

Participation of First Generation Students in High Impact Practices at Liberal Arts Colleges

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following report is about the experiences of first generation students (FGS) at Occidental College and their level of participation in High Impact Practices (HIPs). Studying abroad, conducting research, participating in internships, and serving communities are all HIPs that enhance students' educational experience, but unfortunately, not enough first generation students are participating in these at Occidental College. The following research paper addresses some of the factors that determine whether or FGS participate in HIPs. To answer this question, I reviewed the existing literature, interviewed students, faculty, staff, and administrators, and also created and distributed a *First Generation Student Survey*. My results suggest the top factors determining the participation of FGS at Occidental College in HIPs were their academic experiences, economic concerns, and family expectations. There were also additional factors that were specific to each HIP I investigated. The findings also showed that faculty, staff, and administration all play a major role in ensuring the success of FGS. The implications from my research indicate that while individual characteristics of FGS have an effect on their participation rate in HIPs, there are also institutional factors that are just as important in determining their college experience.

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INTRODUCTION

Research Topic

In the Fall of 2012, I attended a Diversity Committee meeting at Occidental College and during this particular meeting a representative from the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning (IRAP) gave a presentation about the status of students of color and first generation students (FGS) at Occidental College. I recall being very frustrated by the qualitative data that IRAP presented because it showed that FGS and students of color were not performing in several aspects of their college experience at the same high rates as the rest of the student population at Occidental College. What I found most alarming were the low participation rates of FGS in, what are known as, high impact practices (Kuh 2012). Studying abroad, conducting research, participating in internships, and serving communities are all high impact practices that enhance students' educational experience, but unfortunately, not enough FGS were participating in these at Occidental College. I began to really question why other first generation students, like me, were not getting the best out of their college experience.

Early in my research, I learned that this is not an issue that only concerns FGS at Occidental College. First generation students all around the nation are struggling in higher education. I also learned that a couple of policies have been enacted nation wide to serve this particular student group. The Higher Education Act was the first law that addressed the growing needs of first generation students in higher education. Soon after, the government developed the Federal TRIO program, one that continues to support FGS today.

As a first generation student who has participated and benefited from these high impact practices, I am very interested in understanding what factors are determining whether or not FGS are taking full advantage of high impact practices offered at liberal arts colleges such as

Occidental College. I surveyed and interviewed students, professors, and administrators with the hope to gather qualitative and quantitative data to answer this question. Because Occidental College served as the main case study of this research, I wrote about its past and current practices. Recommendations are included at the end and they are informed by all the research I conducted, as well as the programs that two other liberal arts colleges, Scripps College and Williams College, practice. My hope is that my research will help to improve the support that current and future FGS receive at Occidental College.

Personal Account

I am the oldest of my siblings and the oldest grandchild so I am literally the very first person in my family to attend, and soon graduate, from a college in the United States. It is an honor to be a FGS, but there is a huge responsibility that goes with having this status. Most notably, I am pressured to do well because there are so many important people in my life looking up to me. Because of this, I always strived to do my best and seek opportunities to improve my college experience.

One of the opportunities I took advantage of before even starting college was participating in the Multicultural Summer Program (MSI). About fifty incoming first years participate in the summer program every summer and familiarize themselves with the campus, its surrounding community, and its academic demands. The greatest benefit from this program, among many things, was creating a network of friends, professors, and administrators that I would rely on throughout my four years at Oxy.

That same summer of 2010, I received an invitation to attend a reception for FGS during orientation and I recall that because my family was not going to be able to accompany me to my first day of college, I decided to decline the invitation. However, during orientation one of my

friends, whom I had met in MSI, told me that she was going to the first generation lunch and convinced me to come with her and her family. I was hesitant but attended the event after all. I am glad her family invited me to join them because it was at that lunch that I first felt that I was not alone on this campus; that there were other FGS I could relate to and reach out to.

Throughout my four years at Oxy, I have been fortunate enough to participate in high impact practices that have enhanced my college experience. For example, I interned with Esperanza Community Housing Corporation, a non-profit organization that provides affordable housing, for a whole semester during my Junior year. I was able to receive academic credit, fulfill one of the requirements for my Urban and Environmental Policy major, meet amazing leaders in the community, and learn a lot from this experience. I also interned with Inner City Struggle, an organization that works with youth and adults to improve education policy, after Professor Matsuoka introduced me to an Oxy alum who works at this non-profit. There I was able to improve my organizing skills by outreaching to active parents in the community. I also had the opportunity to study abroad in Santiago de Chile for a whole semester where I was able to develop as an individual and improve my global awareness. Finally, one of my greatest accomplishments was receiving the National Truman Scholarship, a national award that is given to students who are committed to public service.

In part, it was my own initiative that led me to become interested in these opportunities, but it was really the encouragement and support of my peers, professors, and administrators that led me to participate in these HIPs. While I have been able to benefit from these programs, many of my friends have not. It is because of my experiences and my friends that I am writing about this topic. I hope to share our stories and in the process decipher why some FGS are not

participating in HIPs. I want the college to know that liberal arts colleges like Occidental College can play a much better role in making the experience of FGS in college a rewarding one.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

First generation students (FGS) are at a disadvantage when pursuing higher education, and those who do enroll at an institution struggle to earn their degree (National Center for Education Statistics 2005). Education leaders know that FGS are a vulnerable population that need additional institutional support, however, students continue to be underserved due to the lack of effective guidance (Davis 2010, xiii). There are opportunities that various institutions offer known as high impact practices (HIP) that benefit all college students. A major concern, however, is that FGS show one of the lowest participation rates in HIP's compared to other underserved groups (Finley 2011). This paper describes some of the experiences of first generation students in higher education and attempts to address the reasons why FGS do not participate as often in HIPs. The following is a summary of the literature available about FGS in higher education and the benefits of participating in high impact practices (HIPs). Included are themes about the amount of FGS in college and reasons they enroll, demographic patterns based on race and socioeconomic status, relationships with peers, family, and faculty, academic struggles, recommended practices, and national policies.

First Generation College Students

Both "first in the family" and "first generation student" are used interchangeably in this literature review. There is no universally accepted definition of first generation students, but the most common one is the following: individuals have a first-generation student status if their

parents or guardians do not graduate from college and earn a bachelor's or associate degree (Davis 2010; Housel and Harvey 2010). Generally speaking, FGS entering higher education are at a disadvantage compared to their peers whose parents did attend college.

Enrollment of FGS in Higher Education

According to the Los Angeles' Higher Education Research Institute, about one in six first year students in four-year institutions in the United States are first generation students (Saenz et al. 2007). Based on the sources that were reviewed, there was no real consensus on whether the amount of FGS students in higher institutions has increased or decreased over time. Saenz et al. (2007), for instance, argues that the number of first generation students has "steadily declined since 1971" and attributes this to having overall greater levels of educated individuals in the United States. Strayhorn (2006), on the other side, claims that the enrollment of first generation students in higher education has been increasing over the years. While there is a lack of clarity about the trends, there is a general agreement on the reasons why some FGS decide to pursue a degree.

It is common for first generation students to admit that they expect to be better off financially after they graduate and that this is one of the reasons they attend college in the first place (Saenz et al. 2007). Furthermore, Bui (2002) adds that FGS are more likely to report that they are pursuing higher education to help their family financially after they graduate. While these reports focus on the financial motives for attending college, there are researchers who claim that this mentality changes once the student is in college. This idea is highlighted by Davis (2006) who postulates that while many do enter college with the goal to have a "higher earning power" they eventually find out that their personal growth and development is more valuable.

It has been documented that having a college education can change the lives of students and the lives of their family and community (Cushman 2005, 8). Students who have the choice of deciding whether or not to attend college will often prefer to go to college after looking at all their options. Those who take into consideration the alternative life style of a person who does not earn a degree might be more encouraged to pursue a degree with the hope that they can have a better life style than other people they know (Cushman 2005, 10).

Demographic Patterns of FGS

While first generation students represent a variety of identities (race/ethnicity, gender/sex, socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, etc.) there is a common experience that first generation students share and one that administrators and advisors should take into account (Davis 2010, xi). At the same time, researchers need to be careful not to overgeneralize because there are unique experiences that some groups of students have based on their identities. These patterns are important to keep in mind because the demographics of first generation students have shown to have an additional effect on students.

Race and Ethnicity

Researchers took a look at what groups were more likely to be FGS, and they concluded that compared to peers whose parents did attend college, FGS were more likely to be Black or Hispanic (National Center for Education Statistics 2005). Based on this reality, it is not surprising that research for demographic patterns have particularly focused on Black and Latinos, thus leaving a gap in the literature about other racial and ethnic identities.

A study that confirmed this pattern discovered that the number of African American students who are the first ones in their family to attend college has shown to have the greatest

drop (Saenz et al. 2007). This means that today there are fewer African American students who identify as FGS. On the other hand, the same study concluded that Hispanics have shown to have the lowest educational attainment, but are the highest number of first generation students represented in colleges (Saenz et al. 2007).

In a study conducted by Araujo and Anastasiou, it was observed that while first generation white students had lower GPAs than white students whose parents did go to college, this group showed to fare consistently better when compared to students of color, regardless of whether they were FGS or not (Housel and Harvey 2010, 51). By comparing students based on their racial or ethnic identity, this study showed the advantages of white students over students of color despite their generational status.

Socioeconomic Status

The next section illuminates the identity experience of FGS that deals with socioeconomic status. Multiple studies have shown that first generation students are more likely to come from a lower socioeconomic background, and because this is the case, it is important to consider how this status affects their college experience and overall level of success (Davis 2010; Housel and Harvey 2010; Bui 2002). For example, due to their financial needs, first generation college students expect to work before, during, and after their college career to pay for their school expenses (Saenz et al. 2007). The amount of time that they spent working might deter them from participating in programs or opportunities that will conflict with their working hours. This might also explain why once they are admitted to a school, financial aid proves to be a great worry for FGS throughout their college career (Bui 2002).

The economic component also has an impact on other extracurricular opportunities. As noted by Housel and Harvey (2010), their SES has limited their participation in programs such as study abroad and experiential learning courses. The same study found that FGS with low income are less likely to enroll in classes with fees, participate in activities planned in their residence halls, or be involved in extracurricular activities (Housel and Harvey 2010, 89). Socioeconomic status might also determine academic paths. This is confirmed by the National Center for Education Statistics (2005) who observed that FGS might be more hesitant to select majors in the arts, humanities, and social sciences because they perceive that they will have lower earnings in the future and, therefore, prefer to select majors in technical or vocational fields.

High Impact Practices (HIPs)

“High impact practices” are widely tested teaching and learning practices that have proven to be beneficial for college students of various backgrounds. They take multiple forms, depending on the school’s and student’s priorities and situations (Kuh 2012, 9). The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) report in 2007 led by the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and Americas Promise (LEAP) identified innovative high impact practices prevalent in higher education (Kuh 2012; Brownell and Swaner 2009). In a second AAC&U report, Kuh (2008) includes a brief overview of the high impact practices that were identified. The teaching and learning practices that are summarized in the text include: first year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service learning/ community-based learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects (Kuh 2012, 9–11). **Table 1** describes these ten high impact practices.

Table 1: Description of High Impact Practices

High Impact Practices	Description
First-Year Seminars and Experiences	Seminars led by staff or faculty that bring small groups of first year students together on a regular basis
Common Intellectual Experiences	Required core courses that cover a variety of themes
Learning Communities	Groups of students and professors who explore topics across multiple disciplines
Writing-Intensive Courses	Courses in which students produce various forms of writings. There is usually a final project.
Collaborative Assignments and Projects	Cooperative projects that range from study groups to team based assignments
Undergraduate Research	Opportunities for students to participate in systematic investigation and research
Diversity/Global Learning	Programs, such as study abroad, that help students learn about cultures, experiences, and worldviews different from their own.
Service Learning, Community-Based Learning	Working directly with community partners and applying what students learn in the classroom to real life situations
Internships	Experiencing a real work setting where they are supervised and coached
Capstone Courses and Projects	A culminating project, paper, or portfolio in which seniors integrate what they have learned in college

Source: George D. Kuh “High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter” 2012.

Using information gathered by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), researchers analyzed the responses that first year and senior year students from thirty nine campuses in California, Wisconsin, and Oregon gave about their participation in high impact practices. The study focused on the students' participation rate and self-reported outcomes linked to six high-impact practices: learning communities, service learning, student-faculty research, study abroad, internship, and senior culminating experience (Finley 2011). The study did not include all recommended high impact practices; however, for the purpose of conducting an accurate study, six of them was sufficient.

Benefits of Participating in HIPs

Swaner and Bownell (2009) completed a comprehensive review that focused on first-year seminars, learning communities, service learning, and undergraduate research. Overall, they concluded that in fact “high-impact activities live up to their name, leading to a range of positive outcomes for students” and recommended that colleges and universities design programs that best met their campus' needs. Both student persistence and academic performance (measured by grade point average) were common outcomes of the four HIPs the same authors studied. They asserted that participants persisted at a higher rate and that the “activities had a positive impact on student performance, or at worst a neutral impact” (Brownell and Swaner 2009). Based on their review, they found that all four practices led to a greater interaction between faculty and peers and that at least three of the practices studied led to more critical thinking, writing skills, more engagement in and out of the classroom, and an appreciation of diversity and different points of view. The benefits are echoed by Kuh (2012) who listed six reasons why participating in high-impact practices can be so effective: students devote a lot of time to a purposeful task, they interact more with faculty and peers, they are more likely to work with people of diverse

backgrounds and think differently, they receive constant feedback about their work, they are able to apply what they are learning to real life situations, and overall some of these practices can have a great impact on their lives (Kuh 2012, 14–17).

Factors Influencing Participation in HIPs

Cultural Capital and Academic Preparedness

Studies suggest that the success of FGS in college is often directly linked to the rigor of their High School preparation. Students who were not taught the skills to succeed in college are more likely to struggle academically. Based on the lower scores in college entrance exams and senior achievement test scores, it was concluded that FGS are less academically prepared than their peers and had a weaker high school preparation before entering college (National Center for Education Statistics 2005). Some studies focus on the effect that high school had on the type of courses FGS take in college. One case, for example, concluded that FGS tend to take more remedial courses in college, mostly in math and reading (National Center for Education Statistics 2005). Others have explained the difficulties that FGS have with acquiring certain learning skills. For instance, FGS tend to have trouble with their writing, reading, and communication skills and this often leads to low retention rates (Housel and Harvey 2010, 15). With regard to their overall performance, the group of first generation students studied in one research project had lower grade point averages (GPA) their first year in college and were also more likely to withdraw or have to repeat courses that they did not do well in (National Center for Education Statistics 2005). In the end, according to an NCES study, while the status of being a first generation student is an important predictor of success in college, having a rigorous preparation in high

school helps narrow the gap between students who do and do not have parents who went to college (Warburton et al. 2001).

There is evidence that FGS are at a disadvantage compared to their peers whose parents did go to college in relation to the amount of social and cultural capital they have acquired prior to going to college (Padgett et al., 244). This means that FGS are “already at a disadvantage in terms of their experiences, values, and resources before they even step foot on a college campus” (Padgett, Johnson, and Pascarella 2012, 246). Research suggests that FGS students are not as prepared as their peers whose parents did attend college (Davis 2010, xv). Similarly, while very little has been written about the relationship with peers whose parents did attend college, it has been observed that first generation students often feel like outsiders within their student classes (Davis 2010, 83). Furthermore, FGS are often victims of the impostor syndrome. This essentially means that FGS feel that they do not belong and are not competent enough to succeed. It is important to note that although FGS often feel scared, frustrated, stressed, and inferior they are less likely to share their experiences or ask for help (Davis 2006). Additionally, FGS tend to have lower academic aspirations than their peers, most likely because they are not as informed about types of degrees, academic preparation, or general resources available to them (Saenz et al. 2007). The lack of information about resources has been linked to the level of social and cultural capital of a person.

Social Capital and Relationships

Having a good relationship with at least one faculty member can prove to be very helpful to a first generation student (Davis 2010, 80) and is one of the reasons that they should be advised early to develop relationships with faculty and other staff (Davis 2010, 196). The problem arises when FGS do not approach their professors at all. One reasoning behind this is

that FGS might not realize the benefits of going to their professors during office hours or might be too embarrassed to do so (Davis 2006). Another group of researchers challenge these assumptions by claiming that because FGS are often not prepared enough to interact with faculty members, the discomfort and intimidation they feel has been found to “negatively affect first-generation students’ need for cognition and psychological well-being” (Padgett, Johnson, and Pascarella 2012, 261). In such extreme cases, meeting with a professor becomes so stressful to the student that it is then detrimental to their overall well-being.

Families of first generation students cannot always offer details about what the college experience will be like because they have not experienced college themselves (Davis 2010, 73). Davis (2010) adds that due to this reality, FGS often feel pressured by their family members who might not understand how demanding school can be and often ask the student to be closer to home (74). At first glance, parent involvement may seem detrimental to the student, but other studies challenge this assumption. While it was once believed that parents of first generation students could be a deterrent to their decision to attend college, recent data notes that in fact students decide to go to college because their parents encourage them to do so (Saenz et al. 2007). In this case, it is important to note that even though family members might not have gone to college, they still have experiences and knowledge that can help FGS succeed in college (Cushman 2005, 24). The influence is so great for some students that proximity to family has proven to influence important decisions, such as where to go to college. For FGS, the proximity to one’s home is an important factor to consider when selecting a college to attend, and for this reason they are more likely to live within 50 miles from their home (Saenz et al. 2007). This might also have a strong correlation with the fact that FGS are often heroes in their family: “younger siblings look up to them, parents see their own hopes and dreams realized through

them, and aunts and uncles brag about them” (Davis 2010, 206). Overall, family relationships are a very important factor for FGS attending college.

Role of Identity

Part of Kuh’s (2012) research tried to determine to what extent underserved students participated in HIPs. One of his findings was that “some groups of historically underserved students are less likely to participate in high-impact activities – those first in their family to attend college and African American students in particular” (Kuh 2012, 17). Blacks, Hispanics, and FGS were three of the underserved populations that showed notable patterns. For instance, the researcher found that Hispanic students reported higher rates of participation in service learning, student/faculty research, and internships (Finley 2011). Blacks on the other hand did not participate nearly as much. In fact, Black students showed the lowest rates of participation in four of the five HIPs examined, but especially low involvement in student/faculty research, and study abroad experiences (Finley 2011). Lastly, and most relevant to the focus of this research, first generation students showed one of the lowest participation rates in HIP’s compared to other underserved groups (Finley 2011).

Practice Recommendations

Institutions that admit FGS have a responsibility to ensure that this student population has the support it needs to have a successful college experience. This is reiterated by scholars who explain that colleges that recruit and admit low income first generation students “should evaluate whether they bear an additional responsibility to ensure that all students, regardless of financial capital, share equal access to academic and social experiences” (Housel and Harvey 2010, 89). Aside from accepting to take on that responsibility, there are specific practices that institutions

need to implement in order to best meet the needs of FGS. While there are recommended practices in the literature, there is no guarantee that these will be effective in all institutions. Finley (2011) explains that while there is an understanding that participation in HIP's has overall positive effects, "there is no means by which to account for best practices within high impact practices." Nonetheless, colleges should strive to implement an effective program that can help FGS on the corresponding campus. While there are certainly limits to what colleges and universities can do to encourage students to participate, programs should still be implemented. As an author explains, "engaging in educationally purposeful activities helps level the playing field, especially for students from low-income family backgrounds and others who have been historically underserved" (Kuh 2012, 22) and so it becomes crucial to intervene in an active manner.

The literature provides a set of recommended practices to help FGS. Kenneth Oldfield, for instance, recommends the following reforms to best meet the needs of FGS: support systems for low income and first generation students should be implemented, classism should be addressed, and the social-class of both faculty and the student body should be diversified (Housel and Harvey 2010, 69–71). There are also programs that incorporate concepts behind high impact practices, and that are most related to proposed research topic.

Kuh (2012) has written extensively about HIPs and has a few recommendations. One of his concerns is participation encouragement. Kuh claims that in order to enhance student engagement, colleges should make it possible for every student to participate in at least two high-impact activities during his or her undergraduate program, one in the first year, and one taken later in relation to the major field" (Kuh 2012, 19). In addition to that, he explains that "to engage students at high levels, these practices must be done well" (Kuh 2012, 20). In this case, it

is important to question what he means by “well” and have each university define that in correlation to their view of FGS’ success. Finley adds to this discussion by recommending that campuses keep better track of the HIP’s available on campus, and a record of students who are taking advantage of those opportunities. He also adds that it is essential to find a way to collect student evaluations on their experiences with HIPs in order to maximize the effectiveness of these programs (Finley 2011).

National Policies

With regard to national policy, a couple of laws have been enacted in an effort to support FGS in higher education. The Higher Education Act of 1965, for example, was passed during Lyndon Johnson’s presidency to make higher education more accessible to people who were not able to attend colleges or universities because of their economic situations. Over the years, the act has undergone multiple amendments. Most notably litigations have resulted in controversial policies regarding Title IX, affirmative action, and FAFSA. The most recent changes were made in 2008 to address diploma mills and the high cost of higher education (Cooley 2011). As a result of the Higher Education Act, the Federal TRIO programs were implemented. As noted on their website, the Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) are “federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. TRIO includes eight programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post baccalaureate programs. Private and public higher institutions, and community based organizations are eligible to apply for the grants (U.S. Department of Education 2013).

Conclusion

After a review of the existing literature, researchers concluded that there is little research that focuses on specific populations, including underrepresented minorities, lower-income students, and first generation students and their participation in HIPs (Brownell and Swaner 2009). This research paper hopes to fill in that gap in the literature by focusing on FGS and their participation in HIPs. There is a particular focus on liberal arts colleges which is significant considering that most research is based on the experiences of FGS at large universities.

METHODS

There is substantive amount of literature describing the challenges that many first generation students face in higher education. An online search engine that finds books available in the Occidental College Academic Commons was used to find the secondary sources used. Books that the Occidental College library did not own were requested from partner libraries that the college has partnerships with. Academic search engines, such as JSTOR, Project MUSE, ProQuest, and EBSCO, were used to find academic articles . Whenever possible, the option to find ‘related articles’ was selected to find more sources. All of the sources found are peer-reviewed academic articles and published books.

The key words used to find these books and scholarly articles were “first generation students” “first in the family” “student success” “college” and “high impact practices”. The oldest source dates back to 1971, but the vast majority of the sources date from 2000 to the present as there has been some recent research on the topic. The search was limited to colleges and universities in the United States, but no distinction was made between sources whose data was based on public or private institutions.

Case Study

Occidental College serves as the main case study for this research, but two other liberal arts colleges were researched as well. The process of selecting Scripps College and Williams College involved completing a web analysis of institutions that Occidental College has identified as its “peer institutions” and “aspirational institutions.” After going to their websites and searching for programs and/or services catered to FGS that showed clearly established programs, several colleges were contacted and e-mailed with interview requests. Administrators from both Williams College and Scripps College were the only ones that responded. Given the limited information obtained from both of these institutions, the majority of the findings reflect the data collected at Occidental College. I conducted an in depth analysis of FGS at Occidental College through a comprehensive survey, focus groups, and interviews.

Survey

The *First Generation Students Survey* (FGSS) was created with a program called *Qualtrics* and was distributed electronically to first generation students at Oxy. Respondents remained anonymous to encourage more honest and open responses. First year students were not included in the study because they have not been enrolled long enough and are less likely to have participated in high impact practices. As an e-board member of the First Generation Club, I have access to an e-mail list serve of most of the FGS that are currently enrolled at Oxy so I sent my survey to students on this list. In order to reach the first generation students who were not part of this list serve, I posted the link to my survey on our online campus announcements e-mail known as the “oxy root”. I also asked cultural club leaders of La Raza Coalition, Black Student Alliance, and Asian Pacific Americans for Liberation to forward the link to their members. To ensure that only first generation students were taking the survey, a question about their parent’s educational

attainment was asked at the beginning of the survey. If they answered that either one of their parents had attended a college or university, they were not allowed to continue with the survey. Participants who selected that they were a first year student and/or that they were under 18 were also denied access to the survey.

A total of 88 students participated in the survey. 23 of the participants were sophomores, 29 were juniors, and 36 of them were seniors. Because I did not include the 67 freshmen, the response rate was about 36% (88/245). Out of the 88 participants, 23 identified as male, 63 identified as female, and 2 decided to not respond to this particular question. The following **Figure 1** gives a visual representation of the racial/ethnic composition of the participants. The percentages of FGS participants are pretty similar to the total number of FGS at Oxy (pie chart shown later) with Latinos making up the majority of the FGS population (56%).

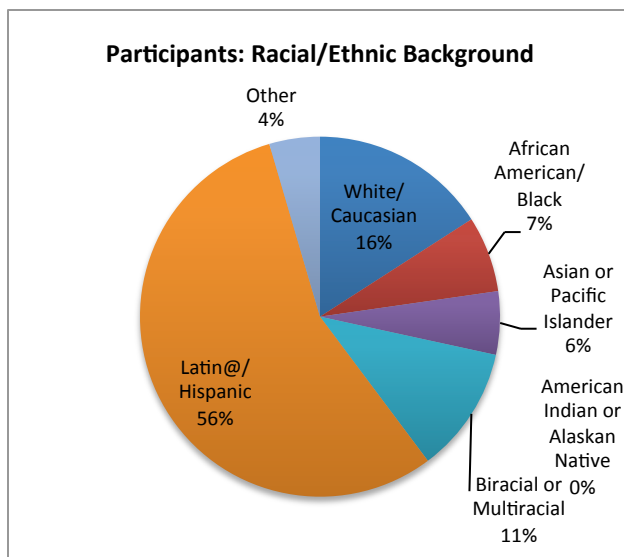


Figure 1: Racial and Ethnic Background of Participants.

Source: Bianca Cervantes, "First Generation Students Survey" *Qualtrics*, 2014

Focus Groups

Based on the patterns observed, fifteen self identified FGS were asked to participate in semi-structured focus groups to share their struggles and successes throughout their college experience. A request for first generation students to be part of the focus groups was also included in the e-mails to first generation students and cultural club members. A total of three focus groups were conducted; one with seven participants, another with five, and the third one with three. All three of the one-hour sessions were held at Occidental College; two in the Intercultural Community Center and one in the *Imágenes Latinas* room in the Academic Commons.

Interviews

Five additional students who did not feel comfortable in a group setting or who could not meet at the scheduled times were allowed to participate in individual interviews. For both of these research methods, the students were asked whether or not they had been involved in high impact practices; if they had not they were asked why not, and if they had participated, they were asked to evaluate their experiences, but most importantly they were asked to evaluate the offices responsible for providing these HIPs.

I also conducted interviews with office administrators, the president of the school, and a professor. These included Robin Craggs from the International Programs Office, Janet Morris from the Undergraduate Summer Research office, and Valerie Savior from the Career Development Center. I also interviewed Paula Crisostomo, and Dominic Alletto from the Intercultural Community Center. Additionally, I interviewed President Veitch to get a better understanding of what the institution is doing to support first generation students. Professor Mora who has been involved with the first generation program in the past also shared his perspective.

Participatory Observation

I was part of the e-board of the new First Generation Club as well as a programming assistant for the Intercultural Community Center focusing on events for FGS. Given my position in both of these groups, I was able to serve as a liaison between the students and administration. This was advantageous because I was able to participate in the planning of workshops and was able to recommend ideas based on the research I was conducting.

Review of Institutional Data

After explaining my research topic to the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning (IRAP), they shared data with me that the office had collected about first generation students. Their methodology and pool of people was different from my own, but it was helpful to have access to data that the office has been gathering for a few years now. The biggest difference was that they were able to conduct comparable analysis because they included FGS and non-FGS in their studies.

Presentation to Faculty

On February 18th, 2014, I presented my preliminary research to professors who attended a *Talking About Teaching* lunch workshop. The session was titled “Enhancing the Academic Experiences and Success of First Generation College Students” and a representative from IRAP presented institutional data (the same presentation I got access to) and I followed by presenting quantitative but mostly qualitative research I had completed at that point. After we presented, we engaged in a meaningful dialogue about the role that professors play in supporting FGS. A major concern was that the current advising system had not been effective enough. Plans were made to assess the situation and improve the advising system to accommodate for the needs of all students, including FGS. The initiative to improve advising is led by Prof. Kristi Upson-Saia

who is the Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence and Prof. John Swift who is the Associate Dean for Core Curriculum and Student Issues. Both of them also met with members of the First Generation Club, along with Professor Mora, to discuss ways to improve the existing advising program.

CASE STUDY: OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE

The following is an in depth analysis of the role that Occidental College has played in supporting first generation students. A brief history and background of the college is provided and it includes the commitment that the college has promised to FGS. A description of past programs is summarized and demographics of currently enrolled FGS are included. This section also includes information about a campus wide effort to keep Oxy accountable for its commitment to diversity and equity. The student and faculty coalition advocates for underrepresented and first generation students.

History and Background

When President Jonathan Veitch, the current president of Occidental College, gave his inaugural speech in 2009, he listed and elaborated on twelve commitments to the college. The last of these commitments was about equity and excellence, and under such commitment he stated, “Occidental must remain committed to this historic mission by enhancing its scholarship support for first-generation students.” When I interviewed President Veitch, I asked him if the college is fulfilling the commitment that he spoke about during his inaugural speech and he replied that, “there is more that we can and must do.” According to Veitch, one the biggest challenges the school faces in helping first generation students is limited resources. Apparently,

“Oxy’s endowment is \$114 million smaller than the average of its official comparison group” which means that “there is less money to address the many needs on campus.” He claimed that because of this building the endowment and increasing endowed scholarships is one of his top priorities. In the same presentation, he also referred to, and named his speech after, the story of Dr. Arenas to explain why a liberal arts education matters. In *Magdalena’s Lamp: Occidental and the Power of a Liberal Arts Education*, President Veitch shared that Dr. Arenas was one of eleven children and the first one in her family to attend college in the 1980s. As explained in the speech, she did not have the full support from her father and consequently only brought a lamp with her to campus. Thanks to the support that she received from professors and President Slaughter at the time, she was able to take advantage of opportunities that Oxy offered her and pursue her career as a physician. President Veitch reflected on this story when he shared that “when Dr. Arenas told me her story, I was deeply humbled. Humbled not just by her drive and determination, but by my responsibilities to the myriad of other students like her for whom education is as necessary to their lives as oxygen. I can't think of a more powerful reminder of the importance of our mission than her inspiring example” (Occidental College 2009). With regard to the responsibility that the school should have toward first generation students, Veitch reiterated the school’s commitment to equity when he stated the following:

We want to make sure that first generation students are aware that Oxy is a strong option for them when they are considering college, that we have the kind of financial aid in place that makes an Oxy education affordable, and that we provide the kind of support that ensures students thrive while at Oxy” (Veitch, 2014).

Occidental College’s Mission

Occidental College’s Mission Statement reads “the mission of Occidental College is to provide a gifted and diverse group of students with a total educational experience of the highest

quality – one that prepares them for leadership in an increasingly complex, interdependent and pluralistic world” (Occidental College 2013). In my academic opinion, high impact practices are directly linked to the “total educational experience” that the mission statement of the college refers to. With this in mind, it is clear that first generation students are promised an educational experience that can prepare them for their life after undergraduate study. However, because not enough first generation students participate in high impact practices, Oxy is not completely fulfilling its mission as a college.

Definition and Number of FGS at Occidental College

According to the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning (IRAP), an office at Oxy, Occidental College defines a first generation student as one whose neither parent(s) received a BA/BS degree from a four-year institution federally recognized by the United States. To clarify, this means that a student is not considered a FGS if only one parent has not gone to college, and that a student is identified as a FGS if either one of his or her parents received a two year degree from a community college. As of Fall 2013, data provided by IRAP showed that 326 out of the 2187 enrolled students were first generation students; approximately 15% of the total number of enrolled students. The following is a break down by grade level. These numbers do not add up to 2187 because they do not include transfer or exchange students. 67 out of 560 first years (12%), 66 out of 504 sophomores (13%), 68 out of 476 juniors (14%), and 99 out of 475 seniors (21%) are first generation students. **Figure 2** is a visual representation of these statistics. It is easier to note that Oxy is admitting more students every year, and unfortunately fewer FGS every time.

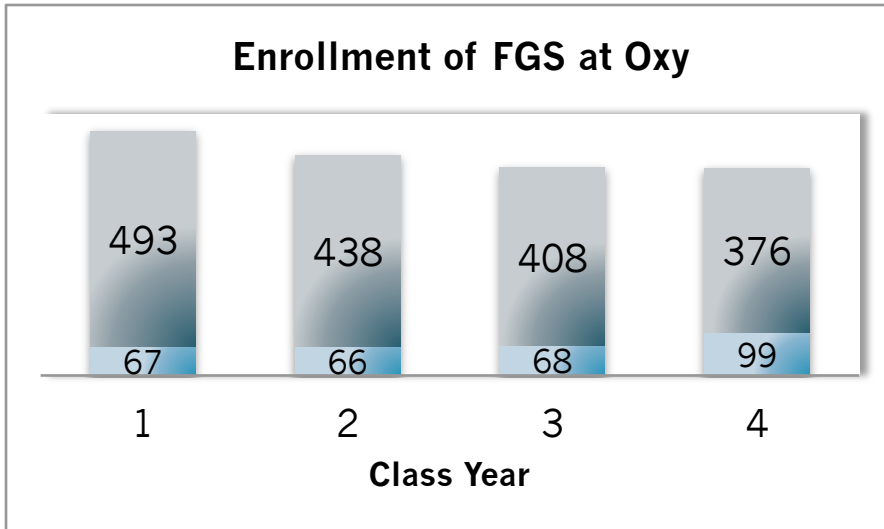


Figure 2:
Total Enrollment of FGS at Occidental College

Source: IRAP, "Enrolled FGS: Race and Ethnicity," 2014

With regard to their racial background, **Figure 3** shows that 50% of FGS at Oxy identify as Hispanic or Latino, 21% are White, 10% are Asian, 8% are Black or African American, 6% are Two or more races, 4% are non resident aliens, and 1% are Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.

Enrolled FGS: Race and Ethnicity

Figure 3: Racial and Ethnic Background of Enrolled FGS

Source: IRAP, "Enrolled FGS: Race and Ethnicity," 2014

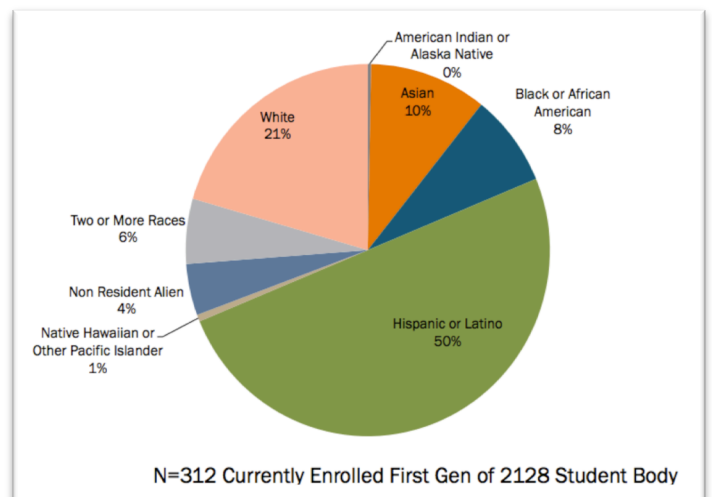


Figure 4 is a Venn diagram that shows the intersectionality of a student's generation status, Pell Grant eligibility (indicator for low income students), and racial background. This diagram shows that out of the 312 FGS currently enrolled, 53.2% of them were both Pell-eligible and non-white students (166/312). Also, 80% of the FGS were students of color (249/312) and 63% of them low income students (197/312). This diagram serves as a reminder that one cannot generalize the experiences of FGS because they all come from different backgrounds.

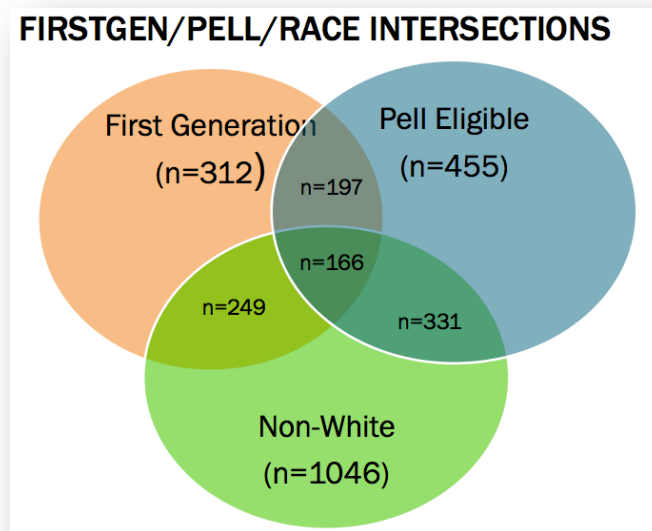


Figure 4: First Gen/ Pell / Race Intersections
Source: IRAP, "Enrolled FGS: Race and Ethnicity," 2014

Figure 5 shows the number of FGS that according to IRAP have participated in undergraduate research and studied abroad. At first glance, it appears that more FGS have participated in both of these HIPs compared to Non-FGS students. What is important to note, however, is that the pool of non-FGS is much bigger (1816) than the population of FGS at Oxy (312). When the percentages are converted, the data shows that about 51 FGS currently enrolled went abroad compared to about 280 non-FGS and about 30 FGS participated in undergraduate research compared to 113 non-FGS.

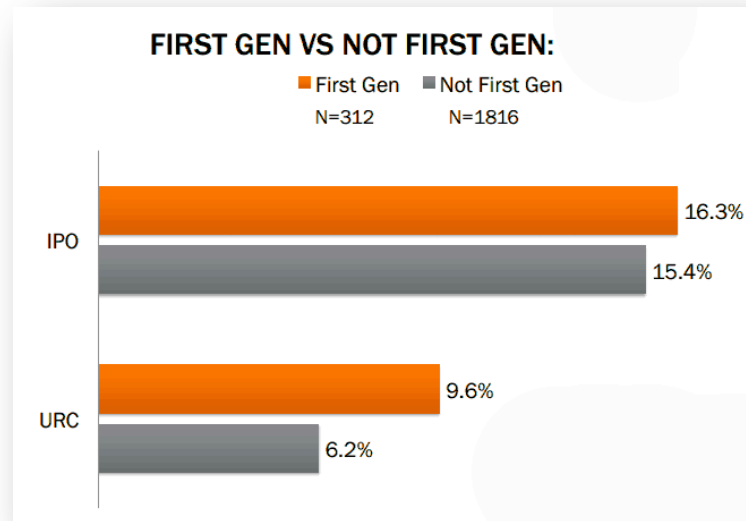


Figure 5: First Gen vs Not First Gen
Source: IRAP, "Enrolled FGS: Race and Ethnicity," 2014

High Impact Practices at Occidental College

There are a variety of offices on campus that are responsible for promoting and providing programs and activities that are considered high impact practices. For example, orientation led by O-team and First Year Residential Education (FYRE) are all part of the first year experience HIP. For the writing HIP, courses under the Cultural Studies Program (CSP) are writing intensive courses for first years, and the Center for Academic Excellence (CAE) provides writing support to all students. Undergraduate research is coordinated by the Undergraduate Research Center (URC). The community based learning is led by the Center for Community Based Learning (CCBL) and the Office of Civic Engagement (OCE). With regard to global learning, the International Programs Office (IPO) is in charge of the study abroad programs. Diversity learning is an HIP led by the Intercultural Community Affairs (ICA). The Career Development Center (CDC) provides multiple services, but their guidance with internships is what constitutes an HIP.

Programs for FGS 2010-2014

In 2009, Professor Christianakis and Professor Mora, who were both the first ones in their families to attend college, initiated a program called First Generation Success Series. They partnered with Assistant Director of New Student Programs, Karina Viaud, who organized the meetings and handled the logistics. The program had different tracks so that workshops were catered to students based on their school year. Monthly meetings were scheduled throughout the school year to inform FGS about opportunities on campus and they provided academic advice for FGS to succeed at Oxy. They also organized a welcoming gathering for FGS students and their families during orientation. During the interview with Professor Mora, he explained the importance of having a partnership between professors and staff in student affairs. He also saw the value in having adults who either identified as the first in their family to graduate from college or had experience working with this student population. Unfortunately, Karina Viaud left in the Fall of 2010 and because she was not replaced, the professors lost track of the program and “next thing we knew the Dean of Students had their own program” that they were no longer a part of (Prof. Mora, 2014). Dominic Alletto stated that, “when the previous staff member left Oxy the position was not renewed and this left a gap in the support of FGC students” (Alletto, 2014). Even when Justin Gerboc, who at the time was a staff member for the Office of Student Life, stepped in to help continue the program, in the end, it was not as successful as it had been mostly because the people who had been leading it were no longer involved.

In the 2011-2012 academic year, the Intercultural Community Affairs office and the Dean of Students intervened and created a new program called Partners in Excellence. Dominic Alletto and Emily Harris led the program that year. In essence, it was a mentoring program that matched incoming first year students with professors, staff members, and upperclassmen. Not many

students were content with the structure of the program and by the end of the year it was evident that a different strategy had to be implemented. Most notably, participation decreased and there were complaints about its effectiveness.

During the fall semester of 2012 a committee was formed. Dean Paula Crisostomo from the Intercultural Community Center (ICC), Michelle Saldaña from Residential Education and Housing Services, Horacio Aceves from Upward Bound, and me a Junior Class student senator for Associated Students of Occidental College (ASOC) at the time made up the committee. Together we planned two events during that semester. The first one was a mixer with Oxy alumni and the second one was an information session about national awards and scholarships led by Sue Pramov. In the Spring of 2013, while I was studying abroad, first generation students and students of color who had a GPA lower than 2.5 were matched with mentors to offer support and help them raise their GPAs. Each dean and staff member had about ten students they worked with and would meet with twice a month. That same semester Rachel Martino, a FGS, introduced the idea of having a student club for FGS.

For the 2013-2014 school year, three big changes were made. First of all the Intercultural Community Center changed their mission statement to include first generations students and students of color. The second was the establishment of the First Generation Club. Rachel Martino led the efforts to recruit members during the first general meeting and to create an e-board composed of five students. The third change was that the ICC hired me as a student-programming assistant to work directly with first generation students and the new club. This year both the ICC and First Generation Club have worked collaboratively to plan workshops and general meetings throughout the year. The first event was a welcoming reception at orientation for incoming FGS and their families. Students were given the opportunity to meet and ask

questions to other FGS students, as well as FGC faculty and staff. As Dominic Alletto explained in the interview, the ICC and First Generation Club “coordinated five resource workshops connecting students to high impact practices and key support services including: Financial Aid, National Awards, Career Development Center, Faculty Advisors, and Alum. We invited office representatives and professors to provide this information during our workshops. In addition to these sessions, the First Generation Club has also held more informal meetings where we had discussions and gave each other advice. The ICC also plays a major role in organizing an end of the year “graduation reception to honor our FGC graduates and their families” (Alletto, 2014).

Evidently, there is a general commitment to help first generation students but changing programs every year has proven to be ineffective and confusing for FGS. When I asked Dominic Alletto, why programs have been so unstable he explained that it was due to time and resources and that “shared responsibility for supporting FGC has led to a lack of continuity for our FGC population”. Mr. Alletto also explained that now that the ICC has committed itself to supporting first generation students and “that other parts of [his] job have been reprioritized, [he] can now focus on supporting our FGC population.”

Coalition @ Oxy for Diversity and Equity

A coalition of students and faculty has formed this year in response to the campus not fulfilling its mission statement. The coalition goes by the name Coalition @ Oxy Diversity and Equity, but is most often referred to as C.O.D.E. In the coalition’s blog page, their mission statement reads, “C.O.D.E. believes that Occidental College will achieve its full potential as a leading liberal arts college only by broadening and deepening our decades-long institutional commitment to excellence and equity”. On November 14, supporters of C.O.D.E presented a list of 29 actions at a faculty meeting that had been compiled by administrators, staff, and students.

While faculty discussed the list of demands inside the building, student members of C.O.D.E. showed their support outside with a large banner that read “Thank you C.O.D.E. faculty” and posters and headbands reading “I support C.O.D.E.” One of the student demands, number 20, refers specifically to first generation students: “Action 20: The school should hire a professional staff member to support first-generation students. Currently, a student employee is expected to fulfill this task” which is counterproductive because it “requires a great deal of time and effort” that a student cannot take on without negatively impacting his/ her academics. Therefore, “it is necessary to support first generation students by having a professional staff completely devoted to this task” (C.O.D.E. 2013). The fact that this coalition demands better support for first generation students highlights the similar disadvantages that this population has with low income students of color at an institution where there are predominantly wealthy white students. Both students of color and first generation students on this campus often feel that they do not belong. They have vocalized that they are aware that Oxy is not fulfilling its mission of ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, have the best college experience they can have.

FINDINGS

The following section details the main findings of this research project based on responses I received from a survey, focus groups, and interviews of FGS. All of the participants shared valuable information about their experiences at Occidental College as FGS. These findings also include responses from office representatives, faculty, and administrative staff at Occidental College, as well as staff from Williams College and Scripps College. Findings include details about the participation rates of FGS in HIPs, common academic and social struggles, the role that staff, faculty, and administration have in supporting FGS, and finally feedback on this year’s FGS program.

Low Participation of FGS in HIPs

I asked a series of questions in both the survey and the interviews about five of the HIPs at Oxy that FGS have an option to participate in. FGS were asked whether or not they had participated in each HIP and what factors determined their decisions. They were asked to share whether or not they had held internships, studied abroad, conducted undergraduate research, applied for a national award, or had done community service. Because I interviewed students who still have time to apply, I included the option, “no, but I plan to before I graduate.” As stated before, these results do not include first year students. **Figure 6** shows their responses.

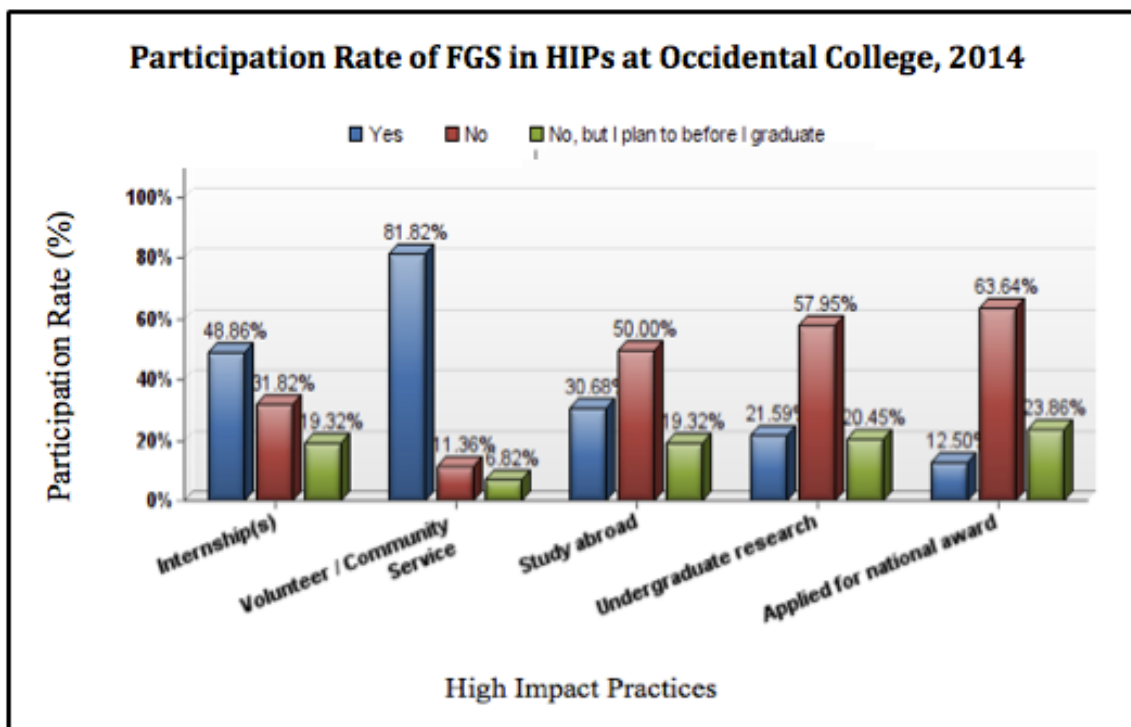


Figure 6: Participation Rate of FGS in HIPs at Occidental College, 2014
Source: Bianca Cervantes, “First Generation Students Survey” Qualtrics, 2014

What is most notable is that in all categories, except for “volunteer/ community service”, there were more students who had not participated than students who had and those who intended to participate. Existing literature demonstrates that FGS have high rates of participation

in this particular HIP, so that result was expected. The HIP of “internships” showed the second highest participation rate with basically half of the FGS involved. The results on the rest of this graph; however, show that in fact a low percentage of FGS at Occidental College are participating in HIPs. There are more FGS who are not participating than those who are.

Common Obstacles Influencing Participation

FGS attributed their lack of participation in HIPs to many different factors, but three of them were particularly salient across all of my research. They included financial concerns, family expectations, and grade point averages. Based on the replies I received, it is evident that these are all also large sources of stress for most FGS. The pie charts below in **Figure 7** show to what degree their academic workload, grades/GPA, financial situation, and family demands are all causes of stress. Most FGS participants replied that these were all origins of stress “all of the time,” “often” and “sometimes”.

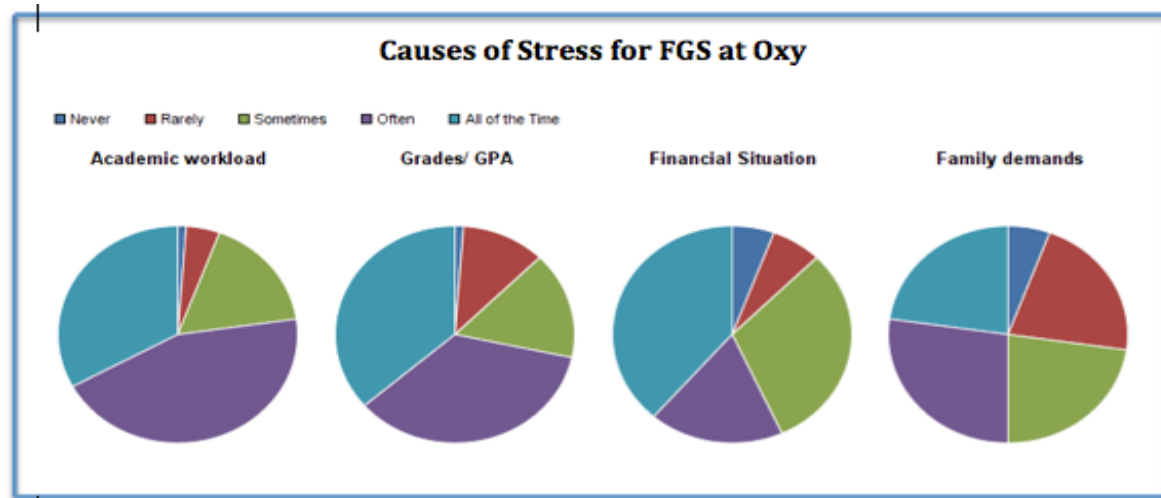


Figure 7. *Causes of Stress for FGS at Oxy*

Source: Bianca Cervantes, “First Generation Students Survey” *Qualtrics*, 2014

Financial Concerns

Several students attributed their lack of participation in HIPs to their financial situation. They explained, for example, that they did not participate in internships because most of them were unpaid and because they included additional costs. One student who had participated in an internship shared how time consuming and expensive it was for her to get to and from her interview site (Student Interview). Whether they owned a vehicle and had to pay for gas or had to rely on public transit, transportation became something very difficult to deal with. One student claimed that, “if there hadn’t been that money, I definitely wouldn’t have done it, money was a huge deciding factor” (Focus Group 1). Whether or not they were being paid was a huge issue that determined whether or not students stayed during the summer for an internship or research. One student shared that she was planning on working in a restaurant for the summer and almost declined an offer for research because she did not know that it was paid (Focus Group 2). Similarly, whether housing was provided or not was also something FGS had to consider, especially those from out of state. There were similar financial concerns with study abroad because many of them thought that it would cost a lot for them to go abroad and not all of them knew that they could apply for scholarships to help with those additional costs (Focus Group 3).

Family Expectations

Family demands and expectations was another factor that FGS had to keep in mind. One of the students who had applied to a Fulbright, for example, shared that it was difficult for her to explain to her parents what a fellowship was. They questioned her decision by saying things like, “why are you going to another country to teach? That sounds like a waste of time” (Focus Group 1). Aside from not always being able to communicate to their parents the value of participating in HIPs, students also felt limited sometimes because of their parent’s expectations. For example,

one student who wanted to study abroad said that his family relied on him economically so going abroad was not an option for him because he would not be able to work and make money (Student Interview). Additionally, there were some students who did not feel comfortable being away from their family for a whole semester. FGS, especially those who are local to the L.A. area and are not used to being far from home, shared that it would be difficult for them to be away from their family. One participant explained how “just the idea of being away from my family, I just don’t know if I could deal with it so I decided to stay” (Focus Group 2). In addition to that, several students, shared how just the status of being the very first one in your family to go to college can be very stressful. One student in particular stated, “ I have a lot of support from my family but likewise I have a lot of pressure to do good” (Student Interview).

Grade Point Averages

Another concern was being eligible to apply to HIPs. Some of the students who had shared that they had struggled their first year and therefore had low grade point averages (GPA) explained that they could not apply to anything because of their low GPAs. One student said he was very frustrated because he wanted to study abroad and had a low GPA but by the time he found out that he could appeal for that, it was too late for him to apply (Focus Group 1). Another student shared that while she understands why they have that GPA requirement she felt that “they are pushing the wrong people out of these opportunities” (Focus Group 1). With regard to research, another student explained how her GPA was an impediment and how she wished “someone had stopped me [during my] first year and told me to try to maintain a certain GPA so that in the future I could apply to do research...” (Focus Group 3).

Many of the students shared that they “hit rock bottom” and academically did very poorly their first year. One student in particular shared how he felt that he was failing himself and to tell his family when they did not do as well as they wanted to,

I remember I was so hard on myself because I was used to getting the good grades and I when I got my first D I told my parents *I am really sorry that I am not doing good* so it was something that made me feel that I was failing my parents and myself too... (Focus Group 1)

With regard to grades, **Table 2** shows the current grade point averages of participants. It is evident that there is great variety in the academic performance of students. The majority of FGS (69%) have a GPA greater than a 3.00, but nearly a third of FGS (31%) have GPAs lower than 3.00.

Table 2: Grade Point Averages, FGS at Oxy, 2014

Answer ▾	Response	%
0.00 - 1.50	0	0%
1.51 - 2.00	1	1%
2.01 - 2.50	5	6%
2.51 - 3.00	22	25%
3.01 - 3.50	34	39%
3.51 - 4.00	26	30%
Total	88	100%

Source: Bianca Cervantes, “First Generation Students Survey” *Qualtrics*, 2014

Academic and Social Experiences of FGS at Oxy

This section focuses on academic experiences of FGS at Oxy. Many students claimed that their first year in college was very difficult and for many of them their performance during their first year would haunt them the rest of their college career, particularly those who started with a low GPA. They also reflected on what they did to improve their overall experience at Oxy.

First Year Critical to the Success of FGS

Students were asked to reflect back to their first year in college and comment on what they experienced as FGS. Most of the respondents shared that they struggled academically, socially, and emotionally as a first year student and that they did not have the same social and cultural capital as some of their peers whose parents did go to college. First of all, students talked about feeling like they were on their own and about not knowing who to ask for help (Focus Group 2). One student explained how she “didn’t have any people guide [her] or tell [her] what college was going actually like” and later commented on how she could not turn to her parents for help even though her “parents could talk to [her] and say we love you, but they didn’t have any perspective” (Focus Group 1). Another student explained how she began to internalize the problem and think “I’m the problem, I need to fix this, I need to figure this out” (Focus Group 3).

Aside from feeling that they were on their own, many of the students explained that things that seemed simple to others were not so simple to them. One student admitted that she was very overwhelmed by the registration process and that she “didn’t know what [she] was doing, what classes to pick, and that’s how [she] ended up with classes [she] didn’t like or needed (Student Interview). Similarly, a student who was part of a focus group stated that “some of the classes [she] chose weren’t even four units” and did not realize it until much later (Focus Groups 2). Another student shared that he did not know what office hours were; many others in that group agreed with him (Focus Group 1). Some of them also talked about their classroom dynamics and how their peers would use sophisticated vocabulary and how they were often embarrassed to ask questions or participate. Unfortunately, because of these experiences, many of them felt that they did not belong and were not as capable as their peers; something known as the impostor syndrome.

Students also commented on struggling with their time management and study habits. One student, for example, stated that they were used to things being scheduled for them in high school and that planning for classes, meals, sleeping, homework, and exercising was very stressful and difficult for her to figure out (Focus Group 1). A participant stated it best when she said, “I think *overwhelming* is the best word to describe it; there was a lot going on at once” (Focus Group 1).

Improvement After First Year

Fortunately, most students were able to improve their academic standing, but many lamented that their bad start affected their overall GPA. One student claimed that what eventually helped them was “knowing that it is okay not to know and knowing that there are support systems...” as well as “letting yourself realize that when you do need help you just need to go out and seek it and you shouldn’t be embarrassed (Focus Group 2). Another student found that self-motivation and convinced herself that “yeah I messed up, but even though I messed up I keep going, I push myself and I just don’t quit” (Focus Group 1). Two of the students happened to be roommates and one of them told the other, “it was nice to live with someone who has gone through a similar situation because we have been able to support each other” (Focus Group 1). Others added to this saying that they found friends and entire support groups, such as cultural clubs, that helped them make it through challenging times. With regard to their involvement in clubs and organizations on campus, the survey showed that 73 FGS out of the 88 who took the survey had participated in a student club or organization and that out of those, 50 had held some type of leadership position within those clubs (FGSS). Many leadership skills can be acquired by holding e-board positions, but there are instances when being too involved can be problematic. In fact, one student alluded to his over commitment and explained that he enjoyed being a part of

all of these extracurricular activities but he realized that he was spreading himself too thinly by participating in clubs, athletics, and dealing with academics all at the same time (Focus Group 1).

The Responsibility of Supporting FGS

In focus groups, one of the ideas FGS debated was the pro-activeness of students to participate in these HIPs. There were several students who explained that it is up each student to ultimately take the time to inform themselves about opportunities at Oxy and apply to them. One student felt very strongly about this individual responsibility and stated that “it’s just a matter of being self motivated to find these opportunities, and I’m not necessarily sure that it should fall on someone else to provide these opportunities, to spoon feed you” (Focus Group 2). While at least one other student agreed with this, two other students in the same group argued that it was impossible to be responsible for applying to opportunities that they were not even aware of. One of them strongly disagreed with the comment and argued that “I feel like there should be some kind of system that can help first generation students, not necessarily feeding us the information, we are not babies, but I feel like there should be some guidance” (Focus Group 2). Similar sentiments about whose responsibility it is to make sure that FGS participate in HIPs were evident in several interviews. One student, during an individual interview, explained it best when she said, “it’s the responsibility of the offices to let us know about what’s available and once we know, it is our responsibility to go out and ask for more information” (Student Interview). Another student added how difficult it can be to seek help when it is not clear who or where you can get that information, “there isn’t a place where first gen students can go and find someone who can help you and answer questions about things you are interested in” (Focus Group 3).

The Role of Office Representatives

Staff who work for the offices that provide some of these HIPs are also responsible for encouraging more first generation students to participate in HIPs. The following section details some of the outreach strategies that offices like IPO, URC, and CDC have undergone, how they have addressed some of the obstacles that FGS face, and additional comments about how their office can better help FGS. Included in this section are also reasons why FGS said they did not participate in the HIPs that these offices represent, as well as a few additional questions about whether or not FGS are familiar with the location and services of each office.

International Programs Office (IPO)

Robin Craggs, the executive director of international programs, has worked at Occidental College for nearly 13 years. During an interview she shared the office's outreach strategy, their successes, but also some initial thoughts about how the office can encourage more FGS to study abroad. The International Programs Office (IPO) relies primarily on grassroots networking, or word of mouth, to encourage students to go abroad. With nearly half of all Oxy students going to other countries, it is common for the younger students to meet and hear from students who have gone abroad. They also have an interactive website that gives students a sense of the programs that the office offers. With regard to the programs themselves, Craggs noted that one of the goals of the office has been to ensure "that the programs we offer reflect the broad diversity of interests of Oxy students" something that she feels they have improved upon over the years (Craggs, 2014).

Another accomplishment has been the creation of a comprehensive fee that according to Craggs has leveled the playing field and allowed students to use their financial aid to study abroad. However, there are still misconceptions about the cost of plane tickets, for example, that

she feels the IPO needs to address more carefully. Robin Craggs also emphasized the relationship that the office has been developing with the faculty and the importance of it. By having that strong alliance, the office is able to inform them of opportunities related to their department and make it easier for professors to inform and encourage their advisees to participate in HIPs.

While Robin Craggs is aware of some of the difficulties that FGS face, she admitted that the office can improve and find better ways to support FGS and other underrepresented students. She shared the example of two FGS, for instance, who wanted to go abroad but for whom “time away from family is huge and going 3,000 or 4,000 miles away for a whole semester was something they couldn’t even imagine” (Craggs, 2014). Once the office was aware of their situation, they made sure to offer them the option of going abroad during the summer; something that ended up working best for these students. During the interview, Robin Craggs commented on how the office needs to be more proactive and plan effective outreach strategies to encourage FGS to participate in the programs that the IPO office offers. She mentioned how specific outreach has been done in the past, by going directly to cultural club meetings for example, and suggested that they could do something similar with the new First Generation Club.

Table 3 shows some the top reasons why the 56 FGS who did decided to abroad and decided to did not participate in study abroad programs. It is also important to note that participants had the option of selecting as many of the options that they thought were most applicable to their situation. It is clear that one of the main reasons why FGS do not go abroad is because they would not be able to fulfill major requirements. Having low GPAs and the desire to go abroad some other time were also great concerns.

Table 3 : Reasons Why FGS Did Not Study Abroad

Why have you NOT studied abroad? Select all that apply

N = 56

Answer	Response	%
Would not be able to fulfill major requirements	20	36%
GPA not strong enough	17	30%
I plan to study abroad later (some time before I graduate)	17	30%
Financial Obstacles	16	29%
Did not have time to apply	15	27%
Did not have enough information to make a decision	11	20%
Don't want to be too far from home	8	14%
Not Interested	7	13%
Was discouraged by the office staff	2	4%

Source: Bianca Cervantes, "First Generation Students Survey" *Qualtrics*, 2014

The next **Table 4** shows that most FGS do know where the office for IPO is located, despite its recent change in location. It also notes that the majority of participants of the survey were familiar with the services that this office provides and that several of them had visited the office. As noted before, only 29 of FGS who participated in the survey stated that they had studied abroad.

Table 4: International Programs Office

N = 88

Question	Yes	No
Do you know where their office is located?	<u>61</u>	<u>27</u>
Are you familiar with the services that they provide?	<u>57</u>	<u>31</u>
Have you ever visited their office?	<u>60</u>	<u>28</u>
Have you studied abroad?	<u>29</u>	<u>59</u>

Source: Bianca Cervantes, "First Generation Students Survey" *Qualtrics*, 2014

Undergraduate Research Center (URC)

Janet Morris has been an administrator for the Undergraduate Research Center (URC) for about a year. She has also served as an associate of the human subjects board for 12 years. During an interview, she explained some of the URC's outreach strategies, about possible situations that are stopping FGS from participating in research, the role that the faculty plays, and finally some thoughts about how to move forward.

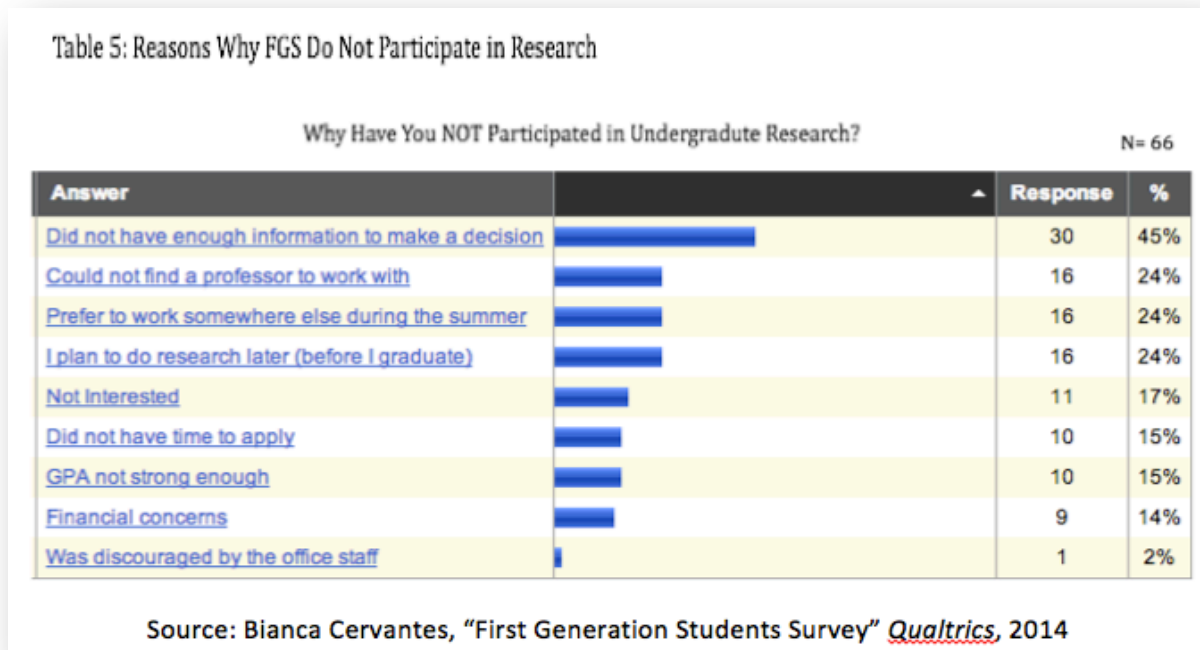
With regard to how the URC distributes information about the services they provide, they post information on their website and on their facebook page, they send newsletters every quarter that feature students who have participated, and they distribute flyers and posters. They also tell faculty in different departments and ask them to encourage them to tell their students. While she is confident that the information is out there, she acknowledged that she can see how for FGS "if it has never occurred to them to look for this information then they might be missing it" (Morris, 2014).

She also shared that the office does not ask students when they apply to share personal demographic information and that because of that she does not know how many FGS have participated in URC programs. With regard to GPA requirements, this might be discouraging students from applying. She explained how this can be compromised if it is addressed in the application, but that many times the students are not aware of the fact that they can do this.

Faculty members play a major role in recruiting students to participate in research. The office administrators "don't know many of the students; all they see is the paper work" but professors, on the other hand, do know them (Morris, 2014). They are the ones who are able to determine whether a student is capable and ready for a rigorous program. Students who have participated in undergraduate research, especially those who are FGS can also help attract other

FGS to the program. Morris suggested that hearing from friends who have participated makes research “sound more accessible, more doable” (Morris, 2014).

Table 5 shows some of the top reasons why FGS do not participate in research. For the 66 students who said they had not participated in research, their top reason was simply not having enough information about the HIP. This was followed by students who could not find a professor to work with, and by those who preferred to work summer jobs elsewhere.



Additionally, students were asked about their familiarity with the URC office. **Table 6** shows that many FGS did not know where the office was located, perhaps because they just changed their location, and even a larger number of them had neither visited their office or participated in

research.

Table 6 : Undergraduate Research Center

Question	Yes	No
Do you know where their office is located?	38	48
Are you familiar with the services that they provide?	40	46
Have you ever visited their office?	24	62
Have you participated in undergraduate research?	19	67

Source: Bianca Cervantes, “First Generation Students Survey” *Qualtrics*, 2014

Career Development Center: Internships

Valerie Savior who has been the director of the Career Development Center (CDC) for 8 years and has given 14 years of service to Oxy also participated in an interview. I asked her to speak specifically about internships because the office oversees some internship opportunities.

The CDC as a whole has expanded its staff and has decided to incorporate social media in their outreach. The office has a facebook page, a twitter account, an instagram as a way to contemporize the way they distribute information to students. She also explained how there have been years when they have worked with cultural clubs on campus to speak directly with underrepresented students about the opportunities the office offers but that this can be challenging for several reasons. First of all, it can be difficult for staff to be available when clubs meet. Second of all, sometimes the clubs shift due to leadership turnover and the relationship is lost. I asked Valerie about whether or not the office keeps a record of how many FGS participate in internships and she replied that they did not. The CDC does not keep count of how many FGS participate in internships primarily because they tend to stay away from confidential information that can often make the student feel tokenized. Valerie Savior did say, however, that she could see the value and importance of keeping track of FGS.

When I asked her to share why she thought that FGS were not participating as much in internships she explained that based on her own observation, her conversations with students and colleagues, and conferences she had attended, her “sense is that many FGS need a source of income and a lot of internships are unpaid.” She explained that whether the interns are paid or not is determined by the occupation sector and not by the CDC. Nonetheless, she argued “if a college is going to assure compensation for FGS that may have low income, the college would

have to create endowed gifts or a mechanism to have funding source to assure that any occupation area would have funding” (Savior, 2013).

She also attributed the lack of participation to family conditions and expectations. FGS do not always have a “productive career conversation about occupational decision making” because their parents may not be familiar with the occupation they aspire to have. Related to this, Valerie Savior explained, is the common expectation that students will “go into known and reputable areas” in the medical or law field, for instance.

Support from Faculty

Professors

Many of the students stressed the importance and the difference that it made to have professors on campus who believed in them and cared about their experiences in college. One student said it best when she said, “it’s really beneficial to have someone who feels that I am capable and tells me you’re smart and you can do this” (Focus Group 1). This type of support is especially important to FGS who are struggling academically. One student was recalling a time when he “felt lost and hidden in a large crowd of people and it was nice for professors to reach out” when he needed it the most (Student Interview).

What many FGS appreciated was not only having someone who believed in them, but also someone who was sensitive to their experiences as FGS. One student explained how she felt that “professors should know how they affect us; the things that they say and the way they act matters” (Student Interview). Professors do not necessarily have to be FGS themselves, but students did note that there are some professors who appear to be more understanding than others. Professor Mora, for instance, explained that he is careful about what he says to students

because of his own experiences as a FGS in college, “I try to be mindful... what I say carries a lot of weight so if I say something to a student, positive or negative, coming from a professor it’s going to mean a lot and I think that is especially important for first generation students” (Prof. Mora, 2014).

Students who did participate in HIPs shared that had it not been for their professors who encouraged them to apply for any of the HIPs they most likely would not have participated. Many times these same professors became the ones who wrote letters of recommendation for the various programs they applied to. Professor Mora also emphasized the importance and benefits of developing relationships with professors when he suggested, “I think it’s important to develop relationships because for example, we can write letters of recommendation that are much more developed, and also once we get to know students we can tell them about opportunities depending on their interests (Mora, 2014). **Figure 8** shows that many professors do encourage students to apply to HIPs. National fellowships had the lowest outcome, but there were some nonetheless.

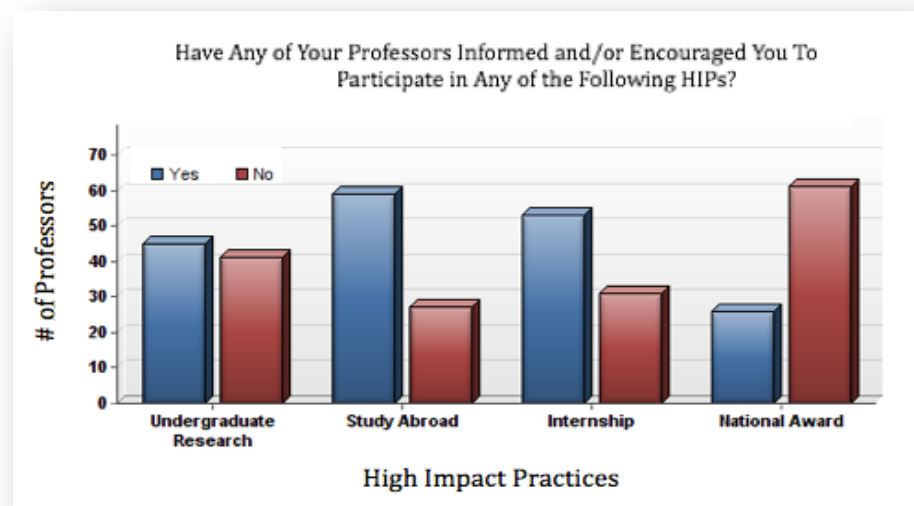


Figure8: Professors Informing FGS about HIPs
Source: Bianca Cervantes, “First Generation Students Survey” *Qualtrics*, 2014

As one student suggested, professors can also become role models for FGS, “ I have one professor who I respect so much, and he’s one of my idols and I found out he was a first generation college student and I see him and I think you make me believe I can do it” (Focus Group 1).

Advisors

Advising was also very important to FGS. While some had great experiences with their advisors, there were others who wished they had been more helpful. One student for example, explained that he wanted to study abroad but that studying abroad conflicted with the classes he needed to graduate. He explained that “when it came to planning around my classes to see if I could go abroad I couldn’t go because of one class, because it was only offered that one semester” (Focus Group 2). While the FGS did not acknowledge it explicitly, his comments exemplify poor advising because the advisor should have helped him plan his courses ahead of time so that he would be able to study abroad. Students acknowledged the role that advisors have in helping students beyond just providing them with their pin number around registration time. Taking the time to help the student plan out their four years, for example, can make a huge difference in the overall experience of a FGS. All professors play a major role in the lives of FGS, but as shown in **Figure 9** it appears that students are more likely to visit their professors than their advisors.

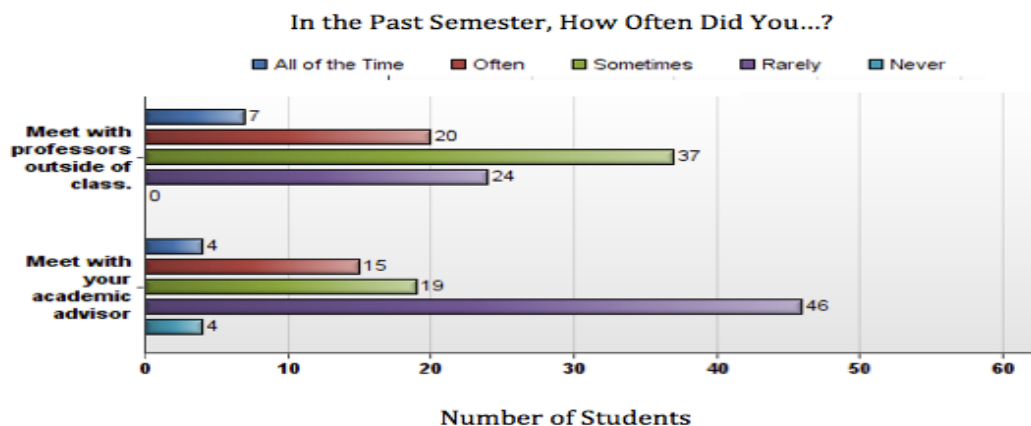


Figure 9: FGS Engagement With Faculty
Source: Bianca Cervantes, “First Generation Students Survey” *Qualtrics*, 2014

Valerie Savior gave her sincere opinion about the advising system at Occidental College and strongly suggested that it be addressed:

I don't think first and second year advising is that thoughtful, I think there is a huge issue in academic advising at the underclass level before students are declared and I imagine that those issues are profoundly worse for FGS,

Programs for FGS at Oxy

In the *First Generation Student Survey*, there was a question that asked FGS to indicate whether or not they had participated in programs that have been offered to FGS in the past four years. The following **Table 7** shows the results to that question. Because second, third, and fourth years took the survey, it is important to note that sophomores only knew about the last two programs, juniors were aware of the last three programs, and seniors had been offered all four of them. Out of the 28 students who responded to this question, at least 15 claimed that they had participated in the programs offered this year.

Table 7 : Participation in Programs for FGS at Oxy

Have You Participated in Any of the Following Programs for FGS? (Select All That Apply)

N = 28

Answer	Response	%
First Generation Success Track (2010): program offered workshops throughout the year catered to each grade level	8	29%
Partners in Excellence (2011): mentoring program for first years that matched students with faculty and staff	7	25%
First Generation Committee Events (2012): an alumni mixer and a session on national awards	10	36%
First Generation Club (2013): mixer with office representatives, health and wellness workshop, and life after oxy event	15	54%

Source: Bianca Cervantes, "First Generation Students Survey" *Qualtrics*, 2014

One student who participated in the survey referred to a specific program that she liked and explained why. He or she (the survey is anonymous) said:

My favorite type of program was the First Gen Success Track program. It catered to the different needs that students of different years need. It was helpful having a staff member in charge of the program since they know the types of programs that would be helpful to first generation students (FGSS).

Currently, as noted in **Table 7**, there is a First Generation Club that with the support of the ICC has planned several workshops and club meetings throughout the year. Because the club is new, there were many instances of trial and error, but the hope is that there will be much improvement in the years to come. When the survey was distributed, 49 students out of the 77 that answered the question showed that they had at least heard about the First Generation Club and 25 indicated that they had attended at least one event that semester.

FGS who had not participated in the events that the First Generation Club and the ICC held during the Fall of 2013, were asked to share why they had not. The results are shown in the table below. As **Table 8** illustrates, most students did not know about the events or had time conflicts. One student added a comment about how one of the programs he or she was a part of discouraged him or her from returning the following year, “ I had a bad experience with the PIE program... I found it to not be helpful and very unorganized and so it deterred me from wanting to join the first generation club this time around” (FGSS).

Table 8: Reasons Why FGS Do Not Participate in First Gen Club Events

Why did you Decide to NOT Participate in the First Gen Club events?			
Answer		Response	%
Inconvenient Location		1	2%
Already familiar with material		5	10%
Themes do not apply to me		5	10%
Other		6	12%
Not interested		9	18%
Time Conflicts		19	38%
Didn't know about events		26	52%

Source: Bianca Cervantes, “First Generation Survey” Qualtrics, 2014

Programs and Services at Liberal Arts Colleges

The following are tables that describe the programs that three liberal arts colleges, Scripps College, Williams College, and Occidental College, offer to their first generation students. There are many similarities between the programs, but it is evident that the program at Occidental College is still developing.

Scripps College

Sonia De La Torre-Iniguez is the Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Academic Resources and Services at Scripps College and she shared information about the First-Generation@Scripps program that was launched in the fall of 2010. **Table 9** shows the name and brief description all of the services and events that the Scripps program provides to its FGS.

Table 9: First-Generation@Scripps Programs

Name of the Program	Description
Pre-Orientation	A three-day pre-orientation for all first-year FGS to inform them about resources available at Scripps
Workshops	A variety of educational and social programming offered throughout the school year. They are based on what the FGS want and need. Examples of the topics addressed include: “open house, preparing for summer options, lunches with faculty, dinner with the cohorts, time management, transitioning home for break, and choosing a major”
Mentoring Program	Incoming first generation college students are matched with returning FGS
Newsletter	“The newsletter was created with the purpose of highlighting areas of diversity and achievement in the first-gen community as well as in the larger community of First-Generation students in higher education.”
First-Gen Student-Faculty Lunches:	Lunches where students, faculty, and staff are invited to meet each other and improve the communication between each group
Co-Intern Office Hours	Co-Interns help program events for FGS. They hold office hours in the Dean of Students office every week so that students can drop by if they have questions.
Faculty Liaison:	A faculty member that serves as an advisor and liaison to the program. He or she works to make partnerships between the FGS program initiative and faculty

Source: “Inside Scripps” <http://inside.scrippscollege.edu/studentaffairs/first-generation-scripps-program>

Williams College

Dr. Rosanna Reyes is the Associate Dean and Dean of First Generation Initiatives at Williams College and she is responsible for overseeing the planning and coordination of programs for FGS that occur throughout a school year. **Table 10** shows a list of the programs that they provide and a quick explanation about each one.

Table 10: First Generation Students Williams College Programs

Name of Program	Description
First Year Orientation Program	Workshops and sessions provided during the student's first fall semester.
Fall Meet & Greet	FGS have the opportunity to meet faculty, staff and other students.
<i>Rites of Passage</i> Graduation Celebration	Event to celebrate FGS' graduation
<i>Lunch & Learn</i> Sessions	Informal sessions where they meet staff from their career center, financial aid center, and other offices on campus
First Gen Student Advisory Board	A group of FGS from all class years. "The group works closely with the Dean of First Generation Initiatives and informs programs and services for their peers at Williams. The board also coordinates a monthly newsletter and activities through out the year."
<i>Williams Firsts</i> Peer Mentoring Program	Peer to peer mentoring where first-years are matched with an upper class FGS

Source: "Dean of the College: First Generation Students" http://dean.williams.edu/?page_id=4078

Occidental College

The descriptions of each program are paraphrased based on the newly created webpage about first generation students on the Oxy website. Currently, there are still a few changes that need to be made to the site, but the most important information is now available to current and future FGS at Oxy.

Table 11: FGS Programs for students at Occidental College

Name of Program	Description
First in the Family Reception	The reception is held during orientation and it is held for FGS and their families. Members of the Oxy community are invited to share their experiences and advice.
First Generation Success Workshops	Workshops are held throughout the year to inform FGS about the opportunities and resources available to them. Past workshops have included topics on internships, research, scholarships, and advising guidance.
Peer Mentorship	Starting in the fall of 2014, a peer mentorship program will be created where older FGS will serve as mentors for the younger students.
Graduation Reception	After four years of hard works, a ceremony is held for FGS and their family members to celebrate their accomplishments.
First Generation Club	The club is led by students and is meant to create a safe space for FGS to come together and support each other.

Source: "First Generation Success Program" <https://www.oxy.edu/first-generation-success-program>

RECOMMENDATIONS

The implications from my research indicate that while there are individual characteristics that influence the outcome of FGS in college, the institutions themselves have a greater effect on their experience. The following are a few recommendations based on all of the research that I gathered from students, faculty, staff, and administration.

Inform Students About HIPs Early

The first year for FGS is critical for their success so it is important that incoming FGS receive information in multiple forms about the HIPs and services available to them as Oxy students. All students are bombarded with a lot of information during orientation, which is why it would be best to provide this type of information before they arrive to campus. The ICC already plans a lunch during orientation every year and family members are invited to attend. As Professor Mora suggested, this is an opportunity for faculty and staff to speak directly to the parents (in both Spanish and English, if possible) to help minimize some of the anxieties the

family and the students may be facing (Mora, 2014). Professors, staff, and other older FGS should be present at this event as well, so that the incoming FGS know who to reach out to during their time at Oxy.

Aside from providing useful information during orientation, the ICC and office representatives must think of creative ways to continue to inform FGS about opportunities throughout their time at Oxy. Some offices already use social media, for example, to increase awareness of the events that are happening on campus. Using facebook, twitter, instagram, and other similar mediums can help ensure that FGS are receiving the information they need to thrive at Oxy. Additionally, students should have the option to easily refer back to information that they have heard about. The ICC has started a discussion around the possibility of creating a website, for example, with links to other offices as well as a description of events that the ICC has held. Both Williams College and Scripps College have such websites. There have also been proposals to create small videos that FGS can view during a time that is most convenient for them. Another possibility is to create a monthly newsletter much like the FGS at Scripps where they share the success stories of FGS. According to Sonia De La Torre-Iniguez, the Assistant Dean of Students at Scripps, “the hope is that by sharing these types of stories we will instill confidence in new first-gen students by helping them see themselves in someone who has done it” (De la Torre, 2014). Overall, it is critical to support FGS throughout their four years at Oxy. While their first year is pivotal, the rest of their college career is just as important.

Improve Existing Programs

Now that the ICC has made the commitment to support FGS, the office must do its best to improve the pioneer workshops that were conducted this year, and consider alternative and more interactive options for its workshops. First of all, it is imperative that rather than changing a

program completely every year, that the office take the time to fully develop a program and give it time to improve. Secondly, it is important that students not feel like they are being lectured for a whole hour. While the information that the ICC is providing them is really helpful, the reality is that it can be very overwhelming to gather so much information. The way that these information sessions are held is also very important because we do not want students to feel like their status is limiting them in any way. One survey participant addressed this concern when he or she shared, “the first generation workshop made me feel like I couldn’t succeed at Oxy because of my background... I would have liked programs that didn’t seem remedial but rather supportive” (FGSS, 2014).

The partnership between the ICC and the First Generation Club is very important and needs to be strengthened. The club can potentially be a great support group and a way for FGS to realize that they are not on their own; that they are not the only experiences the things that they are. The establishment of this support group can then help ensure attendance, for example, to any workshops that the ICC plans. The club can also serve the role of informing the ICC by giving recommendations as to how to best support FGS on campus. A student suggested this when they stated, “I believe programs and services should be created in partnership with first generation students themselves so that activities are tailored to individual needs” (FGSS, 2014). This partnership with students is present at Scripps where they have co-interns available during office hours. At Williams College they have an advisory board composed of students who help the dean plan and execute events. On a similar note, it is also important to be careful that students who hold leadership positions in the club do not feel overburdened for running this club. They should not have to risk their academic standing for wanting to create a support group on campus.

Inform Staff, Faculty, and Administrators About the Experiences of FGS

Professors, administration, and staff need to know about the unique experiences of FGS so that they can be more mindful of how they support FGS. A student in the survey has suggested, “training for faculty and administrators and staff to understand the difficulties of being first generation college students” (FGSS, 2014). A professional, either from Oxy or from an external source, must lead these trainings. Ideally they would share the common experiences of FGS, backed by research, and be able to provide advice as to how to best help FGS. Valerie Savior also suggested that the “college give faculty and staff more opportunities to go to conferences so that they can learn about the unique needs of FGS and know how to serve this population better” (Savior, 2013).

It is also important that people work collaboratively across departments and offices. De la Torre at Scripps attributes their success to this collaboration when she says,

I think in part we have huge success in encouraging first-gen students to participate in high impact activities because of the close partnership with staff and faculty who constantly encourage, support, and reach out to our students to participate in these types of activities (De la Torre, 2014).

Valerie Savior had a similar request and explained the value of having such collaboration. She suggested that students would really appreciate seeing “a unified front of interests across departments...” and in the process they would “understand that we care for their success if not more so than any other matriculate” (Savior, 2013).

Everyone Must Take Responsibility For Ensuring the Success of FGS

Office representatives should keep track of the number of FGS that are participating in their programs so that they can determine whether or not they are helping increase the number of FGS who participate in HIPs. According to Paula Crisostomo, “directors of HIPs can be more

intentional about getting first gen and students of color to participate in their programs” and one way to do that is to target FGS in their outreach and be “more sensitive around language and needs of these students” when they do visit the offices (Crisostomo, 2014). These offices also need to make sure that they are visible on campus; that they make sure students know where their offices are located and the services they provide. One way to do this is to make their presence in the quad during the lunch hour.

Professors also have a very important role in terms of informing and encouraging their students to participate in HIPs. FGS might “already be stigmatized to not talk to faculty, and perhaps they don’t know how to approach faculty and use their intellect” so it is important that professors reach out to their students. This can especially be effective during their office hours when the professors could provide a space for the students to share what they are experiencing as FGS at Oxy. Professor Mora explained how he takes the time to learn about all of his students and then tells self identified FGS about his “own experience to some extent so that they can understand that they are not alone” (Mora, 2014). With regard to advising, the school needs to provide guidelines to all faculty members who serve as advisors so that they know how to address the needs of FGS. Advisors should not only help students complete all of their graduation requirements, but also encourage them to participate in HIPs.

Occidental College has a responsibility as an institution to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, get the best out of their college experience. In order to accomplish their own mission statement, the school and its top administrative leaders need to commit to “provide resources and institutionalize programs that they school is known for” (Mora, 2014). Resources need to be allocated to support existing programs, to train faculty and staff, and to remove any financial barriers that are stopping FGS from applying to HIPs.

Hire a Professional Staff

Rather than adding to the existing responsibilities of staff members, the college needs to hire a trained staff member who knows how to best support first generation students. This person (or group) should not have too many other responsibilities and should make him or herself available to FGS. This person would be in charge of planning and coordinating workshops, create newsletters to inform students about opportunities and serve as a counselor when students need someone to talk to. Paula Crisostomo who works for the ICC and is a Assistant Dean of Intercultural Affairs shared how many people who work at Oxy “are all wearing five different hats” and although they are all dedicated staff, they are all trying to do too much. She suggested that the ideal situation would be to “at best, given Oxy, hire a half time professional person who would work directly with first generations students and move them from MSI to Phi Beta Kappa and make sure that they do everything in between to accomplish that” (Crisostomo, 2014). Oxy can look at both Scripps College and Williams College as models. Both of these schools have deans who are responsible for overseeing first generation programs and they both have staff and hired students who help run these offices.

CONCLUSION

I presented the existing research in academia about FGS and shared my original research with the hope that more and more people will commit themselves to helping FGS succeed in higher education. The work that I presented is specific to the experiences of FGS at Occidental College, a small liberal arts college, but my hope is that the information I gathered will help inform other small liberal arts colleges around the country, especially because most of the existing literature focuses on the experiences of FGS in large state universities. By conducting

this research I realized that there are many people who are already committed to helping FGS but that their good intentions are not enough. They are already burdened with many responsibilities and they do not have enough resources to help FGS. Having a professional staff who solely focuses on helping FGS can help alleviate this burden on other staff but also make room for a more organized and collaborative approach to helping FGS. The ICC and the First Generation Club can learn a lot about what they accomplished this year and use that experience to improve the program for future FGS. Based on what I have experienced, I sincerely believe that Occidental College has the potential to become a leader in these efforts but in order for that to be a reality, the college as a whole has to be committed to this goal. Oxy can also take the time to learn from other institutions who are coming up with creative ways to help FGS in order to make a program that combines existing and new ideas. Most importantly, Oxy needs to include FGS themselves in the conversation to ensure that their needs are being addressed.

With regard to further research, there were some topics that I was not able to address because I did not have enough information to develop them. First of all, there should be more research done on the intersections of FGS status and other underrepresented identities, for instance gender and sex. Also, the health and well being of FGS is another topic that I did not address but that also needs to be researched more.

Overall, my greatest hope is that my work will help improve the experiences of current and future FGS at Oxy. A few changes and efforts began to take fold even while I was conducting my research, so I am hopeful that my research will have a greater impact once more people access it. After conducting interviews, for example, office representatives became more aware about their role in helping FGS and began to think of ways that they could improve. Additionally, after giving my presentation to faculty, they too began to discuss how they could

improve the advising system and even reached out to the First Generation Club to inform their program changes. Speaking of the club, five new e-board members were elected to continue leading the club next year. Lastly, the ICC has shown to be fully committed to helping FGS and the staff have already begun creating a website. They also led the planning of a first generation reception for the 99 FGS who are graduating this year. Hopefully staff, faculty, and administration will continue to play a role in supporting students who want to and need to succeed not only for their own well being but for the future of their families. Occidental College must help FGS become the role models that they aspire to be.

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APPENDIX A - Research Participants

Focus Groups

Focus Group #1

- Jacqueline Ayala
- Damian Mendieta
- Violeta Campos
- Shannon Owens
- Nancy Nguyen
- Nubia Menchaca
- Eric Quizhpi

Focus Group #2

- Pablo Romano
- Luis Orozco
- Karina Ortiz
- Megan Liu
- Gaspar Moreno

Focus Group #3

- Lauren Silverly
- Jasmine Tovar
- Julissa Plascencia

Individual Interviews

- Maya Morales
- Jonathan Kanellakos
- Jorge Rivera
- Sarah Reyes
- Carlos Razo
- Prof. Richard Mora
- Paula Crisostomo
- Dominic Alletto
- Janet Morris
- Valerie Savior
- Robin Craggs
- Sonia De La Torre-Iniguez
- Dr. Rosanna Reyes

APPENDIX B – Interview Questions

Questions For Focus Groups/ Individual Interviews

- What does a college education mean to you? Why is it important to you that you receive a college education?
- Think back to your first semester at Oxy, what were those few days like for you?
 - What might you have experienced as a first generation student that perhaps some of your peers did not?
- Have you studied abroad?
 - If yes, why did you? What convinced/encouraged you to participate?
 - If not, why didn't you? If you were in a different position would you have participated?
- Have you conducted undergraduate research with a professor?
- Have you applied for a national award?
- Have you had an internship?
- Whose responsibility is it to make sure first generation students get involved in these HIPs?
- What type of relationships do you have with professors?
- Who do you usually go to for guidance for school opportunities?
- What do you like the best about Oxy? About your overall college experience?
- What additional academic support and services do you think Oxy should provide to first generation students?

Questions to Professors

- Talk about the first generation program four years ago that Karina used to run.
 - What were some pros and cons of this program?
 - What role did you play after she left?
- What role should (or can) professors play in supporting first generation students?
- First generation students are less likely to approach professors (office hours) for additional help. What can professors do to address this issue?
- How can professors help increase the participation of FGS in HIPs?
- Why is it important that first generation students develop relationships with professors?
- What can Oxy do to better support first generation students?
- I am presenting my work to faculty in two weeks, is there anything that you recommend I tell them?

Questions to President Veitch:

- What role should and can the administration play in supporting first generation college students?
- In Magdalena's Lamp: Occidental and the Power of a Liberal Arts Education, you stated that "Occidental must remain committed to this historic mission by enhancing its scholarship support

for first-generation students.” In your opinion, do you think that the college is fulfilling this commitment to its full potential? Why or why not?

- What are some of the challenges that Oxy faces in trying to support first generation students?
- First generation students whom I have interviewed have shared how important it is for them to receive guidance and support from adults. What can the college do to ensure that all students receive quality advising and support?
- Students, professors, and staff who I have interviewed have recommended the hiring of at least one professional staff who can work directly with first generation students. Karina Viaud held such position four years ago but was not replaced when she left. Are there any plans to rehire someone? Do you think it is necessary?

Questions to Peer Institutions

- Why do you think it’s important to have a program catered to first generation students?
- Please describe in detail the program(s) that this campus provides to first generation students (types of events, topics covered). How long?
- When are the events held (breaks, school year, lunch, evenings, etc.) and how often (once a month, every week, etc.)
- What office/ administrator runs this program? What other offices on campus do you work with?
- How do you encourage first generation students to participate in high impact practices such as research, study abroad, and internships?
- How do you help low income first generation students participate in study abroad, internships, research, etc. despite their SES status?
- What challenges have you faced in supporting first gen? Is there something that you think needs to improve?

Questions to ICC staff

- Why do you think it’s important to have a program catered to FGS?
- What role has the ICC taken in supporting FGS?
- Please describe the last few programs for FGS that the ICC has been involved in
- What challenges have you faced in trying to support first generation students?
- What would be the ideal program structure to best support FGS?
- What role should (can) administration play in supporting first generation students?
- What role should (can) faculty play in supporting first generation students?
- What other offices on campus have you worked with? What responsibility do they hold?
- I am presenting my preliminary work to faculty on Monday, is there anything that you recommend I tell them?

APPENDIX C – FIRST GENERATION STUDENT SURVEY

4/15/2014

Qualtrics Survey Software

Default Question Block

Thank you for volunteering to take this anonymous survey about your experience as a first generation student at Occidental College. Please note that for this specific study, you will not be able to participate if:

- 1) You are not a first generation student *
- 2) You are under the age of 18 or
- 3) You are a first year student

The survey should only take about 15-30 minutes to complete. The data will be submitted to the department Urban and Environmental Policy of Occidental College for my Senior Composition. A summary of the data will also be presented to Oxy administration with the hope that Oxy will improve programs for first generation students. Your participation is very important, and remember that your identity will remain anonymous.

Below is a consent form that outlines the procedure and details of this survey. If you agree with all of the terms, please indicate that at the bottom of the document.

**Based on Occidental College's definition, you are considered a first generation student at this school if neither of your parent(s) received a BA/BS degree from a four year institution federally recognized by the United States*

OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR ADULT SUBJECTS

Faculty Supervisor: Martha Matsuoka **Student Investigator:** Bianca Fonseca Cervantes

Title of research project: Participation of First Generation College Students
in High Impact Practices at Occidental College

I acknowledge that on 4/15/2014 I was informed by Bianca Fonseca Cervantes of Occidental College of the following research project, the way it will be conducted and the conditions of my participation in it:

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the experiences of first generation students in undergraduate liberal arts colleges with a focus on the factors that influence these students to engage in high impact practices.

Procedure

This questionnaire will be conducted with an online Qualtrics-created survey. You will be asked to complete a short anonymous questionnaire about your experiences as a first generation student at Occidental College. The questionnaire consists of mostly multiple choice questions and will take about 15-30 minutes.

Participation

Participation is completely voluntary, and the participant may choose to not answer a question or to stop the survey at any time. Participants will remain anonymous and only the student investigator and faculty advisors will have access to the raw data. Findings will be used for the investigator's senior comprehensive project at the College.

Risks

Given the nature of the questions and the topic, there should be little to no risk to the individual participating in the interview.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits for participants; you will not be compensated. However, the hope is that through your participation, the Occidental College administration will learn how to better serve the needs of first generation students.

Questions

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the student Bianca Fonseca Cervantes at Occidental College at (602)565-9631 or fonsecacervantes@oxy.edu. You may also contact Martha Matsuoka, the primary advisor and Urban and Environmental Policy professor at Occidental College at (323) 259-2971 or matsuoka@oxy.edu.

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Agreement

I am at least eighteen years of age. I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this research project and the possible risks as outlined above. I understand that I may withdraw my participation on this project at any time without prejudice or penalty of any kind. I hereby agree to participate in this research project.

- I have read, understood, and printed a copy of the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.
- I am at least 18 years old

Personal Questions

Please indicate the highest level of education your Father and Mother completed.

	Elementary School	Middle School/Junior High	High School	Associate's Degree (2 year)	Bachelor's Degree (4 year)
Father	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mother	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Current grade level:

- First Year / Freshman
- Second Year / Sophomore
- Third Year / Junior
- Fourth Year / Senior
- Fifth Year Senior

Age:

Sex:

- Male
- Female

Racial/Ethnic Group:

- White/ Caucasian
- African American/ Black
- American Indian or Alaskan Native

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- Asian or Pacific Islander
 - Biracial or Multiracial
 - Latin@/ Hispanic
 - Other
-

Indicate total household income:

↓

Academic Questions

What is your current GPA?

↓

What is your major?

↓

If you have a second major, what is it?

↓

If you have a minor, what is it?

↓

Employment

Do you work?

	Yes	No
Work on campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work off campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you have work study?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please select all the types of jobs you have held on campus
<https://s.qualtrics.com/ControlPanel/Ajax.php?action=GetSurveyPrintPreview&T=VfFfc>

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Please select all the types of jobs you have held on campus

- Clerical/Administration Support
- Event Programming
- ITS or AV
- Research
- Campus Dining
- Library Positions
- Other

What is the average number of hours you work per week? (While school is in session)

On Campus	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Off Campus	<input type="text" value="0"/>
Total	<input type="text" value="0"/>

Extracurricular and Academics

Have you participated in the following extracurricular activities?

	Yes	No	Select this box if you have held a leadership position
Student club or organization	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sports (intermural or NCAA)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteer work (on and/or off campus)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Choir/Band/Music	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Think back to the previous semester, in general, how often did you...

	All of the Time	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Contribute to discussions in your classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meet with professors outside of class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meet with your academic advisor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Turn in assignments on time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seek additional help for assignments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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To what degree are the following a cause of stress:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All of the Time
Academic workload	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Grades/ GPA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial Situation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family demands	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Homesickness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Roommate concerns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Uncertainty of career goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal relationships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Have any of your professors informed and/or encouraged you to participate in any of the following:

	Yes	No
Undergraduate Research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Study Abroad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Internship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
National Award	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Campus Resources and Programs

Have you ever visited the Center for Academic Excellence (CAE) for help with your writing (Peer and/or Faculty)?

- Yes
- No

Have you participated in any of the following?

	Yes	No	No, but I plan to before I graduate
Multicultural Summer Institute	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Internship(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteer / Community Service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Study abroad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Undergraduate research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Applied for national award	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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International Programs Office

	Yes	No
Do you know where their office is located?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you familiar with the services that they provide?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you ever visited their office?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you studied abroad?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

IPO Continued...

Office Evaluation: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I found the IPO staff to be friendly, and readily available to answer my questions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt encouraged to apply to study abroad	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The IPO was able to determine the best program for me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
For the most part, the IPO staff was knowledgeable about the programs I was interested in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The IPO processes and applications were easy to understand and complete.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

IPO

If you have participated (or are about to), how did you (or anticipate) benefit from your study abroad experience? (select all that apply)

- Improved language skills
- Advanced your academic goals
- Experienced personal growth
- Better global awareness
- Lasting relationships
- Other

IPO

If you have not studied abroad, why haven't you? (select all that apply)

- I plan to study abroad later (some time before I graduate)
- Would not be able to fulfill major requirements
- GPA not strong enough
- Don't want to be too far from home
- Don't have the time

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- Did not have time to apply
- Did not have enough information to make a decision
- Financial Obstacles
- Was discouraged by the office staff
- Not Interested
- Other?

Undergraduate Research Center

	Yes	No
Do you know where their office is located?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you familiar with the services that they provide?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you ever visited their office?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you participated in undergraduate research?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

URC Continued...

Office Evaluation: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I found the URC staff to be friendly, and readily available to answer my questions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt encouraged to apply to do research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The URC was able to determine the best program for me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
For the most part, the URC staff was knowledgeable about the programs I was interested in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The URC processes and applications were easy to understand and complete.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

URC

If you have participated, how did you benefit from your Undergraduate Research experience?

- Improved research skills
- Advanced your academic goals
- Personal Growth
- Head start on Senior Composition
- Other

URC

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If you have not participated in undergraduate research why haven't you? (select all that apply)

- I plan to do research later (before I graduate)
- GPA not strong enough
- Did not have time to apply
- Did not have enough information to make a decision
- Financial concerns
- Prefer to work somewhere else during the summer
- Was discouraged by the office staff
- Could not find a professor to work with
- Not Interested
- Other?

National Awards and Fellowships

	Yes	No
Do you know where their office is located?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you familiar with the services that they provide?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you ever visited their office?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you gone through an application process led by this office?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

NA continued...

Office Evaluation: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
I found the National Awards staff to be friendly, and readily available to answer my questions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt encouraged to apply for an award	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The National Awards office was able to determine the best award to apply to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
For the most part, the National Awards staff was knowledgeable about the programs I was interested in	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The National Awards processes and applications were easy to understand and complete.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

National Awards

If you have participated, how did you benefit from your National Awards application experience? (select all)

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If you have participated, how did you benefit from your National Awards application experience? (select all that apply)

- Improved writing skills
- Learned how to write a personal statement
- Improved interviewing skills
- Career goals are more clear
- Met other applicants
- I was a finalist
- I received an award
- Other

National Awards

If you have not participated, why haven't you? (select all that apply)

- I plan to later (before I graduate)
- GPA not strong enough
- Did not have time to apply
- Did not know about this opportunity
- Was discouraged by the office staff
- Not Interested
- Other?

Service/ Volunteer Experience

Have you taken a Center for Community Based Learning (CCBL) course at Oxy?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

How often do you participate in community service / volunteer?

- Never
- Less than Once a Month
- Once a Month
- 2-3 Times a Month
- Once a Week

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- 2-3 Times a Week
- Daily

Describe the type(s) of service work you participate in:

In general, how do you find out about the service opportunities that you participate in?

- Office of Community Engagement
- Student Club/Organization
- Class / Professor
- Oxy Root /Posters
- Friend
- Previous affiliation
- Other

Post Oxy

What are your immediate plans after you graduate from Occidental College (select all that apply)

- Graduate School
- National Programs (City Year, PeaceCorps, etc.)
- Fellowship/ Internship
- Get a Job
- Travel
- Not sure yet
- Other

Based on your experiences thus far, what additional academic support and services do you think Oxy should provide to first generation students?

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Have you participated in any of the following programs for first generation programs? Select all that apply

- First Generation Success Track (2010): program offered workshops throughout the year catered to each grade level
- Partners in Excellence (2011): mentoring program for first years that matched students with faculty and staff
- First Generation Committee Events (2012): an alumni mixer and a session on national awards
- First Generation Club (2013): mixer with office representatives, health and wellness workshop, and life after oxy event
- None of the above

First Generation Student Club?

	Yes	No
Are you familiar with the student club?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have you attended any of the events planned by this club?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If no, why not? Please select all that apply:

- Time Conflicts
- Themes do not apply to me
- Didn't know about events
- Already familiar with material
- Inconvenient Location
- Not interested
- Other

What recommendations do you have to improve the First Generation Club?

If you have any additional comments, questions, etc. please feel free to post them below:

Thank you SO much for completing this survey! :D