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Center for First-generation Student Success releases new fact sheets on first-generation college graduates

Data includes employment, finances, additional education, and impact of COVID-19 pandemic

WASHINGTON, DC (March 8, 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 Graduates after Four Years: Employment, Finances, and Additional Education* and *First-generation College Graduates after Four Years—Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic: 2020 to 2021*.

“The data is telling us that first-generation students face barriers even after earning their degrees,” said Dr. Sarah E. Whitley, vice president at the Center for First-generation Student Success. “As part of the support we offer to first-generation students while on campus, we must equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed after graduation—career readiness, financial planning, and information on earning an advanced degree.”

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 of four fact sheets, which includes two released in January 2024, [First-generation College Students in 2020: Demographic Characteristics](#) and [First-generation College Students’ Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic: 2020](#), is sourced from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, 2016/20 Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study (B&B:16/20).

The first of the new fact sheets released today, [First-generation College Graduates after Four Years: Employment, Finances, and Additional Education](#), examines key data related to first-generation students’ experiences after graduation.

Highlights from the fact sheet include:

- The median salary for first-generation college graduates four years after earning a bachelor's was \$2000 less than their continuing-generation counterparts (\$50,000 vs. \$52,000 for continuing-generation). While there is still a discrepancy between these figures, it illustrates that a degree can be an equalizer for first-generation students in the job market.
- Continuing-generation students expected to earn advanced degrees at a much higher rate than first-generation students; the expectation of earning a Master's or Doctoral degree was 3% higher (40% of continuing-generation students expected to earn a Master's degree versus 37% of first-generation students; 19% to 16% for a Doctoral degree, respectively).
- There was a significant difference in the percentage of first-generation (79%) versus continuing-generation (87%) graduates who reported they could come up with \$2000 within a month if an unexpected need arose.

The second fact sheet, [First-generation College Graduates after Four Years—Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic: 2020 to 2021](#), continues an initial look at the disproportionate impact the pandemic had on first-generation students.

Highlights from the fact sheet include:

- Almost twice as many first-generation college graduates (14% compared to 8% of continuing-generation peers) did not meet essential expenses (mortgage/rent, utilities, medical care) in the previous year because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The pandemic caused a much higher percentage of first-generation college graduates to delay additional education (15% compared to 11% of continuing-generation peers) and take on additional family or childcare responsibilities (16% compared to 11% of continuing-generation peers).
- Even among first-generation college graduates, the fact sheet data as a whole illustrates that historically excluded communities (Black or African American, Hispanic or Latinx/a/o, and Asian) experienced COVID-related impact at a higher rate.

“We know that first-generation students face challenges above and beyond those faced by their continuing-generation peers,” said Whitley. “This data tells us that the most common challenges we face—financial support, childcare or other family responsibilities, or basic human needs—can hit even harder for first-generation students. It’s vital we’re doing everything we can to help prepare our first-generation college graduates to best overcome these barriers.”

“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,” said Danielle M. Reyes, President and CEO of the [Crimsonbridge](#)

[Foundation](#). “Historically excluded communities were impacted by the COVID pandemic at a higher rate. We see this research about the pandemic's early impact as an opportunity for foundations and donors to invest in promising practices making a big difference for the first-generation students that make up half of all enrolled college students today.”

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.