

Using Data to Improve Outcomes for First-generation College Students: A Guide for Practitioners



This guide provides information for college staff who want to collect and use student-level data to inform work with first-generation college students and graduates. The guide is organized by the subject matter of the data and provides recommendations for obtaining the data. The guide builds upon the national statistics presented in the [national data fact sheets](#) about first-generation bachelor's degree recipients and their undergraduate experiences, transition to graduate school, and employment.

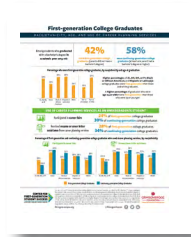
As a first step, we recommend that practitioners speak with relevant institutional offices, such as institutional research, to learn which data are readily available and how these data can be accessed and used by practitioners. Data may be stored in different systems, by different offices, across an institution. For example, data collected by a career center may not include parents' education level, but it may be possible to merge career center data with demographic data from the institutional research office. Data from different university offices may be merged using student identifiers such as a numeric student ID, name, or email address. If the data sought do not exist, practitioners may be able to work with the institutional research office or other data practitioners to create a new dataset, for example by conducting a student or alumni survey or adding new questions to extant surveys.

Demographic Data

Demographic data comprise information about student identity, including parent or guardian education level (used to identify first-generation students), race and ethnicity, and age. These data may be available from the institutional research, admissions, or registrar office. Parent or guardian education level may not be available for all students or accessible for use by practitioners because these data are often collected from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which is not completed by all students. Another first-generation student indicator may be available for use based on the institution's definition of a first-generation college student. This indicator may have been developed using parent or guardian education level from the college application or other data collection efforts.

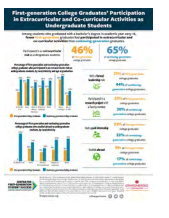
Use of Career Planning and Other Student Services

Fact sheet 1 shows that, nationally, fewer first-generation college graduates reported using career planning services as undergraduate students than continuing-generation graduates. Student services offices, including career services, may collect data about who uses their services through a career management system like Handshake or another data collection system (e.g., card swipe data that show when students entered the office). Such data can be analyzed to determine the frequency of engagement with career services as well as the types of opportunities first-generation students and continuing-generation students are engaging in.



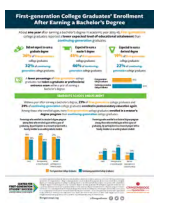
Extracurricular and Co-curricular Participation

Fact sheet 2 indicates that fewer first-generation college graduates reported participating in extracurricular and co-curricular activities as undergraduate students than continuing-generation graduates. Student-level data about extracurricular and co-curricular participation may be decentralized and require effort to identify and access. For example, there may not be a single dataset that indicates whether a student has participated in an extracurricular club or has served as a leader of that club. The student affairs division and co-curricular assessment practitioners can help identify the best data to understand first-generation student engagement in extracurricular and co-curricular activity. Career services may have data about students' participation in internships that the office helped to arrange as well as data that were collected in a postcompletion survey, but these data will likely not capture all students' internships. Similarly, there may be an undergraduate research office that has noncomprehensive data about students' participation in undergraduate research. The study abroad office may have data about students who studied abroad with its own programs but not about students who studied abroad with other organizations' programs.



Alumni Enrollment in Additional Education

Fact sheet 3 shows that first-generation and continuing-generation college graduates have different expectations about graduate degree attainment. Institutions can obtain postsecondary enrollment data about their alumni from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). Institutional offices such as the career services office and alumni office, as well as academic departments, may also have data about alumni enrollment, but NSC data are likely more comprehensive and accurate. Data from NSC can be obtained by working with the registrar or institutional research office, as these data are often obtained for a variety of institutional purposes. Data about students' postsecondary attainment expectations, and whether they have taken or plan to take graduate or professional entrance exams, can be collected by an institutional survey of students and alumni. Graduate or professional entrance exam data may also be obtained from the organizations that produce the exams.



Alumni Employment and Financial Outcomes

Fact sheet 4 shows that first-generation and continuing-generation college graduates get different kinds of jobs. Alumni employment data, if they are available, may have been captured by a survey and may be available from the institutional research, career services, alumni, or development office or academic departments that track their students' outcomes. These data are likely not inclusive of all alumni. Some states, such as Texas, have longitudinal education data systems that track individual students from the K–12 system, to public postsecondary education, to the workforce. It may be possible to obtain state data about graduates' employment outcomes and merge it with institutional data about students. The College Scorecard has institution-level data about first-generation students' loan debt, loan repayment, and degree completion.

