

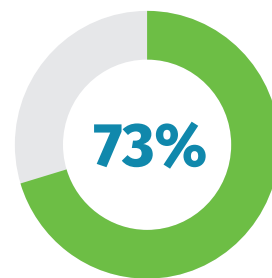
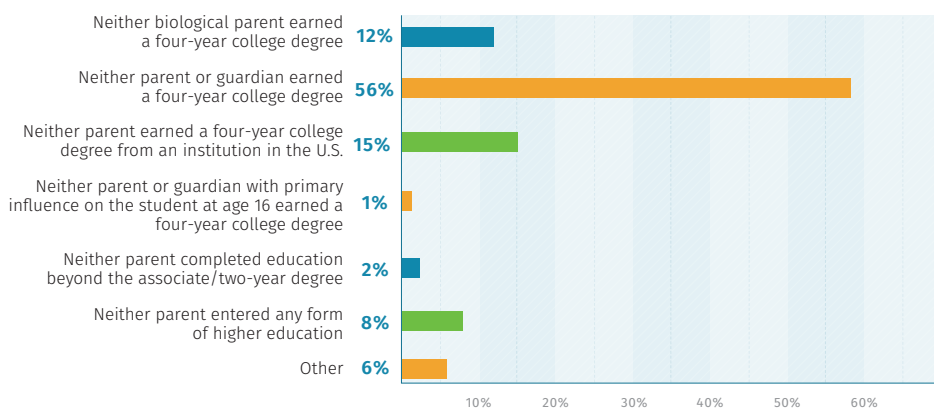
UNDERSTANDING THE FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT IDENTITY

First-generation students make up a third of all college students¹, but only 27% will attain their degrees within four years. For four-year institutions to drive systemic change that improves student success and completion, they must first understand the first-generation student identity.



DEFINING FIRST-GENERATION

Who is a first-generation student? Being aligned on this definition is just as important as providing offerings as it affects eligibility for services, drives decision-making, impacts data collection, and tracks efficacy.



Percentage of surveyed institutions with a formal definition of first-generation yet, this does not indicate this definition is being used consistently across programs and services; an important consideration.



INTERSECTIONALITY — OR “FIRST-GENERATION PLUS”

While the “First-generation Plus” identity can increase campus-wide engagement, it can also unintentionally lead to gaps in service provision. Intersectional identity often drives where support programs are located, and given the diverse nature of first-generation students, it’s important to consider whether those resources are appropriately placed.

STUDENTS MAY BE

- First-generation
- First-generation + minority
- First-generation + LGBTQI
- First-generation + low income...
- or a host of other identities important for consideration.



SHIFTING FROM A DEFICIT TO ASSET-BASED LENS

Often, the challenges that first-generation students face are erroneously perceived as inherent shortcomings. Institutions are uniquely placed to shift this negative narrative to an asset-based lens that celebrates the unique strengths of these students and encourages them to use their talents to enhance the college experience.

“We need to help first-generation students understand the assets they bring to the academy, their job, and society so that they can begin to see that being an outsider is an asset.”

William Durden,
President Emeritus, Dickinson College

Visit firstgen.naspa.org to download our Landscape Analysis of First-generation Programs and Services at Four-Year Institutions.

¹ Cataldi, Bennett, & Chen, 2018; Skomsvold, 2015