What do we know about UND’s first-generation freshmen?  

A look at the incoming 2012 first-generation students compared to second-generation

Introduction

Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Survey is a national survey administered by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California-Los Angeles. UND has participated 40 of the last (approximate) 46 years. Through analyzing the data of 2012 CIRP Freshmen Survey (administered in 2012 summer freshmen orientation program), this study provides readers with an image of the 2012 first-generation freshmen at the University of North Dakota.

First-generation freshmen are defined as those who had neither parent earning a college degree. A total of 382 (Male=173; Female=209) first-generation, and 1,079 (Male=629; Female=449; Unspecified=1) second-generation freshmen filled out the CIRP survey. The high ratio (26%) of the first-generation students lends evidence in that it is important to know who this group of students is. This clip focuses on describing the first-generation students in terms of their demographics, why college, reasons for choosing UND, academic engagement in high school, finances, self-perceptions, academic aspirations and goals.

Demographics

First-generation students are 18 (N=206) or 19 years old (N=152) - the traditional age for college students. The majority (N=241, 63%) reported that their permanent home is 101 to 500 miles away from UND (see figure 1). There is no significant difference in this scale between the first- and the second-generation. 95% of the first-generation and 96% of the second-generation are White Caucasian. More females than males are included in first-generation freshmen.

Why College?

When the first-generation freshmen were asked their reasons for deciding to go to college, the top reasons were: get training for a specific career through college education (96%), and it is important to get a better job (95%). The findings indicate that job preparation and a better employment after graduation are major drivers for them to go to college. In addition, intrinsic values also play a role in their decisions. For example, 95% of first-generation students considered that it is important to learn more about things that interest them in college, and 82% considered that college education will make him/her a more cultured person.

Statistically significant differences in the above discussed reasons were not found between the first- and the second-generation (see figure 2). In other words, both groups of students had similar reasons for going to college.
Reasons for Choosing UND

When students were asked “what reasons make them decide to go to UND?” Academic reputation was recognized by 94% of them. The subsequent reasons are graduates get good jobs (85%), good reputation for social activities (84%), visit to campus (74%), college graduates gain admission to top graduate/professional schools (62%), and offered financial assistance (60%). It is interesting that visit to campus becomes a top 4 reason - indicating the importance of a campus tour. No differences in above listed reasons were found between the first- and second-generation freshmen (see figure 3).

Academic Engagement in High School

First-generation freshmen reported that they actively engaged in high school academic activities, such as ask questions in class (96%), seek alternative solutions to a problem (95%), seek solutions to problems and explain them to others (95%), revise papers to improve writing (94%).

It was found that many differences existed in engaged academic activities between first-generation and second-generation freshmen (see figure 4). Specifically, the second-generation generally had higher scores in each of the following scales than the first-generation. It means that although the first-generation actively engage in academic activities, they still lag behind in several aspects than the second-generation.

Notes: All indicators are significant at p<.05

Seventy-nine percent of the first-generation reported that they obtained B or above grades in high school. However, their math learning in high school is of concern (see figure 5); most of them only completed math 1 and 2 with few completing math courses beyond that level. Significant differences in math 2 and math 4 were found between first- and second-generation. It indicates that more second-generation students completed the math 2 and 4.
Moreover, financial concern is significantly correlated to 4 out of 5 financial resources of first-year college expenses: Family resources ($r = -0.22, p<0.01$), my own resources ($r = 0.16, p<0.01$), aid which must be repaid (loans etc.; $r = 0.30, p<0.01$), and other resources ($r = 0.16, p<0.01$).

Significant differences in the resource of first-year education expenses (see figure 6) as well as financial concern (see figure 7) were found between the first-generation and second-generation. Specifically, on average, the second-generation obtained more financial support from their family than the first-generation, but the first-generation received more social support, such as grants, scholarships, and military funding than the second-generation. In addition, the first-generation more than the second-generation depend on loans to pay their first-year college expenses. Further, the first-generation show more financial concern than the second-generation.

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The findings indicate that the more a family can support first year college expenses, the less first-generation students would be concerned over their financial ability. In addition, if they have to pay their first-year college expenses on their own, by grants or loans, they show more financial concern of college education.

Financial concern is also significantly correlated to several scales of choosing UND, such as This college has a very good academic reputation ($r = -0.12, p<0.01$), The cost of attending this college ($r = 0.16, p<0.01$), and Could not afford first choice ($r = 0.11, p<0.01$). These findings reveal that when choosing UND, if the first-generation students are more concerned with their financial ability, the academic reputation of UND would be less of a consideration as would attending their first choice school.

Self-perception

First generation freshmen of 2012 highly recognized their self-perception by rating the following scales with average or above average scores: drive to achieve (96%), writing ability (87%), computer skills (86.2%), creativity (86%), academic ability (86%), and mathematical ability (81%). First-generation students also highly rated the following scales: cooperativeness (97%), self-understanding (96%), self-confidence (intellectual; 94%), leadership ability (92%), self-confidence (social; 89%), understanding of others (87%), popularity (87%), creativity (86%), and public speaking ability (70%). Although the first-generation had good perception of themselves, their average scores of each scale are still lower than the scores rated by the second-generation (see figure 8).

For more detailed information about any of our surveys, please refer to http://und.edu/research/institutional-research/survey-timelines.cfm
First-generation Freshmen

First-generation freshmen of 2012 show a high level of academic aspiration: 37% of them plan to earn a Bachelor’s degree, 30% plan to earn a Master’s degree, and 22% plan to earn a Doctorate. There are no significant differences that exist in the aspirations between the first- and second-generation freshmen (see figure 9). Furthermore, although there are no statistically significant differences between the first- and the second-generation students in the highest academic degree aspirations at UND (see figure 10), the first-generation show slightly higher aspiration in each degree than the second-generation.

Goals

The first-generation highly rated the following goals as important or very important, such as being very well off financially (96%), obtaining recognition from my colleagues for contributions to my special field (90%), becoming an authority in my field (90%), and raising a family (89%). Thus, first-generation freshmen strive to academic excellence and recognition. There is no significant difference in the above listed goals between the first-generation and the second-generation (see figure 11).

Conclusion

Comparing first-generation and second-generation freshmen of 2012, both similarities and differences were found between the two groups of students. For instance, both groups have similar reasons to go to college as well as similar reasons why they choose UND. In addition, the first- and second-generation have similar academic aspirations and goals. However, statistically significant differences exist in Academic Engagement in High School, Finance, and Self-perception. Thus, when working with the first-generation freshmen, their uniqueness should be taken into account.

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