

First-Generation Students - College Access, Persistence, and Post Bachelor's Outcomes

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OVERVIEW

A new report by the National Center for Education Statistics, titled "[First-Generation Students - College Access, Persistence, and Post Bachelor's Outcomes](#)," highlights the barriers that first-generation college students face. In this report the term, "first-generation students" simply refers to students whose parents have no college education and does not indicate immigration status. The report draws on data from three nationally representative studies from the National Center for Education Statistics done between 2002 and 2012 and focuses on three study questions: (1) How do high school students whose parents did not enroll in college fare in high school compared with their peers whose parents attended at least some college? At what rates do these groups transition to college and in what types of institutions do they enroll? (2) Compared with students whose parents attended at least some college, how do first-generation students fare after enrolling in postsecondary education? At what rates do they attain degrees or certificates or remain enrolled? (3) Among bachelor's degree recipients, how do first-generation students fare compared with their continuing-generation peers in the labor market or further postsecondary enrollment?

KEY FINDINGS

- First generation high school graduates are less likely to enroll in high-level math courses when compared to students whose parents have a bachelor's degree. In trigonometry/statistics/precalculus it was 27 percent vs. 43 percent and in calculus it was 7 percent vs. 22 percent.
- Among 2002 high school sophomores, 72 percent of students whose parents had never attended college had enrolled in postsecondary education by 2012. In contrast, 84 percent of their peers whose parents had some college education had done so, as had 93 percent of those whose parents had earned a bachelor's degree.
- Three years after first enrolling, comparatively more first-generation students who began postsecondary education in 2003–04 had left postsecondary education without earning a postsecondary credential (33 percent) than had their continuing-generation peers whose parents attended some college (26 percent) and whose parents earned a bachelor's degree (14 percent).
- Among 2007–08 bachelor's degree recipients who were employed 4 years after completing their degrees, median annualized salaries were not statistically different between first-generation graduates and their continuing-generation peers among either full-time (\$43,000–\$45,500) or part-time workers (\$12,500–\$16,100).

DISCUSSION

Many first-generation students are at greater risk of not persisting in or not completing credential programs because of such challenges as being less well prepared academically, having children of their own, and working full time while enrolled. In addition, first-generation students often possess other demographic and enrollment characteristics (low socioeconomic status and lower enrollment intensity, among others) that are associated with dropping out. Using data from multiple sources about various points in the education pipeline and beyond, this report examines the personal, enrollment, academic, and career characteristics of students whose parents had not attended college. The intent of the report is to describe the experiences of first-generation students during and after enrollment in school, with a specific focus on enrollment and labor market outcomes, and compare their experiences with those of their peers whose parents enrolled in or completed college.