteristics of first-generation college students and trends in their enrollment in higher education, as well as retention, class, culture, and family issues characteristic of their experiences. Libraries can better serve first-generation students by identifying them, scheduling instruction sessions for evenings and weekends, creating library assignments that do not presume a common “collegiate” experience, providing family-friendly settings, offering personalized research services, encouraging peer mentoring, and becoming part of campus first-year experience courses.

In her article, Wang advocates for out-of-class communication and out-of-class support for first-generation students to build mentoring relationships. Wang interviewed 30 first-generation students who had mentors in college and found the long-lasting message from their mentors shared the themes of pursuing academic success, valuing school, increasing future potential, making decisions and support and encouragement. This article provides great insight into the messages that first-generation students remember.