Academic Characteristics among First-Generation and Non-First-Generation College Students

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Abstract

The present study involved a sample (n = 203) of college students and investigated the differences in academic expectations of first-generation and non-first-generation undergraduates who attended a doctoral-granting public four-year historically Black university on the eastern shore of Maryland. There were 133 first-generation and 70 non-first-generation students. This study focused on the expressed needs of first-generation and non-first-generation college students to determine whether differences exist in academic expectations. In addition, this study sought to lead to an increase in the understanding of the academic expectations shared by first-year first-generation and non-first-generation college students.

This study used an ex post facto design with a population of students who were enrolled in a Developmental Psychology, Abnormal Psychology or Introduction to Psychology course. The data were analyzed to assess the academic expectations that describe first-generation and non-first-generation students. This study, in spite of its limitations, has added to the body of existing literature supporting the academic expectations examined. Students who had parents with no college experience, students who had parents with some college experience, and students who had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree were similar. However, they differed significantly regarding transferring to another institution before graduating and socializing with friends who are students at their institution. Students whose parents had no college experience were more likely to expect to stay at their institution until graduation instead of transferring and were more likely to expect to spend less time socializing with friends than other students. Administrators and student affairs professionals could consider these findings when recruiting, admitting, and retaining students. Programs could be developed which address students' needs relative to their collegiate experience.

Introduction

The United States has one of the most diverse higher education systems in the world. There are several types of institutions geared towards providing access to a diverse group of people who need and desire different things from a college or university. Access, however, does not always equal success. For example, there are many students who begin college but do not attain a degree (Choy, 2002). Factors that have been shown to affect completion rate are students' race and ethnicity as well as first-generation status (Richardson &

Skinner, 1992; Choy, 2002). Swail, Redd and Perna (2003) asserted that "although gaps will always exist in who goes to college and who ultimately succeeds, it still holds true that education has the greatest potential to benefit all" (p. 5).

A large number of the students enrolling in college in the twenty-first century are first-generation college students, and they bring unique challenges to college. During the first semester of college, first-generation students have a higher risk of dropping out and not returning for the second year (Inman & Mayes, 1999; Riehl, 1994). Studies have shown that first-generation students have poor pre-college preparation, lower career aspirations, lack of family support, lack of faculty and peer support, fear of the college environment, and poor study skills or habits (Billson & Terry, 1982; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991; Riehl, 1994; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000). These factors inhibit the success of first-generation students and decrease their rates of attaining a degree (Billson & Terry, 1982; National Center of Education Statistics [NCES], 2001). As with all students, it is imperative that first-generation students receive appropriate support in and out of the classroom in order to navigate successfully the educational pathway.

The present study involved a sample (n = 203) of college students and investigated the differences in academic expectations of first-generation and non-first-generation undergraduates who attended a doctoral-granting public four-year university. Previous studies have indicated that first-generation college students represent a unique demographic group and that their level of commitment and attitudes toward achieving a college degree are different from students whose parents have attended college. Because previous research studies provided contradictory evidence on the actual academic performance of first-generation college students, there was no clear indication how they would perform academically when compared to students whose parents had attended college. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine the differences in academic expectations of first-generation and non-first-generation undergraduates who attend a doctoral-granting public four-year university.

Academic Preparation

Research has found that first-generation students are less prepared academically and are unable to perform at the higher levels required in college (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991; Hsaio, 1992; Riehl, 1994; Education Resources Institute & Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1997; Chaney, Muraskin, Cahalan, & Goodwin, 1998). First-generation students are less likely to have taken college entrance exams such as the SAT and ACT (Warburton, Burgarin, Nunez & Carroll, 2001). First-generation students took fewer academic hours than non-first-generation students and took less challenging courses (Warburton et al., 2001). However, first-generation students who followed rigorous high school coursework or who scored in the highest percentiles of their class showed little difference from their non-first-generation peers (Warburton et al.,

2001). First-generation students are more likely to have lower first-semester grades (Riehl, 1994) and lower first-year grade point averages than those whose parents attended college (Warburton et al., 2001). Terenzini et al. (1996) discovered that there were no differences between first-generation and non-first-generation gains in mathematics and critical thinking abilities. However, first-generation students made fewer gains in reading comprehension than their non-first-generation peers.

Terenzini et al. (1996) ascertained that first-generation students were likely to be more confident in their choice of a major field (although from simple t-test the means do not differ significantly). Still, first-generation students are at-risk of being academically, socially and economically left behind than non-first-generation students, even when their motivation and academic credentials are equal (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004).

Academic Integration

Academic integration is the formal and informal interaction with the academic systems of the university, including activities centered around classrooms and laboratories involving various faculty and staff (Tinto, 1993; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2004).

Nettles (1991) concluded that academic integration includes:

student's satisfaction with faculty relationships; their feelings that the faculty of the university are sensitive to the interests, needs, and aspirations of the students; the ease with which students feel they can develop close personal relationships with faculty members on campus; the perception of students that their faculty are good teachers; and the students' satisfaction with the quality of instruction at their university (p. 90).

In a study of American Indian students, those students who persisted had higher levels of interactions with faculty and staff (Brown and Robinson Kurpius, 1997). "Even among those who persist, wide-ranging contact with faculty is associated with heightened intellectual and social development" (Tinto, 1987, p. 66). In addition, the influence of academic integration on grades was much greater than the influence of entering ability for minority students (Eimers & Pike, 1997).

Academic incongruence, an individual's feeling that his or her interests mismatch those of the institution, can occur from several venues (Tinto, 1987). Academic boredom, or feeling that the intellectual life is not challenging enough, is one reason students withdraw from an institution (Tinto, 1993). Incongruence may also occur when the student's intellectual orientation does not fit that of the institution. For example, the day-to-day interactions with faculty, staff, and students may not have the positive outcome needed for a student to want to continue at an institution (Tinto, 1993). However, while contact with others does not guarantee persistence, "the absence of interaction almost always enhances the likelihood of departure" (Tinto, 1993, p. 117).

Terenzini et al. (1996) found that first-generation students were less likely to attend workshops and were less likely to see faculty as being concerned with student development and teaching. Large class sizes and lack of opportunity for faculty interaction provide a great risk for first-generation students who are often less prepared to cope with such challenges (Richardson & Skinner, 1992).

Methodology
Profile of Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 203 freshmen from a public four-year doctoral-granting historically Black university. There were seventy-three (35.6%) males and 130 (64.4%) females who participated in this study. The majority of freshmen surveyed for this study were African-American (84.4%); of the rest, 2.4% were Asian-American, 3.4% were Caucasian, 0.5% was Hispanic, and 9.3% of the freshmen identified themselves as "other." In total, 65.5% of students were first-generation compared with 34.5% non-first-generation. A first-generation student is defined as a student whose parents did not obtain a bachelor's degree. For this study, the students were divided into three groups based on their parent education status: two first-generation groups and one non-first-generation group. The two first-generation student groups are 1) those in which neither parent has any college experience and 2) those in which at least one parent has college experience, but no college degree. The third group of students is defined as non-first-generation students who have at least one parent who has obtained at least a bachelor's degree.

Nearly forty-four percent of the respondents' fathers had a high school diploma or less, while 39.3% of mothers had a high school diploma or less. Thirty-four percent (34.1%) of fathers and 32.4% of mothers were high school graduates; and 9.8% of fathers and 6.9% of mothers did not graduate from high school.

Students indicated that twenty percent of fathers and 18.1% of mothers had some college, but did not receive a degree. Eight percent of fathers and eighteen percent of mothers earned an associate's degree. Twelve percent (12.3%) of fathers and 16.7% of mothers earned a bachelor's degree. Advanced degrees were earned by 11.3% of fathers and 6.4% of mothers. Students who had parents with no college experience were more likely to come from families with lower household income than students with parents with some college experience and those with a bachelor's degree. Students who had a parent with a bachelor's degree tended to have higher household income than students whose parents had no college experience. A significant association was found between household income and parent education status ($X2 = 46.321$, df = 10, $p < .001$).

About forty-nine percent of students with household income level under $25,000 had parents with no college experience; seventeen percent (17.1%) of these students had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree. Fifteen (38.5%) students with household income of $25,000-$39,000 had parents with no college experience, 38.5% had parents with some college experience, and only twenty-three percent (23.1%) had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree. Of students

who indicated a household income level of $80,000-$99,999, only four percent had parents with no college experience. Twenty percent had parents with some college experience, and three-fourths (76.0%) had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree. Sixty-two percent (61.9%) of students with a household income of $100,000 or more had parents with a bachelor's degree, one-third (33.3%) had parents with some college, and 4.8% had parents with no college experience.

Instrument

The Student Information Questionnaire (SIQ) was developed by the Office of Strategic Planning, Institutional Research & Effectiveness at Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana. Dr. Terence Hicks, a research professor at Fayetteville State University, revised the instrument and surveyed undergraduates at a historically Black university on the eastern shore of Maryland.

The SIQ is a fifty-item questionnaire that includes demographic and background questions as well as Likert-type questions that examine college students' experiences in high school and expectations of college. The SIQ was used to determine differences in academic expectations of first-generation and non-first-generation college students. In this study, fifteen of the fifty items were examined to determine students' academic expectations of college. The items are listed in Table 1.

Table 1
List of Academic Expectations

Academic Expectations
Expectations about highest degree and most difficult academic area: 39. What is the highest degree you intend to earn? 40. Which academic area will be most difficult for you?
Expectations about time commitment in hours per week (Less than 1 hour to More than 20 hours) 41c. Studying, researching or doing homework on your own 41d. Meeting with professors or instructors to discuss or prepare for class 41e. Meeting with other students to discuss or prepare for class
Expectations of college helping to improve abilities in certain areas (Strongly agree to Strongly disagree) 42a. Find new ways to think about problems or topics 42c. Effectively communicate my ideas in writing 42e. Organize, prioritize and plan my time
Chance that student would do the following (Very good chance to No chance [sic])

44b. Fail one or more classes
44c. Get tutoring help
44d. Need extra time to complete a degree
44e. Graduate with honors
44f. Transfer to another college before graduating
44g. Drop out permanently (excluding transferring)

Expected grade point average

45. Using a 4-point scale (4=A, 3=B, 2=C, 1=D, 0=F), what do you predict your overall grade point average will be during your first year?

Data Analysis

Parent education status was used to determine first-generation status in this study. Parent education status was divided into three categories. First-generation students were divided into two categories:

1. students who had parents with no college experience and
2. students who had at least one parent with some college experience, but no college degree.

The non-first-generation student category consisted of students who had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree. The data were analyzed item by item by determining the number and percent of responses for each choice. This was done for first and non-first generation students using Chi-square analysis of SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). A comparison of the responses was made by academic items and by first-generation status.

Results

This section focuses on the fifteen academic expectations of college students, including their interactions with faculty, staff, and students. These expectations also include students' expectations regarding their thinking about academics, organization of time, academic performance and grades. An examination of parent education status was used to determine differences in academic expectations among students whose parents had no college experience, some college experience, or a bachelor's degree.

Academic Expectations about Highest Degree Intended

There was no significant association between highest degree intended and parent education status ($X2 = 5.146$, df = 6, p = .53) (see Table 2).

Table 2
Highest Degree Intended by Parent Education Status

	First-Generation		Non-First-Generation

Question	Neither Parent College Experience		At Least One Parent Some College Experience		At Least One Parent Bachelor's Degree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
39b. Highest degree intended						
a. Associate's degree or no degree	5	29.4%	5	29.4%	7	41.2
b. Bachelor's degree	9	25.0%	18	50.0%	9	25.0%
c. Master's degree	26	33.3%	25	32.1%	27	34.6%
d. Advanced degree (PhD, MD, JD)	16	23.5%	28	41.2%	24	35.3%
Total	56	28.1%	76	38.2%	67	33.7%

Academic Expectations about Most Difficult Academic Area

The results were similar for students' choice of the most difficult academic area they expected ($X2 = 7.637$, df = 12, p = .81) (see Table 3). For all first-generation and non-first-generation students the most difficult academic area was mathematics followed by the laboratory sciences such as biology, chemistry, and physics.

Table 3
Most Difficult Academic Area Expected by Parent Education Status

	First-Generation				Non-First-Generation		
	Neither Parent College Experience		At Least One Parent Some College Experience		At Least One Parent Bachelor's Degree		Total Number
40. Which academic area will be most difficult for you?	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Mathematics	20	27.8%	31	43.1%	21	29.2%	72
Lab science (biology, chemistry, physics)	13	24.1%	21	38.9%	20	37.0%	54
English	10	29.4%	10	29.4%	14	41.2%	34

composition						
Communication	4	26.7%	6	40.0%	5	33.3%	15
Social Sciences (economics, psychology, sociology, politics)	4	40.0%	2	20.0%	4	40.0%	10
Literary and artistic studies (art, music, lit)	2	22.2%	4	44.4%	3	33.3%	9
Multicultural studies	3	50.0%	3	50.0%	0	0.0%	6

Academic Expectations about Time Commitment

There were no significant associations between expectations about time commitment and parent education status. As shown in Table 4 results were similar for students with regard to expectations about studying, researching, and doing homework on their own. More students who had a parent with a bachelor's degree (45.0%) spent six hours or more meeting with professors or instructors to discuss or prepare for class than did students who had parents with no college experience. There were few respondents for this choice, however. More students who had parents with some college experience (39.2%) and who had parents with a bachelor's degree (34.3%) met six hours or more with other students to discuss or prepare for class than students who had parents with no college experience (26.5%).

Table 4
Academic Expectations About Time Commitment by Parent Education Status

	First-Generation				Non-First-Generation	
	Neither Parent College Experience		At Least One Parent Some College Experience		At Least One Parent Bachelor's Degree	
Question	N	%	N	%	N	%
41c. Studying, researching, or doing homework on your own						
a. 5 hours or fewer	23	23.5%	39	39.8%	36	36.7%
b. 6 hours or more	33	32.4%	37	36.3%	32	31.4%
Total	56	28.0%	76	38.0%	68	34.0%
$X2 = 1.994$, df = 2, p = .37						

41d. Meeting with professors or instructors to discuss or prepare for class						
a. 5 hours or fewer	50	27.8%	71	39.4%	59	32.8%
b. 6 hours or more	6	30.0%	5	25.0%	9	45.0%
Total	56	28.0%	76	38.0%	68	34.0%
X2 = 1.811, df = 2, p = .40						
41e. Meeting with other students to discuss or prepare for class						
a. 5 hours or fewer	44	26.5%	65	39.2%	57	34.3%
b. 6 hours or more	12	35.3%	12	35.3%	10	29.4%
Total	56	28%	77	38.5%	67	33.5%
X2 = 1.092, df = 2, p = .58						

Expectations Regarding Academic Performance and Behavior

The distribution of responses for expectations regarding academic performance and behavior and parent education status are illustrated in Table 5. A significant association was found regarding the statement, transfer to another college before graduating (X2 = 14.790, df = 2, p = .001). Non-first-generation students who had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree were more likely to indicate they would transfer before graduating. Forty-four percent of students who indicated there was a "very good or some chance" of transferring to another college before graduating had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree compared to 18.3% of students who had parents with no college experience and 37.5% of students who had parents with some college experience.

Table 5
Students' Expectations of Academic Performance and Behavior by Parent Education Status

	First-Generation				Non-First-Generation	
	Neither Parent College Experience		At Least One Parent Some College Experience		At Least One Parent Bachelor's Degree	
Question	N	%	N	%	N	%

44b. Fail one or more classes						
a. very good chance or some chance	11	24.4%	18	40.0%	16	35.6%
b. little chance or no chance	45	29.2%	59	38.3%	50	32.5%
Total	56	28.1%	77	38.7%	66	33.2%
X2 = .408, df = 2, p = .82						
44c. Get tutoring help						
a. very good chance or some chance	40	29.0%	54	39.1%	44	31.9%
b. little chance or no chance	16	25.5%	23	37.1%	23	37.1%
Total	56	28.0%	77	38.5%	67	33.5%
X2 = .547, df = 2, p = .76						
44d. Need extra time to complete a degree						
a. very good chance or some chance	25	27.5%	37	40.7%	29	31.9%
b. little chance or no chance	31	29.0%	40	37.4%	36	33.6%
Total	56	28.3%	77	38.9%	65	32.8%
X2 = .222, df = 2, p = .90						
44e. Graduate with honors						
a. very good chance or some chance	44	28.9%	57	37.5%	51	33.6
b. little chance or no chance	12	25.0%	20	41.7%	16	33.3%
Total	56	28.0%	77	38.5%	67	33.5%
X2 = .368, df = 2, p = .83						
44f. Transfer to another college before graduating						
a. very good chance or some chance	19	18.3%	39	37.5%	46	44.2%
b. little chance						

or no chance	37	38.9%	37	38.9%	21	22.1%
Total	56	28.1%	76	38.2	67	33.7%
$X2 = 14.790$, df = 2, p = .001						
44g. Drop out permanently (excluding transferring)						
a. very good chance or some chance	6	20.7%	15	51.7%	8	27.6%
b. little chance or no chance	50	29.6%	60	35.5	59	34.9%
Total	56	28.3%	75	37.9%	67	33.8%
$X^2 = 2.805$, df = 2, p = .25						

Note: these items were recoded because expected values were less than five.

Expected Grade Point Average

As shown in Table 6, there was no significant association between expected grade point average and parent education status $(X2 = .364, df = 2, p = .83)$. Almost one-third (29.8%) of students who had parents with no college experience and thirty percent (29.8%) of students who had a parent with a bachelor's degree expected their grade point average to be below 3.00.

Table 6
Expected Grade Point Average by Parent Education Status

	First-Generation				Non-First-Generation	
	Neither Parent College Experience		At Least One Parent Some College Experience		At Least One Parent Bachelor's Degree	
Question	N	%	N	%	N	%
45. Predicted overall grade point average						
a. 2.99 or below	14	29.8%	19	40.4%	14	29.8%
b. 3.00 or above	40	29.2%	50	36.5%	47	34.3%
Total	54	29.3%	69	37.5%	61	33.2%
$X2 = .364$, df = 2, p = .83						

Note: These items were recoded because expected values were less than five. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the differences in academic expectations of first-generation and non-first-generation college students at a doctoral granting university. Students who had parents with no college experience, parents with some college experience and students with at least one parent with a bachelor's degree seem to hold the same high expectations for the highest degree they intended to achieve. Billson and Terry (1982) and Somers, Woodhouse, and Cofer (2004) found that first-generation students expected to achieve bachelor's degrees at high rates. Other researchers (Brown, 1996; McCormick, 1997; NCES, 2004) confirmed that African-American students have high expectations for degree attainment, particularly advanced degrees (Astin, 1990). Students in this study who had parents with no college experience were optimistic about obtaining a master's degree or an advanced degree. This optimism from students who had parents with no college experience may stem from these students' ability to "beat the odds," since many of them believe that in spite of many challenges they faced, they made it to college and they intended to graduate (Pascarella et al., 2004). Students with high expectations are more likely to engage in academic and social experiences and less likely to be discouraged by disappointing circumstances. Thus, the high expectations of first-generation students often allow them to persevere.

Based on their academic experiences and lack of exposure to the college environment, these students may have unrealistic expectations about success. Chen and Carroll (2005) found that first-generation students had high expectations for degree attainment; however, only 24% of first-generation students actually attained a bachelor's degree.

Academic Expectations about the Most Difficult Academic Area

Warburton et al. (2001) found that students who were not prepared in higher-level mathematics had a difficult time in college. The most difficult area expected among all three groups was mathematics. In this study, there were no significant differences among students who had parents with no college experience, parents with some college experience, and at least one parent with a bachelor's degree. Chen and Carroll (2005) found in their study of high school students that first-generation students were less prepared for college, evidenced by lower rates of taking higher-level mathematics courses in high school. In fact, they found that completing only low-level mathematics courses decreased all students' likelihood of obtaining a bachelor's degree and increased their chances of leaving college without a degree. Findings from the present study indicated that students from all educational status backgrounds are less confident about their academic abilities in mathematics and may not be prepared for the rigorous demands of college level mathematics, which in turn can cause academic problems for students. By not engaging in higher-level mathematics in high school, students' academic progress in college typically is hindered particularly for first-generation students who are already at-risk. Choy (2002) discovered that taking challenging courses could

lessen the effect of parents' education even on college enrollment. When Black students were compared to white students (Astin, 1990), white students rated themselves higher on academically oriented traits such as writing ability and mathematical ability. First-generation African-American students' responses in this study confirmed their lack of confidence in their mathematical ability.

Academic Expectations about Time Commitment

Academic expectations of students who had parents with no college experience regarding their time commitment in studying, researching, or doing homework on their own, meeting with professors or instructors to discuss or prepare for class, and meeting with other students to prepare for class, were found to be no different than other students. These high expectations of first-generation students at a historically Black university may be because there exists a "greater cultural continuity between the home and the college environment that provides them with a sense of familiarity and security" (Padilla, Trevino, Gonzalez, & Trevino, 1997, p. 133). Students who had parents with no college experience may feel more a part of the academic community in the nurturing, supportive environment of an HBCU (Jackson & Nunn, 2003). Fleming (1984) acknowledged that there were opportunities to interact with faculty and students, which would help Black students deal with stress. Not surprising, though, students who had a parent with a bachelor's degree spent more time meeting with professors or instructors than students who had parents with no college experience and students who had parents with some college experience. This finding is similar to the findings presented by Terenzini et al. (1996), which indicated that first-generation students are less involved with peers and teachers. In fact, Terenzini et al. (1996) discovered that first-generation students were less likely to perceive faculty members as being concerned with student development and teaching and less likely to receive encouragement from friends to continue enrollment. Parents who have had some college experience or who have earned a bachelor's degree are able to provide the cultural capital needed to help their children realize the importance of meeting with professors and students (McDonough, 1997). Similarly, Strage (1999) confirmed that first-generation students' perceptions of their rapport with instructors were associated with good grades.

Expectations about Academic Performance and Behaviour

Findings from this study were similar for all three groups of students who expected to have "little or no chance" of failing one or more classes, needing extra time to complete a degree, and dropping out of school permanently. These findings differed from previous research which found that first-generation students expressed a greater fear of failing in college than other students (Bui, 2002), expected to take longer to complete their degree programs (Terenzini et al., 1996, Warburton et al., 2001), were more likely to stop-out or transfer, and more than twice as likely to leave their first institution without returning (Warburton et al., 2001). Richardson and Skinner (1992) found that minority students frequently indicated dissatisfaction with their social and emotional environment as a reason for leaving

college or earning poor grades, regardless of academic ability or parent educational level. Consequently, first-generation students in this study had higher expectations regarding these academic activities than students in other studies.

Students whose parents had no college experience were more likely to indicate they would not transfer to another institution before graduating. These first-generation students were also more likely to have lower income levels. Therefore, they may not have the financial resources to transfer to another institution. First-generation students may also lack the cultural capital needed to understand the demands and challenges of a college education compared to students whose parents had some college and those who had a parent with a bachelor's degree (Astin & Osequera, 2004). Non-first-generation students expected to transfer at a greater rate than other students did. They may have been better equipped to recognize early on that their academic and social needs were mismatched with their institution. They were also in a better financial situation to make the decision to transfer. Muskat (1979) found that students who reported a greater likelihood to transfer were students who did, in fact, withdraw and transfer to another institution. Therefore, those students who indicate that they will transfer probably will. A majority of students from the three educational status groups indicated a "very good or some chance" instead of "little chance or no chance" of getting tutoring help and graduating with honors. All of these students recognized the need for academic assistance in college, but they also expected to graduate with honors. One might speculate that students who responded affirmatively to seeking tutoring help and whose parents had no college experience may believe that getting such help assists them with graduating with honors. Terenzini et al. (1996) revealed that first-generation students do not graduate with honors. In this study, first-generation students were optimistic about graduating with honors.

One explanation for the confidence of these first-generation students is that their coursework prior to enrolling at this institution might have mirrored that of their non-first-generation peers. Warburton et al., (2001) found that students who took rigorous coursework were likely to stay on the persistence track, and this did not differ meaningfully between first-generation students and students whose parents had a bachelor's degree. Another explanation is that because of the numerous demands on their time, these first-generation students who may also have work and family demands, may adjust and handle situations more efficiently at this university than their non-first-generation peers (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005).

Expected Grade Point Average

Students who had parents with no college experience and students who had parents with some college experience did not differ from students who had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree regarding expected grade point average. Close to thirty percent of students whose parents had no college experience and thirty percent of students who had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree expected to receive a grade point average of "2.99 or below." This finding does not align with first-generation students' perceptions of

graduating with honors. Since this study was conducted after the semester began, some students may have actually known their grade point averages. Astin (1990) found that Black students earn substantially poorer grades in high school and rate themselves lower on academic ability than do Caucasian students, but their academic expectations for college are comparable to those of Caucasian students. There is a substantial relationship between academic performance in high school and in college. These results suggest that many Black students may have unrealistically high expectations about their anticipated academic performance in college (Astin, 1990). However, as Astin (1990) found, high expectations may be an adaptive method of coping with the potential stress and uncertainty of one's first year in college.

Recommendations

This research into students' academic expectations should be used to inform college students, high school counselors, college faculty, and administrators about the high expectations of first-generation students who attend HBCUs. Findings from this study could help these individuals determine the best ways to assist first-generation students in understanding the collegiate environment and to aid them in coping with college when they enroll.

Student affairs professionals should use these findings regarding first-generation students to demystify the college experience, to dispel some of the misconceptions about college, and to assist them with effectively integrating into the university environment. Specifically targeting first-generation students after matriculation could relieve additional stress for the student and foster expectations that are more realistic after matriculation.

Early identification of first-generation students should assist student affairs professionals with understanding the needs of these students and provide them with special attention during the first year of school. Data collection methods may need to be changed in order to obtain this information at the beginning of the school year. Policies and procedures that might hinder academic and social participation may be examined if these data are collected early in the academic year.

Administrators at the study's institution should use this information to continue and develop additional programs to better facilitate retention and, ultimately, degree attainment for first-generation students as well as non-first-generation students. Successful retention programs need to involve coordinated efforts of student affairs and counseling professionals as well as admissions officers. Different interventions may be needed to retain first-generation students and non-first-generation students. Institutions that are successful in retaining minority students facilitate minority students' academic, social, and personal development (Wright, 1987).

The findings from this study could be used to develop and implement orientation programs that last a full year which include faculty and peer mentoring/advising programs and can address

students' unrealistic expectations. Wright (1987) found that minority students arrive on campus with naïve perceptions regarding their life plans and future careers; therefore, involving all students in the orientation program may be helpful. These programs could challenge students to foster attitudes conducive to earning good grades, persisting, and ultimately graduating (Hicks, 2003). This follows Beil, Reisen, Zea, and Caplan's (1999) suggestion that students could be encouraged to participate in intervention programs promoting social and academic integration into the college community. These programs could also provide first-generation students with the nonacademic skills needed to persist such as interacting with faculty and students and participating in campus events.

Recruitment officers could use these data to conduct information sessions with students and parents and disseminate information about the institution and expected characteristics of students. These sessions could provide the cultural capital needed for first-generation students to succeed in college. Students need validating experiences and faculty, administrators, and peers who are involved in events that promote academic and social awareness offer the needed boost for these students.

There were few differences found between first-generation and non-first-generation students in this research study. Since HBCUs provide nurturing, supportive environments for their students (Gurin & Epps, 1975; Fleming, 1984; Jackson & Nunn, 2003), continuing to support their existence would, in turn, encourage the success of many first-generation students.

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