



# First in My Family:

## A Profile of First-Generation College Students at Four-Year Institutions Since 1971

*This brief summarizes key findings from the new report, "First in My Family", which shares new insights on entering first-generation college students at four-year institutions over the last thirty-five years. Results are drawn from survey trends data from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey, administered by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA.*

### First-Generation College Students

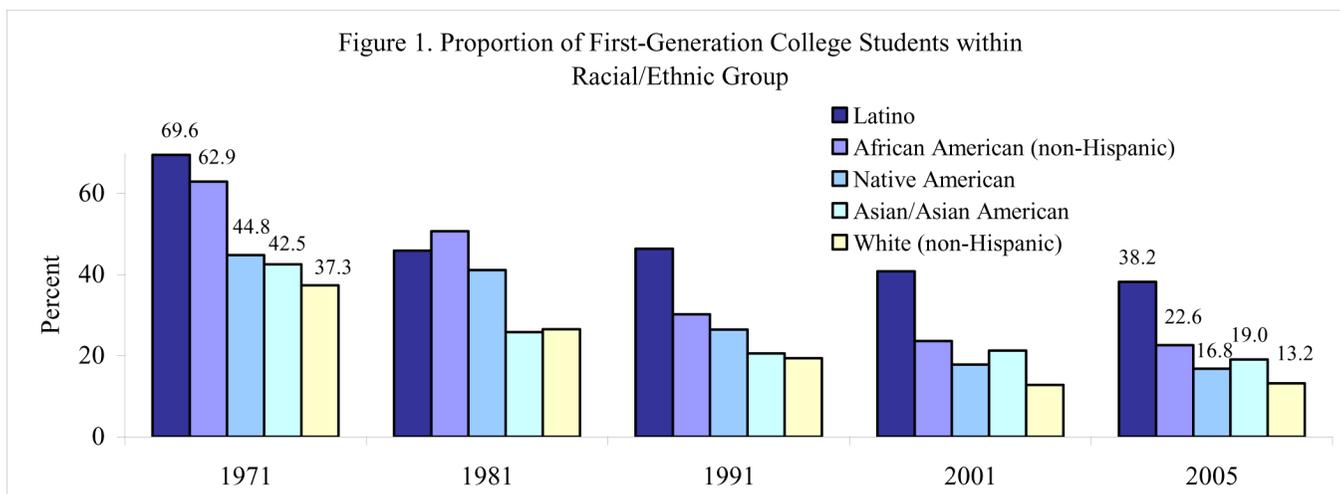
Examining survey trends over time for first-generation college students both confirms previous research and also reveals previously unknown or unanticipated pre-college behaviors, college-going motivations, and career-oriented values and objectives. The key contribution of this report is in its review of CIRP Freshman Survey trends on such issues as the importance of parental encouragement, students' reasons and motivations for going to college, students' financial concerns and considerations while in college, the influence of home in the college choice process, students' pre-college academic preparation, as well as students' goals and values at college entry.

### The Changing Face of First-Generation Students

The proportion of first-generation students within the overall population of first-time, full-time entering college freshman at four-year institutions has steadily declined since 1971, reflecting increasing levels of education among the U.S. population. Nonetheless, persistent differences in first-generation rates between racial/ethnic groups are cause for concern.

Specifically, since 1975, African Americans have shown the greatest decline in their representation of first-generation college students—a declining rate that is of concern because it is faster than the relative proportion of African American adults without a college education as well as the decline of first-generation students in other racial/ethnic groups. Hispanics have remained the most likely group to be first-generation college students (38.2 percent) at four-year colleges. Figure 1 offers a complete breakdown of each racial/ethnic group by first-generation status.

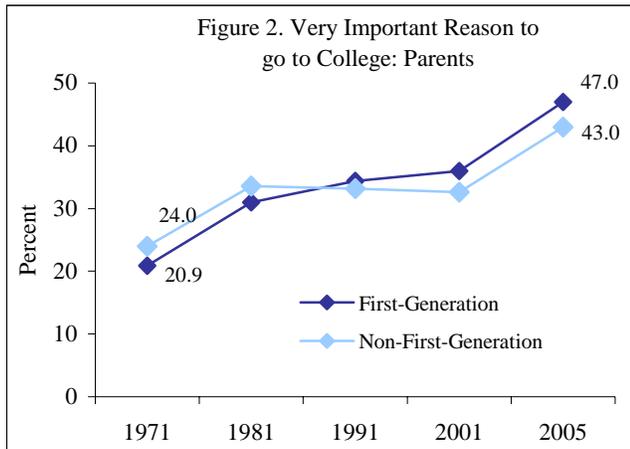
Figure 1. Proportion of First-Generation College Students within Racial/Ethnic Group



Note: Data are weighted to reflect a national normative population of first-time, full-time freshmen at four-year institutions. Latina/o students can include students from Mexican American/Chicano, Puerto Rican, or other Hispanic backgrounds. The descriptor "non-Hispanic" indicates that the respective group omits all Hispanic students, as such students can be from any racial group.

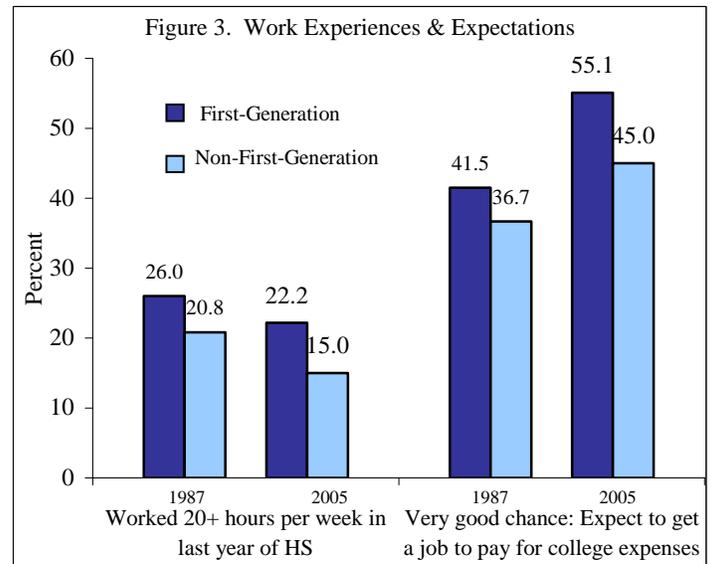
**Parents Are Key Source of Encouragement**

Despite the assertion that first-generation students are at a disadvantage due to their parents’ lack of knowledge about formal educational systems and higher education, our CIRP Freshman Survey trends show that both first-generation and non-first-generation students placed similar importance on parental encouragement for college. An increasing proportion of students over the last couple of decades have reported that a very important reason why they went to college was because their parents wanted them to go. In 2005, 47.0 percent of first-generation students (vs. 43.0 percent for non-first-generation students) reported this as a very important reason for attending college. It is important to note that this trend has reversed for the two groups—first-generation students are now more likely to report parental encouragement as a very important reason for going to college.

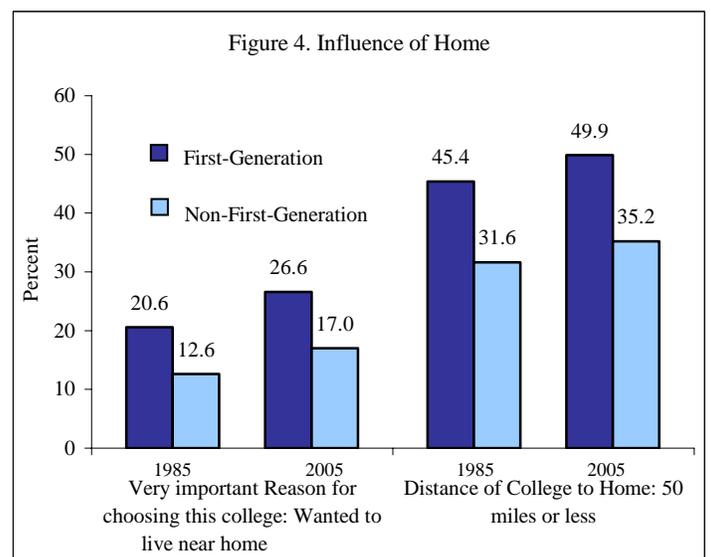


**Influence of Work and Home on Choice**

Over the years, higher proportions of first-generation college students than their peers worked 20+ hours per week in their final year of high school, and well over half (55 percent) now expect to get a job to pay for college expenses—a gap that has widened between these students and their peers since 1987. Also, given their typically low socioeconomic status, it is not surprising to find that attending college to “make more money” was more likely to be cited as an important reason for first-generation students relative to their peers (76.4 percent vs. 69.8 percent). Further, between 1972 and 2003, more first-generation college students than their peers considered financial factors very important to their choice of specific colleges, and at college entry, they are twice more likely than their peers to report having a major concern about financing college.

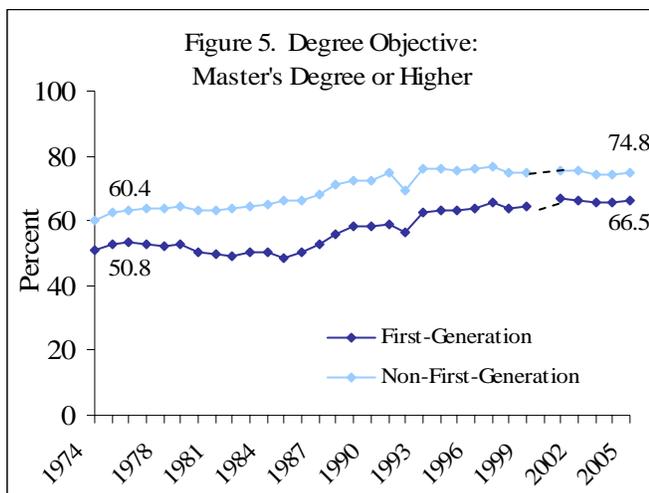


Not only have greater proportions of first-generation students than their peers attended higher education institutions within 50 miles from home, but these students considered the close proximity of the institution to their home a very important reason for choosing their institution. Perhaps as a result of this trend, first-generation students have consistently been less likely relative to their counterparts to expect to live on campus in their freshmen year, a factor which portends for differences in college academic and social integration outcomes. When coupled with other considerations, the decision to attend a college close to home may be directly influenced by the financial outlook of the student and his/her family.



### *Degree Aspirations are on the Rise*

First-generation students tend to have lower educational aspirations than non-first-generation students. This may be explained by students' lack of information about degrees, the college process, availability of resources and their academic preparation. However, over the last three decades, the data reflect rising degree aspirations for both groups of students. This portends a positive outlook for the expansion of graduate education as an attractive and obtainable goal for first-generation college students, especially as an increasing body of research shows that degree aspirations at college entry are critical indicators of eventual college success.



### *First-Generation Students at Private Institutions*

As co-sponsor of this report on first-generation college students, the Foundation for Independent Higher Education (FIHE) had a special interest in the sector of higher education comprised of private colleges and universities. CIRP Freshman Survey trends data for 2005 were utilized to explore selected characteristics of first-generation students that chose to attend private institutions. While public institutions have typically had higher proportions of first-generation college students compared to private institutions, the differences between institution types have narrowed over time.

For the 2005 CIRP Freshman Survey data, first-generation students attending private institutions were more likely to have families with annual incomes over \$40,000, more likely to have attended a private high school (religious or non-denominational), and more likely to have earned an

“A” or better while in high school than their first-generation peers at public institutions.

First-generation college students are more likely to choose to attend private colleges for reasons of size and because they received financial assistance. They are also more likely to live on campus than first-generation college students who elected to attend public institutions, thus providing greater opportunity for campus engagement and academic success. The study also reveals contexts in which private institutions can improve; for example, by increasing the proportion of their first-generation students who come from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.

### **The CIRP Freshman Survey**

The CIRP Freshman Survey has been conducted annually since 1966. The data in this CIRP trends report come from responses of over 12 million students at over 1,800 of the nation's baccalaureate colleges and universities over the last forty years. Results of the CIRP Freshman Survey provide a comprehensive portrait of the changing character of entering students and American society at large. Information on the CIRP Freshman Survey, research and publications based on these data, and other research projects conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute can be found on the HERI website ([www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri](http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri)) or via email to [heri@ucla.edu](mailto:heri@ucla.edu).

**Additional reports for campuses can be requested by contacting HERI Data Services at [heridata@ucla.edu](mailto:heridata@ucla.edu).**

### **The Cooperative Institutional Research Program – STAFF**

Sylvia Hurtado, *HERI Director*  
 John H. Pryor, *CIRP Director*  
 William S. Korn, *Associate Director for Operations*  
 Victor B. Saenz, *CIRP Research Manager*  
 Kathryn M. Mahoney, *Business Manager*  
 Lynette Schumann, *Assistant to the Associate Director*  
 Mary Rabb, *Assistant to the Director*  
 Aaron Pearl, *Client Services Representative*  
 Irwin Stein, *Billing Services Representative*

Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA  
 Graduate School of Education & Information Studies  
 Mailbox 951521  
 Los Angeles, CA 90095-1521  
 Phone (310) 825-1925  
 E-mail: [HERI@ucla.edu](mailto:HERI@ucla.edu)

## UPCOMING CIRP SURVEYS

The Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) will offer three student surveys during the academic year. The next administration of the HERI Faculty Survey will take place during the 2007–2008 academic year. For further information about any of these surveys, please refer to the HERI website: [www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri](http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri).

### The Freshman Survey

The annual survey of entering college students covers an array of demographic, experiential, and attitudinal issues. The questionnaire covers degree aspirations, major and career plans, and expectations about college. Participating institutions receive a campus profile report, plus national normative data. Institutions can merge their Freshman Survey data with other campus data to create a longitudinal data file for institutional research, planning, and accreditation studies.

### Your First College Year (YFCY) Survey

The YFCY Survey provides information on the academic, social, and personal development of first-year college students. When coupled with CIRP Freshman Survey data, YFCY data are especially useful for studying persistence, adjustment, and other first-year outcomes. Students' responses are compared to national and institutional peer group aggregates to enable institutions to determine where their first-year cohort "stands" relative to the first-year experience at large.

### The College Senior Survey (CSS)

The CSS permits institutions to assess how their students have changed since they entered college. The survey includes measures of self-assessed academic, social, intellectual, and emotional capabilities, and more conventional measures of academic success such as undergraduate GPA and GRE test scores. When combined with the CIRP Freshman Survey data, the CSS serves as a longitudinal measure of cognitive and affective growth in students.

### The HERI Faculty Survey

Designed for both faculty and administrators, the survey collects data on career satisfaction; perceptions of campus climate; preferred methods of teaching; and educational goals for students. Demographic information and background characteristics are also queried. In addition, the instrument includes a section that permits individual institutions to ask their faculty/administrators up to 21 locally developed questions. Participating campuses receive a detailed profile of their faculty, as well as national normative data for similar types of institutions. The survey is offered on a triennial basis.

## PUBLICATIONS ORDER FORM

Qty.

_____	First in My Family: A Profile of First-Generation College Students	\$15
_____	Black Undergraduates From <i>Bakke</i> to <i>Grutter</i>	\$15
_____	The American College Teacher: National Norms for the 2004–2005 HERI Faculty Survey	\$25
_____	The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 2006	\$25
_____	The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 2005	\$25
_____	The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 2004	\$25
_____	The American Freshman: Forty Year Trends	\$30
_____	The American Freshman: Thirty-Five Year Trends	\$30
_____	Degree Attainment Rates at Colleges and Universities	\$15
		for shipping add \$7
		(+\$1 per additional book)

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Institution \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

---

Higher Education Research Institute  
 UCLA, Graduate School of Education & Information Studies  
 Mailbox 951521  
 Los Angeles, CA 90095-1521  
 Phone (310) 825-1925  
 E-mail: [HERI@ucla.edu](mailto:HERI@ucla.edu)  
 Fax (310) 206-2228