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Center for First-generation Student Success releases new fact sheets on first-generation student demographics and enrollment characteristics

1 in 2 undergraduates in the United States are first-generation students

WASHINGTON, DC (January 16, 2024) - The [Center for First-generation Student Success](#), an initiative of NASPA and The Suder Foundation, today released two new fact sheets on first-generation students, *First-generation College Students in 2020: Demographic Characteristics* and *First-generation College Students' Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic: 2020*.

“The data reaffirms that first-generation students—students whose parents do not have a bachelor’s degree—make up more than half, 54 percent, of all undergraduates in the United States,” said Dr. Sarah E. Whitley, vice president at the Center for First-generation Student Success. “At a time when enrollment and retention of students is of the highest priority, it’s imperative that colleges and universities recognize the unique needs of first-generation students and do everything possible to advance systemic change and allow them to graduate.”

The new resources, produced with RTI International, are the continuation of a [series of national data fact sheets](#) first released in 2019, with additional sheets produced in 2021. This new set is sourced from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019-20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:20). Released in 2023, this is the most recent iteration of NPSAS.

The first, [First-generation College Students in 2020: Demographic Characteristics](#), is an update to the original 2019 fact sheets and displays demographic and enrollment characteristics of first-generation and continuing-generation college students.

Highlights from the fact sheet include:

- While the median parental income of continuing-generation students has risen almost 15% (\$90,000 to \$103,000) since the data was last published, the parental income for first-generation students remained constant at \$41,000, emphasizing the need for increased financial support for first-generation students.
- Almost three-quarters (73%) of Hispanic and Latinx/a/o undergraduate students are first-generation, while around two-thirds of Black/African American students (65%) and American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian/or other Pacific Islander students (64%) are first-generation students, important data as institutions seek to maintain a diverse student population in the wake of the recent Supreme Court decision banning the consideration of race as a factor in admissions.

The second fact sheet, [First-generation College Students' Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic: 2020](#), offers an initial look at the disproportionate impact the pandemic had on first-generation students. The NPSAS:20 data includes the early months of 2020, when stay-at-home orders brought the country to a standstill and higher education was forced to rethink operations.

Highlights from the fact sheet include:

- Almost twice as many first-generation students (5%) than continuing-generation students (3%) reported COVID-19 was the reason they withdrew from college.
- Finding safe and stable childcare for dependent children was a major challenge for first-generation students, with 34% of female students and 26% of male students reporting major difficulties in this area.
- A significant percentage of first-generation students (12%) reported difficulty accessing or paying for food.

“We know that first-generation students face challenges above and beyond those faced by their continuing-generation peers,” said Whitley. “The data in these fact sheets is confirmation that—whether the barriers are financial support, childcare or other family responsibilities, or basic human needs—we need to do more to support our first-generation college students in order for them to achieve degree attainment and reach their career goals.”

“As a foundation that works with higher education institutions, nonprofit organizations, foundation partners, and leaders across sectors, we’ve seen a growing demand for data on first-generation students,” said Danielle M. Reyes, President and CEO of the [Crimsonbridge Foundation](#). “The resources developed by the Center for First-generation Student Success enable philanthropy and other key stakeholders to be effective and informed partners in advancing student success work.”

To access the fact sheets and other resources, or to learn more about the Center for First-generation Student Success, visit firstgen.naspa.org.

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ABOUT THE CENTER FOR FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT SUCCESS

The Center is transforming higher education to drive first-generation student success effectively and equitably across education, career, and life. We provide data, training, and expertise for a growing network of colleges and universities around the country to scale and sustain the important work of serving first-generation students. The Center aims to acknowledge the intersectional experiences of first-generation college students. It offers an outlet for sharing cutting-edge research and current media conversations, opportunities for engagement through online learning, conferences, and events, and access to a bevy of programs and services intended to improve first-generation initiatives across higher education.

ABOUT THE CRIMSONBRIDGE FOUNDATION

The Crimsonbridge Foundation is an entrepreneurial philanthropic organization that builds bridges of collaboration to create transformative solutions to improve the lives of our nation's youth and families. We innovate and strategically invest in education, leadership development, environmental sustainability, and capacity building programs to help America's youth and nonprofit organizations achieve their potential.

ABOUT NASPA

NASPA is a member-centered association supporting a diverse and passionate network of 15,000 professionals and 1,200 institutions across the globe. It is the professional home for the field of student affairs and is dedicated to cultivating student success in collaboration with the missions of its institutional members—a network of colleges and universities representing every sector of higher education.

ABOUT THE SUDER FOUNDATION

Since 2008, Eric and Deborah Suder have been working to transform higher education by serving the unique needs of first-generation college students. In 2009, the Suders launched a family foundation and created the First Scholars® Program, a holistic network of resources and support to dramatically improve graduation rates and unlock the success of FirstGen students across education, career, and life. Driven by a desire to reach more students and create lasting institutional change, in 2017 The Suder Foundation partnered with NASPA in a joint venture to establish The Center for First-generation Student Success and scale First Scholars nationally.