

ABSTRACT  
SELF-EFFICACY AND STUDENT SUPPORT PROGRAMS IMPACT ON CAMPUS  
EXPERIENCES: A STUDY OF FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

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First-generation college students' degree attainment is far below their continuing generation peers (Whitely et al., 2018). This study aims to offer institutions of higher education better insight into how to provide support to be more effective in retaining first-generation college students. This explanatory sequential mixed methods study examines how first-generation sophomores and juniors with low and high self-efficacy who are either participating in or not participating in formal student support programming experience different institutional interactions meant to support them while at their institution. Quantitative results from the College Self-Efficacy Inventory (Solberg, 1993) were used to purposely select participants to interview for the qualitative portion of this study. Bean and Eaton's (2001) Psychological Model of College Student Retention was used as the theoretical framework to investigate students' experiences.

The themes that emerged from this study were sense belonging, support systems, and agency. All students felt a sense of belonging when they saw themselves represented on campus and felt people cared about them, with support programs providing intentional representation for students in these programs. Support systems varied for high and low self-efficacy students, with students in support programs having built in support systems and those not in support programs seeking out support on campus. All high self-efficacy students and some low self-efficacy students demonstrated a high sense of agency. Overall, the interactions students had with advisors were positive, the interactions with instructors varied, the academic interactions with peers were not positive, while the social interactions with peers were positive.

Recommendations for institutions of higher education include providing structured spaces, programs, and events designed for first-generation college students, adequately training faculty and staff to support first-generation college students, implementing holistic support systems for first-generation college students, and implementing parent-specific outreach and programming for first-generation college students' parents. Recommendations for further research include interviewing first-generation college students from different types of institutions, comparing experiences of students that persist and do not persist to year two and year three, and look at first-generation students' self-efficacy and experiences over their time at the university.