

First-Generation Students and Families:
A Youth Participatory Action Research Project

FINDINGS REPORT

August 2016

Inspired by the Together Possible Initiative

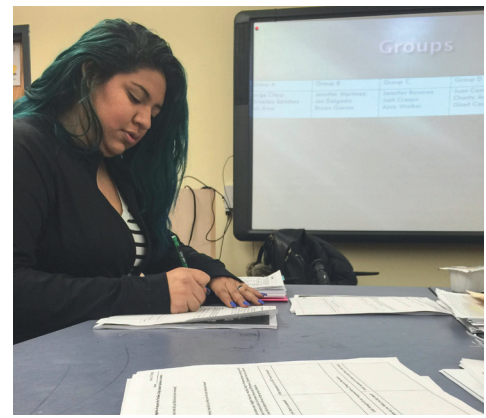
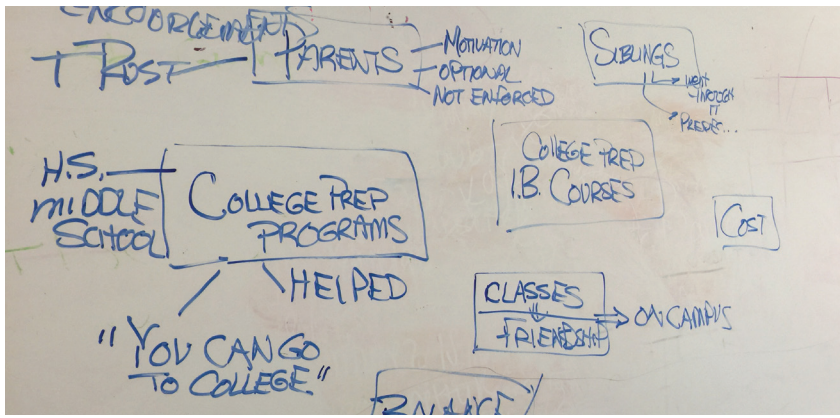
Together Possible is an initiative growing out of a relationship between the University of St. Thomas and Cristo Rey Jesuit High School-Twin Cities based on the simple conviction: Separate, our institutions are thriving. Together, and by collaborating in mutually beneficial ways, significantly more is possible for all of our students and their families.

This project was made possible, in part, due to a generous grant from Youthprise, Minnesota Campus Compact, and an anonymous donor.

For questions or for more information about this report or our project, please contact the faculty lead,
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stthomas.edu/togetherpossible/cristorey

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● EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTION:

What type of education and preparation do parents and families of first generation college students need to best support their first-generation child?

APPROACH AND METHOD

- Conducted Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) over 12-month period.
- Why we did applied research? To help make concrete, positive change for first-gen students and their families!
- Team of 20 included 14 youth (16- to 23-year-olds) and six faculty and staff, all from the University of St. Thomas and/or Cristo Rey Jesuit High School-Twin Cities.
- The lived experiences of our youth team confirmed what we found in the research literature: First-generation college students often face myriad challenges in college, are often less academically prepared, are disproportionately disadvantaged socioeconomically, and are often torn between commitments at home and school.

- Used qualitative and quantitative approaches for collecting and analyzing data.
 - Collected 388 usable surveys using Likert-type and open-ended questions from first-generation high school students, parents of first-gen high school students, and first-gen college students.
 - More than 95% of survey respondents were individuals of color.
 - Conducted 25 in-depth interviews, each with a person of color: 10 first-gen high school, 10 first-gen college students, and five parents of first-gen students.
 - Transcribed and analyzed over 132 pages of interview data.
 - Vast majority of those surveyed and interviewed were from low socioeconomic groups.
 - Data analysis approaches for surveys: statistical and summary analyses of survey data. For interview data: 5-step grounded theory, thematic analysis.

PRIMARY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We identified nine primary themes and 12 subthemes, the majority pointing to the way first-gen students and their families experience a unique “first-gen reality.” Our youth team recommends the development of programs for students and their parents that explicitly address

and support the first-gen unique reality at various levels: colleges and universities, high schools, middle schools, and community partners. We believe all constituents can and should do more to address the first-gen reality explicitly by developing unique, first-gen-sensitive programs for students and their families. Among our many findings:

- **First-gen college students and high school students** know there is a **hidden curriculum** and learn quickly they have to make up for not having/knowing it.
- **First-gen college students and high school students** know they will **work twice as hard** to make **similar gains** as their first-gen, majority peers.
- **First-generation college students** possess wisdom emerging from their lived experiences as first gen students and first-gen daughters/sons and **want to share advice based on those experiences with other first-gen parents and students!**
- **First-gen college students** say they **wish their parents knew more/understood more about their college experiences** so they could better support them during the college transition and throughout their college journey.
- **First-gen high school students**, often based on their own culturally specific realities, are **uniquely linked to their families** in the college process. They recognize their family connection is often different from their second-gen peers.
- **First-gen high school students** need specific types of **technical support** in the college preparation process and repeatedly note how significantly they benefit from excellent college-prep courses, college-prep programs, and college-prep nonprofit organizations.
- **First-gen high school students** need much more **information about financial aid and college affordability** than most of their second-gen peers; they report their **families/parents often lack knowledge** specifically about scholarships, financial support, and budgeting.
- **First-gen high school students** report that, without question, **affordability** is the key factor for first-generation high school students when choosing which college to apply to or attend.
- **Parents** of first-gen students articulate **two strong fears: the financial reality of college**, and the wellbeing of their child and his/her **feeling of inclusiveness** when at college.
- **Parents** of first-gen students want **significantly more knowledge and information**; want it in **multiple formats** (on-line and in-person); and need/want it in their **primary language**.
- **Parents** of first-gen students believe, unlike some of the literature suggests, their child/ren going to college **won't negatively affect their family's sense of connection or family's daily functioning**, and that parents must provide **unconditional encouragement and support** about college regardless of their own education level, knowledge, or experience.
- **Parents** of first-gen students hold strong, positive beliefs about college **creating a good future** for their child/ren.

OUR OUTCOMES AND ACTIONS

Video Summary

We created a dynamic, educational, and inspiring 5-minute video summarizing our research findings, sharing our team's story, and highlighting a few of our key recommendations. The video is designed for multiple audiences: first-gen parents and students, faculty/staff, and educational experts at multiple levels – anyone who wants to better support first-gen students and their families. View it at stthomas.edu/togetherpossible/cristorey.

Action Recommendations

We articulate more than a dozen specific recommendations for ways communities, schools, and college/universities can better support first-gen students and their families through programs. They can be found on pages 23-38, each emerging from our specific data points.

Speaking and Workshops!

The youth and faculty leaders on our YPAR team will be available to do workshops and/or to speak to educational institutions or communities wanting to make change and to implement our research-inspired recommendations.

MEET OUR TEAM

YOUTH MEMBERS:

High school students



VIRIDIANA AREVALO

Bonjour! My name is Viridiana (Vivi). I am a rising senior at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, and I am 4'11. I am small, but I've achieved various things! I've helped victims of AIDS/HIV in Africa through the OPAA organization, I was the senator for my junior class, I helped incoming freshman become young professionals, I am a senior leader for my school retreats, and I am a student ambassador that represents my school. I played soccer for one year and track for two years. I will run for president my senior year. By the end of my senior year I will have taken a total of five Advanced Placement courses. Because of my hard work, I've won Student of the Session and the Gloriam Award. I am Mexican-American and speak English and Spanish. I am currently practicing French. I have a reputation of being a passionate feminist. I have a bubbly personality, and I am sympathetic to those around me. My favorite color is green. I have an obsession with makeup and scarves. My favorite treats are ice cream cake and macarons. I enjoy dancing and reading. I love math and I love dinosaurs! Lastly, I will become the CEO of my own beauty company.



JENNIFER DELGADO

Hey! I was a senior during this project, now a graduate from Cristo Rey Jesuit High School. During my high school career, I was part of a variety of clubs, ranging from robotics to the school musical. I got involved with YPAR (Together Possible) because I was unsure about exactly what "first-generation student" meant, but I knew I was one. I wanted to learn more and see the impact I could make by being part of this project. Not only does the topic interest me, but I wanted to be skilled in research as well since I always thought doing any type of research was boring but very important. Together Possible has been very eye-opening. Viewing the statistics that identify a first-generation student was challenging, but it was important to see how much awaits for us first-gen students and the difference that we can make if we continue on with our education.



LUIS ARCE ROSAS

Luis Arce is a rising senior at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School. He is known to his teachers as a hard worker and his classmates as positive and funny. Luis worked with the survey team on Together Possible; he brought a consistent focus and important insight.



BRYAN RAUL GARCIA

I'm Bryan Raul Garcia, soon to be a senior in high school. I've been in a number of programs during my time at Cristo Rey, such as Junior Achievement Business Program (it was short-lived), Prepare 2Nspire (a math ACT program), and Kairos Retreat Leaders. When I heard that this program was starting soon, I knew that I wanted to be in it. I wanted to know what was really needed to not only get to college but graduate as well. I want to be a film director/screenwriter; I love creating weird, complex, captivating epics. I really enjoyed being part of this program. I learned so much. I hope my contributing to the program helps my fellow first-generation students' success in college.



CHANTELL ARMIJO CRUZ

My name is Chantell Armijo Cruz, or as many like to call me, "Chanty." I'm a rising senior at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School and a researcher for the Together Possible group. This group has allowed me to value the hard work my parents put in to give me all that is necessary for me to thrive. They crossed the border so I could cross the stage; I am a first-generation college student.



GISELL CASTAÑEDA GARCIA

Hello, my name is Gisell Castañeda Garcia, and I am a rising senior at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School. I am a second-degree black belt in Taekwondo, and I also just finished my third year in the high school track team. I am a participant in the Prepare to Inspire program to help tutor fifth-graders with their math homework for an hour; I also have a college student tutor me for an hour in my math course. I've received the honorable mention and Gloriam awards. A skill I carry with me is being patient, and I have a positive attitude when helping my peers. I am a 16-year-old Latina, born and raised in the United States of America. In five years, I see myself studying abroad somewhere in need of water or new homes, being an engineer, and building new communities around the world.



GUADALUPE RUBIO ROBLES

I am Guadalupe, but I like to go by Lupita. I am a recent graduate at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, and I am 19 years old. I have been serving in my community, and I had the opportunity to be part of the Together Possible program, in which we got to do some research on first-generation students. I was really into the topic, because I was personally able to connect to them. I got to be an interviewee, and then I got to gather information on parents of first-generation students, which helped me realize my parents were like other parents of first-generation students.



JOSHUA CRESPO

Hello! My name is Joshua Crespo, and I have recently graduated from Cristo Rey Jesuit High School. I will be attending the University of St. Thomas and will be part of the class of 2020! I was part of the National Honor Society, a member of the Student Government, an active participant as a Student Ambassador, and was a Retreat Leader (Ignite). Providing service to others is something I love to do. When I heard about this research program involving helping first-generation college students and inspiring the future generations, I said, "Count me in!" I not only wanted to serve in this amazing group, but I also wanted to obtain new skills in reading, writing, and communications. The research allowed me to feel more comfortable with how I spoke, and I felt more inspired from the different tasks we had to do for the research. I am planning on majoring in biology, and I would then go to medical school to become a doctor. Joining the Together Possible team was absolutely amazing. There were great people with outstanding personalities, which always put a smile on my face every morning. I am thrilled about what the future holds for each of us and for the next era of students after us. As a first-generation college student, I want to be able to support those who go through the same situation as me. Have a blessed day, everyone! I am going to insert my tag line: "My name is Joshua Crespo, and I approve this message."



NATALIA DURAN SANCHEZ

I am a senior, and I attend Cristo Rey Jesuit High School. I hope to pursue the study of medicine and become a doctor. Something that I learned from being in this program is that first-generation college students don't know a lot about college and they need to be told about resources. I also learned that college is a big dream for first-generation college students and their parents.



AJAA WALKER

I am Ajaa Walker, I am an upcoming senior at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, and I am 17 years old. I play varsity basketball for my school and am also the captain. I also am a current volunteer lifeguard for the YMCA and local beaches in my neighborhoods. When I found out that my school would be creating a research team based on first-generation college students, I knew that I had to be a part of it. I am a first-gen myself and I wanted to know all the information I could possibly know about not only myself, but about others who are also first-generation college students. When I graduate Cristo Rey I want to study physical therapy and sports medicine. I love meeting new people and putting smiles on other people’s faces. I love smiling myself. Together Possible was one of the best programs that I have been a part of, I know that the research that we did and the things that we found will make a difference in not only our lives, but in others’ as well. My goal is to graduate college; there is NO other option!

YOUTH MEMBERS:

College students



ANGEL PAUCAR

Hello! I am a senior majoring in mechanical engineering at the University of St. Thomas. During my time at the prestigious university, I have been a part of many clubs and organizations on campus that have helped share and increase awareness of the idea of diversity in the universities. Some of these clubs/organizations are HOLA (Hispanic Organization of Latino Awareness) and SHPE-UST (Society of Hispanic Professional Engineering). With the different skills gained, such as new organization and communication tactics from these clubs, I used that knowledge in this YPAR project. This research has helped me be more aware of first-generation college and high school students and learn different ways to help them. As a first-generation student, it was time for me to try to help others that are and have been in the same boat as I in terms of applying for scholarships or surviving the first year of school.



WILLIAM ZHANAY

My name is William Zhanay, and I’m pursuing an accounting degree from the University of St. Thomas. I am pretty excited about graduation in May 2017! I enjoy playing soccer on the weekends, and my favorite soccer team is Real Madrid. I have studied abroad through the London Business Semester, and I also got a chance to visit Spain, Italy, and France. I will be visiting South Africa in January 2017. I got involved with the research group because I wanted to learn more about the first-generation experience in college. So far there have been many discoveries, and I have learned plenty about the research process.



JENNIFER RAMIREZ

Hey! I am Jennifer Ramirez, a sophomore at the University of St. Thomas. I am planning on majoring in political science and eventually attending St. Thomas’ Law School to become an immigration lawyer. I love helping others and think I will be able to do so by being a lawyer who defends people’s rights. I decided to join the Together Possible research project for the same reason: helping others. I am a first-generation college student and thought this project would not only allow me to learn more about other first-generation students’ perspectives of their college experience, but also to do something about their struggles and be able to provide other first-generation students with what they need in order to be college ready.

ALUM MEMBER:

Recent college alum



JASMESKUT ("ROBBY") VANG '15

Hello! I am a recent graduate of the University of St. Thomas and a graduate from the very first graduating class at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School. I have always been actively involved with my schools from when I was a student ambassador my sophomore year in high school to when I became the vice president of the Hmong United Student Association my junior year at St. Thomas. I was always taught the embodiment of networking, but building that through communication and giving back to my community was something I had to learn on my own. I am honored to be on the Youth Participatory Action Research team to show others my own success as well as having been given the opportunity to prepare the resources for many first-generation students that will follow. We were researched; now we're the ones doing the researching – and we will thrive.

FACULTY and STAFF LEADERS:

From the University of St. Thomas, MN



CAROL BRUESS, PH.D.

Hello (insert waving hand emoji)! For the past 22 years as a professor of communication, relationships, and family, I've been passionate about how we make sure higher education is not only accessible for all students, but is a place where every student will thrive both personally and academically. I'm a first-generation college student, so it was cool to get to bring my own experiences to this project (... as I often say, research is me-search)! My career-long research agenda has been on family dynamics and their impact on community and healthy relationships. I've been doing community-based learning for 25 years and have partnered with Cristo Rey Jesuit High School-Twin Cities on more than a dozen occasions since they opened their doors in 2007. I was thrilled to be one of the faculty leaders on this incredible opportunity to guide brilliant youth as they became researchers for the first time and experienced how research can make positive change! Without question, I've learned more from them than they have from me.



KARI ZIMMERMAN, PH.D.

Hello! I am a professor of Latin American history that focuses on issues of social and economic equality. Much of my work is inspired by my Jesuit education so one of my top priorities since joining the University of St. Thomas was to partner with Cristo Rey Jesuit High School-Twin Cities. I couldn't have imagined a better opportunity than our YPAR project on first-generation college students and their families. As one of the faculty leaders I provided my experience as a researcher but the student team offered invaluable lessons on perseverance, creativity, and collaboration. I am so excited that our team produced concrete recommendations for college access and success for first-generation students and their families. We learned as a team that research can create positive change both in academia and our communities.

FACULTY and STAFF LEADERS:

From Cristo Rey Jesuit High School-Twin Cities, MN



MS. KELLY COLLINS

Hello, my name is Kelly Collins, and I am the graduate support coordinator at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School. I joined the Cristo Rey community in July 2015. I earned my bachelor's degree from St. Catherine University and a master's degree in higher education and student affairs from the University of Iowa. I am the oldest of five children and the first in my family to go to college. My collegiate experience inspired me to dedicate my career to the college access and retention of students from low-income and first-generation backgrounds.



MR. NICK CONTRERAZ

My name is Nick Contreras, a nine-year veteran teacher at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School. I've served in many roles since the school opened, but have found my passion in the classroom, teaching religious studies. YPAR was brand new to me, and I learned side by side with the students how to conduct true "action research." I found our Together Possible experience to be an enriching and exciting project, clearly addressing the needs of both the immediate Cristo Rey community as well as all constituents involved with supporting first-generation students. There were countless times when I was blown away at the tenacity and productivity of the student researchers (and adult facilitators)! On a side note, I love tacos al pastor as well as coffee, oftentimes paired together.



MS. ERIN HEALY

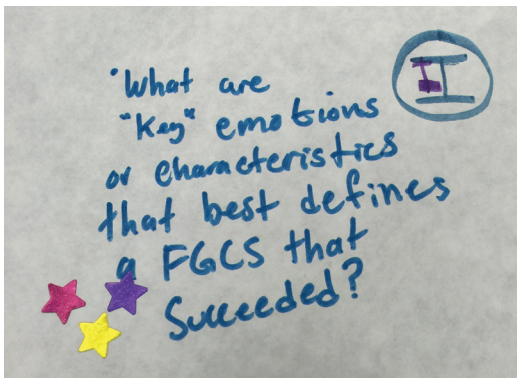
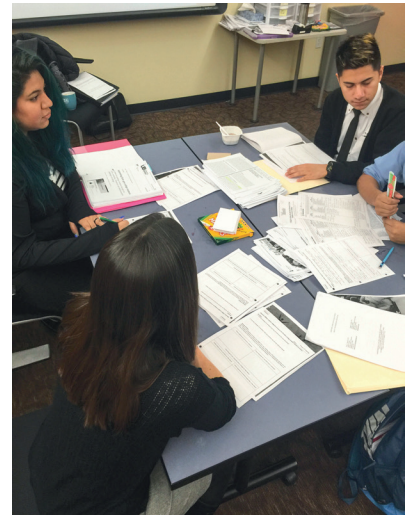
Hello! My name is Erin Healy. I have been with Cristo Rey Jesuit High School since 2008, and I have loved my experiences as both an English teacher and as a dean of student achievement. I received my bachelor's degree from the University of St. Thomas and my master's in education from the University of Notre Dame. The best part of my time at Cristo Rey has been working with our fabulous students as they grow, realize their potential, and reach for the big dreams of themselves and their families.



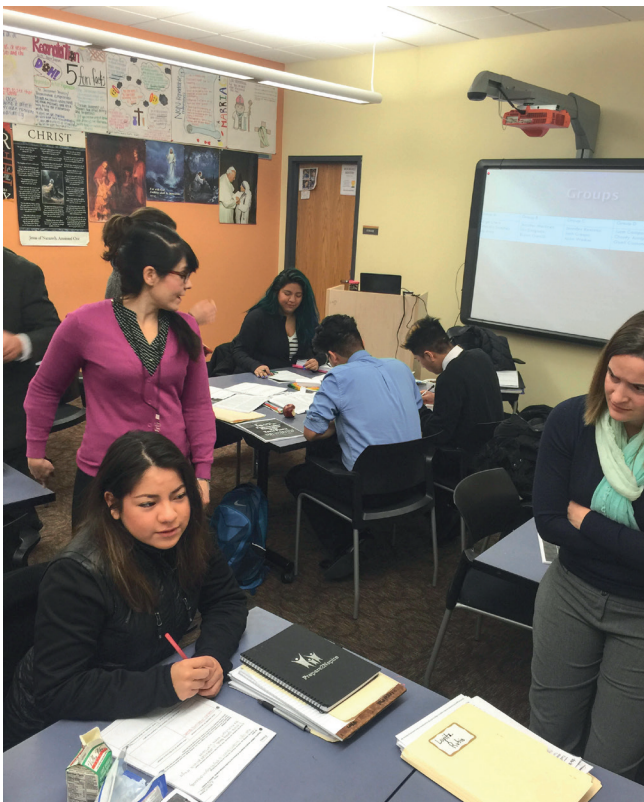
MS. SARAH MCCANN

I'm the 12th grade dean and a senior religion teacher at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School-Twin Cities. Before landing at Cristo Rey I worked as a journalist and researcher on education in general and public policies that support access to vital supports such as education, health and human services programs, and the integration of technology and social policy. Together Possible was a wonderful way to blend my interests and watch the students grow their own research, interviewing, and writing skills. It has been a wonderful opportunity for us all, and I am extremely excited about the impacts our students' work will have on them, their communities, and colleges that they attend.

● A PEEK AT OUR YEAR



● A PEEK AT OUR YEAR



Family + Community
Question d, ii > Family

- help families see FGs as college students
- create family community

Mental + Physical Health
Question J > mentors + support

- Balancing family expectations and personal priorities

→ The role of teachers + programs at schools like CRJ

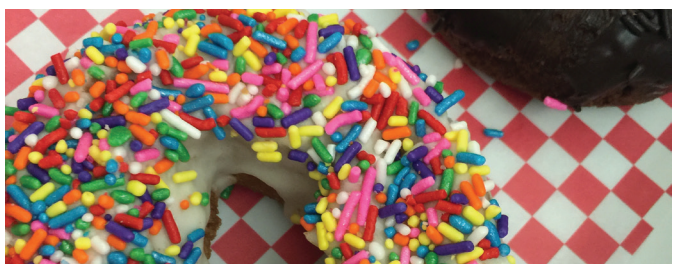
How can we improve college understanding for parents?

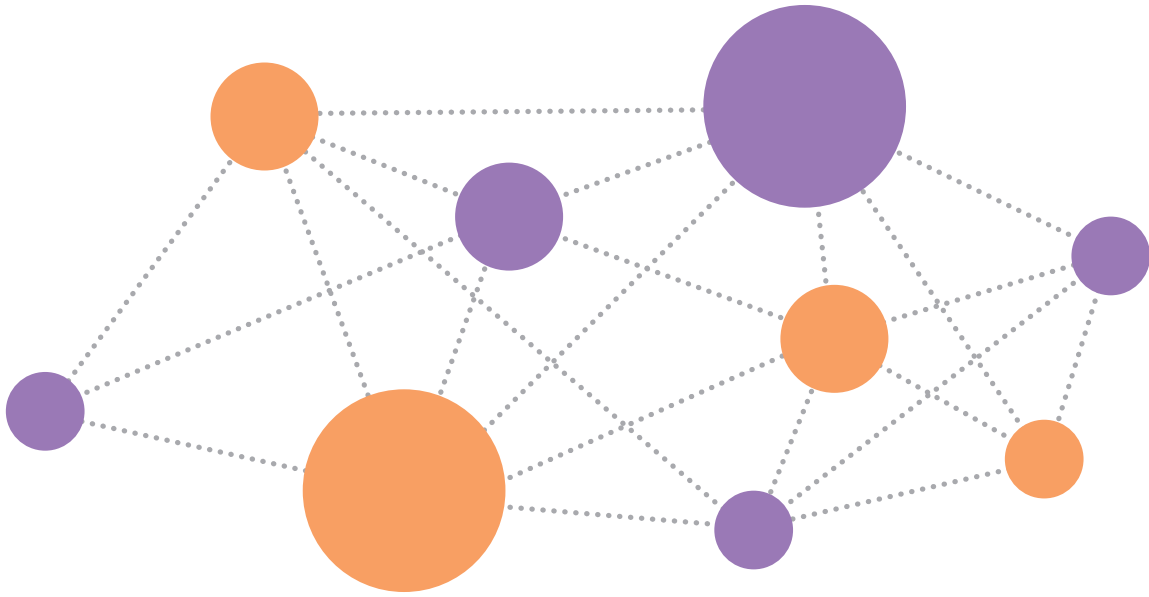
- Focus on parents can help FG students

Why don't FG students do more research?

- Not all FG students have support + awareness of deadlines

→ experience looking for





RESEARCH AND PROCESS

LITERATURE ON FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

Much research documents the challenges that first-generation college students face (Tate, Cyrus, & Harden, 2010). First-generation students are “less academically prepared than students who have a parent who has attended college” (Choy, 2001, p. 21), “face significant transitional issues in adjusting to campus life” (Folger, Carter, & Chase, 2004, p. 27), and are “disproportionally overrepresented in the most disadvantaged racial, socioeconomic, and gender groups” (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005, p. 409). In addition to these foundational challenges, many first-generation students experience significant guilt, defined as “worrying about being in a better position than others and the negative effects these feelings have on all aspect of well-being” (Tate, Cyrus, & Harden, 2010, p. 79). Guilt influences the ways that first-generation students interact with their families and communities, and can have a serious impact on their collegiate engagement: “Individuals who experience survivor guilt suffer from anxiety, depression, and other maladaptive emotions, which may prevent them from reaching their potential” (Tate, Cyrus, & Harden, 2010, p. 81). The shifting dynamics that first-generation students experience with their parents and community members is a complicated and influential aspect of their ability to succeed in college.

Most of the current scholarly work on the parents of first-generation and low-income students focuses primarily on financial literacy and college affordability. According to St. John (2011), “If low-income parents no longer fear that college costs will be prohibitive,

they are most likely to encourage their children to take the steps to prepare for college” (St. John, 2011, p. 32). While the financial aspect of college is a central concern of the parents of first-generation students, the other socioemotional and cultural needs of the parents of first-generation students are often neglected at both the high school and college levels. There is a current void of orientation programs to assist the parents of first-generation students in supporting their child's collegiate success, despite it being beneficial for both parents and students. St. John (2011) focuses his research on low-income, first-generation students who participate in college bridge programs, or programs that aim to prepare students and their families for college. He identifies common characteristics of the parents of first-generation, low-income students who opt in to such programs, noting: “Parents who were actively engaged were more likely to attend focus groups and take their students to events” and “engaged parents and students had an inner hardiness—a set of personal assets—that enabled them to take advantage of the program to build college knowledge” (St. John, 2011, p. 32). Our project focuses on expanding an understanding of the skills and knowledge that the parents of first-generation students need to support their students’ success, and making recommendations on how to assist parents and students in becoming more engaged in the college process.

Choy, S. (2001). Students whose parents did not go to college: Postsecondary access, persistence, and attainment (National Center for Education Statistics Report No. NCES 2001-126). Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office. Retrieved from <http://firstgeneration.unc.edu/storage/Choy%202001.pdf>

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Kezar, A. (2011). *Recognizing and Serving Low-Income Students in Higher Education: An examination of institutional policies, practices, and culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Lohfink, M., & Paulsen, M.B. (2005). Comparing the determinants of persistence for first-generation and continuing-generation students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46, 409-428.

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Tate, K., Williams, C., & Harden, D. (2013). Finding Purpose in Pain: Using Logotherapy as a Method for Addressing Survivor Guilt in First-Generation College Students. *Journal of College Counseling*, 16, 79-92.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF OUR ENTIRE PROCESS

To address our research question and conduct our research, we took the following 16 steps over approximately 10 months:

1. Established Common Ground as a Team: Because we were from multiple schools (a high school and a university) and didn't know each other, we spent time getting to know each other and developed some guidelines and expectations we all should follow to have a fun and productive project. (One of our rules was to have good food and snacks at all meetings! We ate a lot of donuts, pizza, and Jimmy John's this year ... as well as a few thousand M&M's.)

2. Reviewed the Literature on First-Generation Students: We were assigned by our professor-teacher team a large packet of readings that included more than a dozen articles written about first-generation college students. It helped us understand many of the issues we might want to explore and helped us eventually craft our research goals and questions.

3. Brainstormed and Choose Main Issue: We came together many times and developed ideas from the literature and our own experiences that would be interesting and important to study. We wrote on big sheets of paper and then discussed all of the ideas as well as issues that first-gen students face—including topics such as finances, community, family, academics, and faith. Many in our group were interested in the family and parent-related aspects of being first-generation, and the financial realities and worries that came up frequently in our conversations and in the literature were especially interesting to students.

4. Came up with the Main Research Question: After many hours of discussion and consideration—and a host of interesting and important questions we wanted to explore—we narrowed our focus to the following question: **What type of education and preparation do parents and families of first-generation college students need to best support their first-generation child?**

5. Decided our Research Method: We explored many different types of research tools—both qualitative and quantitative—and learned that having at least two kinds of methods is best (triangulation of data). We decided to create surveys so we could get hundreds of responses and to also do in-depth interviews to get deeper

understanding. We explain more about each method later in this report.

6. Received IRB (Human Subjects Review Board) Approval and Training in Research Ethics: We wrote a 43-page IRB application. We all received training on ethics from the director of IRB at the University of St. Thomas, and completed online research ethics training.

7. Divided into Data Collection Teams: We divided our group into four “data collection” teams so we could focus our efforts by learning one type of method in depth. Our four teams (with at least two faculty/staff leaders on each team) included one larger survey team and three smaller interview/qualitative data teams of between three-five members each. The seven-member survey team created and distributed hundreds of surveys, then collected and analyzed all survey data. Among the interview teams, one team focused on interviews with parents of first-gen students, one on first-gen college students, and one on high school students who will be first-gen college students in the future. Each interview team conducted interviews, transcribed all interviews, and then learned and applied a “grounded theory” method of “themetizing” the transcriptions to find results.

8. Collected Data: The survey team created and distributed surveys to approximately 830 people—a combination of first-gen high school students, first-gen college students, and parents. The parent surveys were also translated into Spanish. We received 388 usable surveys back. The interview teams conducted interviews with a total of 25 individuals and analyzed 132 pages of transcribed interviews.

9. Analyzed Survey Data: The survey team collected all surveys—via a combination of an online survey tool (SurveyMonkey) and hard copies—and after entering hard copy data into Excel spreadsheets, analyzed all data by looking for percentages, trends, and themes across response groups.

10. Analyzed Interview Data: Each of the three interview teams engaged in a five-step process of qualitative data analysis resulting in “themes” and their respective definitions. Each theme (or what we called “bins,” a metaphor and way to capture and organize like-concepts) emerged directly from the participant interviews and represent our results. Across all teams,

we spent approximately 23 hours in discussion analyzing our qualitative results and making sure they honored participants' insights and answers.

11. Data Teams Presented Results to Each Other: When all data across the four teams were analyzed, each team presented their results to the other teams. We discussed where results were similar and different. We were delighted to see the many ways the survey and interview results supported each other!

12. Developed Recommendations: Based on our results across the teams, we came up with recommendations that we hope will help make change in not only our own institutions, but will also be adopted and used as guidelines for better supporting first-generation students and their families at many schools (K-12 and colleges/universities) across the country.

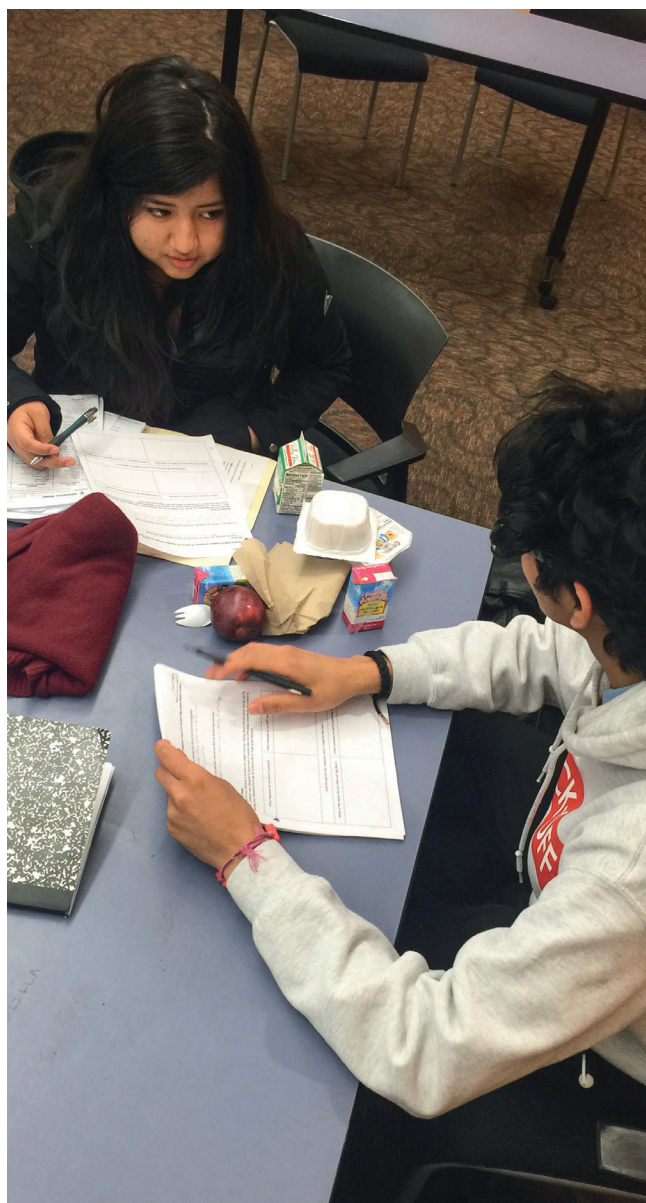
13. Made a Video: Beyond this written report, we wanted to “give voice” (literally) to our youth experiences doing YPAR, being first-generation students, and what we learned through the research. We all agreed that we wanted to have a short four-minute video made that was highly engaging, smart, and awesome so that our research can live on after this project officially concludes, can be shared easily online, and used to support us as we give presentations about our work. We identified our audience, found a local professional company willing to work on our video, and then came up with the storyboard and some key interview questions. We spent approximately six hours on site shooting with the professionals and then after a few edits and about a month later, we have a video we love! You can watch it at: stthomas.edu/togetherpossible/cristorey.

14. Wrote this Report: We wrote this report for many audiences—anyone interested in making college more accessible and supporting students and families in the process—and are excited to share our research process, findings, and recommendations with you, our readers.

15. Developed a Website: To make our report, video, and our project approach, results, and recommendations more accessible and available to all audiences we developed a website. Check it out at: stthomas.edu/togetherpossible/cristorey.

16. Making Plans to Implement Change Based on our Results: At the time of this report-writing, we have many ideas for getting the word out about what we learned and how we can help create and shape meaningful programs for first-generation students and their parents/families! One of our first hopes is to travel around the country and talk to the college counselors at other college prep

high schools (including those in the Cristo Rey Network) and to student affairs, enrollment, and admissions professionals at the University of St. Thomas and other similar colleges and universities, sharing what we learned and how our findings can help shape concrete programs, workshops, and meaningful conversations that will help other first-gen students and their families.



● OUR RESEARCH QUESTION AND RESEARCH GOAL

We took on this research project to address a question or set of questions that the youth on our team believed was important based on their own experiences, those of their peers, and based on the literature on first-generation students and college attendance, acceptance, and retention rates. After discussing many prominent issues related to equity in access to college, we decided that our primary research question would focus on families and parents, because every team member thought it was a key element in their own current and future college success and is especially important for all first-generation students and their families to know more about.

OUR RESEARCH QUESTION: What type of education and preparation do parents and families of first-generation college students need to best support their first-generation child?

Both the literature and our own experiences made clear the fact that many first-generation students struggle to help their parents understand their new identity as a college student. A common challenge for first-generation students is helping their parents conceptualize the scheduling and academic demands central to the collegiate lifestyle. For example, one first-generation (Cristo Rey grad) college student who lived at home commented on how his parents would become upset if he returned home after 10 p.m., although his study group for his chemistry class met on campus at 9:30 p.m. The student shared that his parents struggled to understand that the typical college student schedule varies significantly from the typical high school schedule, and this caused stress to the student's relationship with his parents. Many first-generation students tell us they are concerned about being condescending to their parents as they attempt to explain college life. First-generation students are concerned about the shifting perspectives their families experience as they attempt to support their child in college.

Another challenge for first-generation students, according to both the literature and the experiences of the youth on our team, is a fundamental shift in their role in the family. First-generation students commonly experience guilt at the prospect of redistributing their responsibilities at home in order to be able to focus on college academic work. The literature reveals first-generation student often face myriad cultural challenges in colleges and are torn between home and school practices and priorities. Many first-generation students are accustomed to supporting the survival of their family in multiple ways, including contributing to the family's financial stability as well as daily functioning (such as providing child care for younger siblings). These expectations can persist as the student enters college. Because the collegiate environment often assumes that traditional college-aged students do not experience these responsibilities, first-generation students can feel isolated and/or like outsiders if they seek support.

All of these factors influence and impact the access and retention of first-generation students, and yet many colleges and high schools do not offer formal support services for the parents and guardians of first-generation students. Our research aims to identify the information and services that might help prepare and empower the parents of first-generation students. Our team hopes that this information will help parents to feel more informed, invested, and involved in their child's college experience. Additionally, it will allow first-generation students to focus on their success and retention as they embrace their identities as college students with the support and understanding of their parents.

● OUR RESEARCH METHOD

To answer our research question, we developed a two-pronged approach to collecting data. This approach is called “triangulation” (Patton, 2001)—using two or more types of data-collection techniques to check the consistency of findings. We collected data through two primary approaches:

1 We developed a subset of our team who took a **quantitative** approach, using **survey questionnaires** with a series of Likert-type questions and distributed to hundreds of first-generation high school students, first-gen college students, and first-gen parents of high school and college students.

2 Another set of smaller teams took a **qualitative** approach to answer our research questions. Each of the three qualitative teams focused on conducting and analyzing **in-depth** interviews with the same populations targeted by the survey team: One focused on interviews with parents of first-gen students, one on first-gen college students, and one on first-gen high school students. Each interview team conducted the in-depth interviews, transcribed all interviews, and then learned and applied a “grounded theory” method of **“themetizing”** the transcriptions to find results (Lindolf & Taylor, 2010).

Lindolf, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2010). *Qualitative communication research methods*. London: Sage.

Patton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Next we describe in more detail specifically how each team developed and implemented their research methodology.

SURVEY TEAM & QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

About half of our research team took a quantitative approach to data collection to gather a large volume of responses and insights. We used survey questionnaires to do so. Below is a step-by-step summary of how we approached the process of survey creation and data collection via our surveys; who we surveyed; and how we analyzed all the survey data.

HOW WE CREATED AND DISTRIBUTED THE SURVEY

Given our research questions, we began by having our entire YPAR team discuss and determine who should receive and complete surveys, and then the survey team created surveys for each of our three primary groups of desired participants: **1) first-gen high school students** who have college in their future plans; **2) first-gen college students** enrolled at the University of St. Thomas; and **3) parents of first-gen high school or college students**. The survey team then brainstormed a variety of ways we might approach the targeted groups with specific questions, and began writing draft questions for each participant group. After researching and reading more about excellent survey construction—how to give them, what to ask, what not to ask, and how to keep people actively engaged with the survey—we revised, edited, and added more questions to our surveys. We had an expert in survey questionnaires on our Cristo Rey High School-Twin Cities staff, Dr. Andrew Barron, revise and give feedback on our survey questions. After incorporating Dr. Barron’s feedback and making revisions to our surveys, we used SurveyMonkey to create the college student and high school student versions so students could easily take the survey online. We had the parent surveys translated into Spanish as well.

In total, our survey for high school students included 26 questions, our survey for college students included 42 questions, and our parent survey included 21 questions. Responses were on Likert-type scales (e.g., agree/disagree continuum, comfortable/uncomfortable continuum, etc.). For some questions, participants were asked to choose as many responses as they identified. Sample questions from each survey are provided here.

Sample questions on the high school student survey:

- **What comfort level do you have asking questions and seeking support about college?** (Five response options, ranging from “Very Comfortable” to “Very Uncomfortable”)
- **What do you anticipate to be the most significant barriers (obstacles) in applying to college?** (Check all that apply: Application Process, Application Fees, Tuition (Cost), Family Attitude, Separation From Family, Separation From Community, Lack of Opportunity, Lack of College Information)

- **Your parents involve themselves in your preparation for college.** (Response options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree)

Sample questions on the college student survey:

- **The cost of college impacted your choice of where to attend.** (Response options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree)
- **How often do you communicate with your parents about school?** (Response options: Never, Occasionally/1-2 times per week, Every Now & Then/3-4 times per week, Frequently/More than 4 times per week)
- **What type of support programs would you attend if offered at your school?** (Choose all that apply: Study Skills Workshops, Career Development, Academic Guidance, Community Service, Financial Health and Financial Aid, Social Activities, Peer Support Group, Discussions with Professors or Staff who were first-generation college students, Tutoring)

Sample questions on the parent survey:

- **How many times per week do you talk with your student about homework or go over homework with your student?** (Response options: Never, 1-2 times per week, 3-4 times per week, 5 or more times per week)
- **How often do you talk to your student about college?** (Response options: More than once a day, One-Two times a week, One-Two times a Month, Very Rarely)
- **How frequently have you had positive contacts or interactions with your student's teachers?** (Response options: More than once a week; once a month; once an academic session; very rarely)

After surveys were finalized, we followed our IRB-approved procedures and distributed surveys to high school students using a variety of approaches, and employed the help of Mr. Brad Pulles, a staff member in the office of Student Diversity and Inclusion Services at the University St. Thomas, and Ms. Kelly Collins, graduate support coordinator at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, to help us get surveys to our desired audience of first-generation college students. For the parent surveys, we used multiple approaches to encourage parent participation, including: We sent surveys home with students and asked them to encourage their parents to take the survey; we distributed surveys to parents attending a Junior Parent night; we sent surveys home in student report cards; and each person in the survey group was responsible for giving 20 parent surveys to our peers and friends—asking them to give it to

their parents and bring it back. Then we crossed our fingers and hoped for the data to roll in on SurveyMonkey and in hard copy from parents. When parent data was submitted, a team member would manually enter the data into an Excel spreadsheet.

WHO WE SURVEYED

As mentioned above, we had three primary groups of participants in our sample: Cristo Rey High School students, first-gen college students, and parents of Cristo Rey students. In total, we received and analyzed surveys from 340 high school students (sophomores to seniors), 18 college students (freshmen to seniors), and 33 parents. Summary demographics for each group are as follows:

OUR SURVEY PARTICIPANTS: HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

- Of the 340 surveys completed: 145 were males and 194 were females (one person did not report).
- Of the 340 surveys completed, all four grades participated; the freshman class was the largest proportion with 136 completed surveys submitted.
- More than 80 percent of participants reported the language(s) spoken at home as either Spanish or a combination of English and Spanish.
- Of the 340 participants, 140 respondents said they did not have family members in college or who had gone to college. We did not specifically ask if siblings were in college, although we realize that would have been helpful to know and some students offered that information in the free response section.

OUR SURVEY PARTICIPANTS: COLLEGE STUDENTS

- Of the 18 surveys completed, three reported themselves as male and 15 as female.
- Of the participants, 10 of the 18 said they did not have other family members in college or who had gone to college. Four of the participants listed siblings currently enrolled in college.
- Of the 18 participants, 11 reported they are Hispanic, two as Black/African American, three as Asian, and one as White. One participant chose not to respond to the question.
- The average household size was five and a half persons. The range of number of members within the household was three persons to 10 persons.

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS: PARENTS

Because of an honest oversight by the survey sub-group, we failed to collect data from parents about their gender (how many mothers/fathers completed surveys), family size, or ethnic background. However, to attend Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, families need to demonstrate an income level that falls at or below requirements that qualify for federal free or reduced lunch. Therefore, all participating families were in the lower-income socioeconomic status. The large majority of all families attending Cristo Rey-Twin Cities are also Latino, although we cannot say for sure which parents completed surveys. We comment on this oversight and challenge in our limitations section.

HOW WE ANALYZED SURVEY DATA

To analyze all survey data, we took the following steps for each participant group. First, we examined overall results from each question for each group of participants (i.e., the summary results of all questions for the parent group ... then for the college student group, etc.). We compiled all “free response” answers into one place to begin seeing how many similar or different ideas were emerging. For each Likert-type question, we looked for highest and lowest percentages on each question—and also identified recurring topics and common responses emerging from survey responses. Our team discussed the trends, topics, and themes in our survey responses and began attempting to identify what the results tell us and how they answer our research question. After much conversation over many meetings, we came up with the primary themes and what we believe are the most revealing results across survey groups. We then brainstormed our recommendations: What could be changed or implemented to improve the situation for each participant group, based on what we learned in the surveys? We also began to brainstorm how we would reach out to the various groups of participants to share our results.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS & QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

To gain further understanding of our participants’ lived experiences toward answering our research question, half of our research team took a qualitative approach to data collection and conducted in-depth interviews. Our team divided into three sub-teams, each responsible for conducting, transcribing, and analyzing data with one of our three primary groups of participants: 1) 14 **first-gen high school students** who have college in their future plans; 2) 10 **first-gen college students** enrolled at the University of St. Thomas; and 3) five **parents of first-gen**

high school or college students. Before we summarize specifics of each sub-team’s participants, we provide an overview of our general qualitative approach to collecting our data through our interviews and analyzing the 132 total pages of data emerging from our 29 total interviews.

HOW WE CONDUCTED OUR INTERVIEWS

We conducted all interviews face to face, and each interview consisted of in-depth questions prepared by our entire research team, with follow-up questions added for clarity and depth. A complete list of our interview questions for each group is available by request. Sample interview questions are offered below for each set of participants.

Before each interview began, every interviewee was presented with informed consent documents. Informed consent was reviewed with each participant, informing each of the purpose of the study, any associated risks, their rights as participants, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality in our study. We used assent forms for any minor under 18 being interviewed and received consent forms from their parent/s. After receiving appropriate consent, all participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire to collect basic demographic information, including participants’ age, sex, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Next, the interviews began and were recorded on a digital voice recorder or digital device. Interviews were conducted in a variety of locations: in participants’ homes or apartments, in university buildings, and in high school classrooms and common spaces. Each interview was then transcribed word for word by the researcher who conducted the interview; in the case of the college data collection team, a single member of the research team—who happens to be trained at transcription—did the transcribing of all college interview recordings.

HOW WE ANALYZED INTERVIEW DATA

After the 29 audio recordings were transcribed into 132+ pages of data, each of our three qualitative sub-teams were trained in a method of inductive analysis inspired by Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) grounded theory method, a technique also summarized in an easy-to-digest format for newer researchers by Dr. Kent Lofgren in his video tutorial “Qualitative Data Analysis: A step-by-step approach” (available at [youtube.com/watch?v=DRL4PF2u9XA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRL4PF2u9XA)).

Grounded theory analysis and analytic coding (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010) is a process of deriving themes by identifying categories that emerge from participants' responses. Each of our sub-teams conducted this process for their set of transcriptions. "Open coding" is the first stage in grounded theory analysis and involves each coder reading all the data and identifying what is perceived as relevant, important, or repeated in some way—thereby developing "bins" (Spiggle, 1994). Bins are a way to begin to make sense of patterns in the data. After each person (a coder) on a team shared their bins with other members, each sub-team began lengthy discussions in which bins were discerned and clarified. This resulted in each of the coders then identifying, naming, and defining each bin or "theme." After each sub-group determined our final set of themes, we did what is called "axial coding" according to Lindlof & Taylor—identifying the way we might integrate the themes and categories and figuring out how and if themes relate to each other hierarchically or otherwise. For some of the themes, we developed a visual model to represent how the themes relate to each other and to further help us answer the research question. Our themes, findings, and supporting data from transcripts are presented in a following section.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

As stated above, our qualitative team divided into three sub-teams to gather and analyze data with one of our three primary groups of participants: 1) first-gen **high school students** who have college in their future plans; 2) **first-gen college students** enrolled at the University of St. Thomas; and 3) **parents of first-gen high school or college students**. Below, each sub-team reports on who their participants were and anything unique to their sub-teams process (different from the overarching process of qualitative data collection and analysis as described in the previous section).

FIRST-GEN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Participants were 14 high school students who will be among the firsts in their families to attend college.

- Interviewees were seven juniors and seven seniors, and 50 percent were female and 50 percent were male.
- All of our participants self-identified as Latino and the status of at least two is Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA).
- All participants were between 16-18 years old.
- Not all of our 14 participants self-reported their family's economic status, but 10 students characterized their families as a range between "working" and "middle-class" with annual household salaries between \$17K and \$55K/year.
- Each participant was recruited via a network-sampling technique, also known as a convenience sample. Each participant is a member of one of the interviewee's social or academic network at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School-Twin Cities.
- Each interview ranged from eight to 30 minutes.
- We asked approximately 18 questions on feelings about college family support and being prepared for college. Questions included, for example:
 - "What ideas do you have about college or going to college or even applying?"
 - "What kind of support do your parents or family members give you regarding the college process?"
 - "Do you feel emotionally/academically prepared for college?"

FIRST-GEN COLLEGE STUDENTS

Participants were 10 first-gen college students.

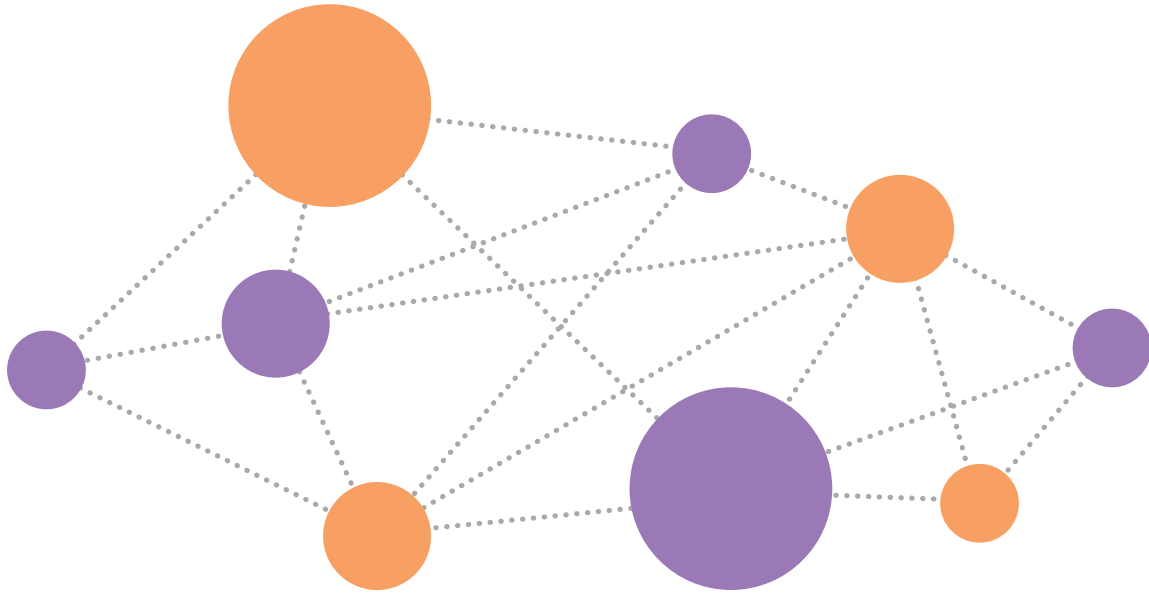
- They included one first-year student, two sophomores, six juniors, and one senior.
- Five participants identified as female, five as male.
- The self-reported ethnicity of our interviewees were:
 - Hmong (one)
 - Ecuadorian (one)
 - Asian/Hmong (one)
 - Latino or Hispanic (seven)
- All participants were between 19-21 years old.
- Our 10 participants self-reported their family's economic status as "working or lower/middle" with annual household income ranging from 24K-61K/year; average reported household income was 40K/year.
- Each participant was recruited via a network-sampling technique, also known as a convenience sample. Each participant is a member of one of the interviewee's social or academic network at the University of St. Thomas, MN.

- Each interview ranged from 15 to 35 minutes.
- Approximately 13 questions were asked, such as:
 - “If you could give advice to parents or family members of first-generation college students, what would it be?”
 - “Is there any advice you would give to first-generation students about their relationship with their parents?”
 - “Now that you’re in college, what advice would you give to your first-year self?”
- One thing unique to our sub-team’s approach: Although we had a three-person data collection team, we decided that two members would conduct the interviews and the third did all the transcription to help us maximize our experience and talents!
- We analyzed more than 41 pages of transcribed interview data.
- Our five-member coding team consisted of three college students and two college professors.
- Our five-member analysis team met and discussed our codes and emergent themes over three meetings, totalling approximately nine hours of discussion.
- We ate a lot of Jimmy John’s during coding. All of us like the JJ’s chocolate chunk cookies.
- Each interview ranged from 10 to 35 minutes.
- Approximately 15 questions were asked, for example:
 - “What do you think some of the greatest challenges are for your child and being in/attending college?”
 - “Do you have any fears about your child attending college?”
 - “Have you helped your child with the college process in any way (i.e., helping answer any questions they have or how to apply)? Is there anything you haven’t helped with that you’d like to be able to or want to help with? Describe what those things are. Is there anything that would help you be able to help them?”
- We analyzed more than 21 pages of transcribed interview data from parents.
- Our four-member coding team consisted of two high school students, one professor, and one high school staff member. Three members participated in finalizing the themes and their definitions.
- In total, our analysis team met and discussed our codes and emergent themes over approximately seven hours total of discussion.

PARENTS OF FIRST-GEN STUDENTS

Participants were five parents of future first-gen college students.

- We had one father/male, four mothers/female.
- Average household size of participants was five members.
- All parents reported their ethnicity as Latino/Hispanic.
- Our parents ranged in age from 38-51.
- Our five parent participants’ family’s economic status was in the lower socioeconomic range, with average total household salary reported as 24-30K/year.
- Each parent participant was recruited via a network-sampling technique, also known as a convenience sample. Each participant is a member of one of the interviewee’s social network as a member of Cristo Rey Jesuit High School-Twin Cities.



OUR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

● FIRST-GEN PARENTS

FINDING #1

Parents of first-generation students overwhelmingly believe three things about college related to their children:

- 1 College creates a **good future** and is something their child must do because it is a pathway to a better life.
- 2 **Encouragement** and **support** are the primary and essential functions of parents regardless of education level, knowledge, or experience.
- 3 Parents must **trust** their child and be **proud** of them in and through the process, which comes from the strong sentiment that their child(ren) going to college won't negatively affect family relationship, but rather will have many positive effects.

SUPPORTING DATA

- In-depth interviews with parents revealed their strong beliefs about why college is essential for their child and that they must go no matter what:

College is "the best thing she could ever do."

"Respect and education will always take her to a better future."

Parents should "never hold their children back."

"Success is right around the corner."

"Our daughter IS going to college."

"Going to college is just the way to succeed ... to make [their] life easier than what we have had."

"College is a very, very good way to get our children to get on the right path."

- According to parents surveyed, 90 percent reported they know their child(ren) will be successful and will have a better life if they go to college.
- In-depth interviews with parents also revealed that parents see themselves in the role of primary encourager, positive motivator, and supporter—no matter what—and that they (parents) are willing to

"give all that is necessary" during the college process. Parents also revealed repeatedly they must "trust" and "be proud."

"I have to support her. Therefore I have to work a lot to help her finish her education but I would work with pleasure."

"... we have to build trust toward our children and let them become adults."

"I don't want to think that I can't help my daughter. I don't want to think that. My thoughts are centered in helping her. I know that it will be a lot. But I need to put in the effort."

"I think it is important for our child to feel the support from their loved ones and know that we are always there for them."

"I'm very proud of all the things he has done."

"She will bring pride and joy to the family."

"I am very proud that my daughter will be going to college."

"We have to build trust toward our children and let them become adults."

- Survey results overwhelmingly reveal that parental support is important to how comfortable their child feels in college.
- 89 percent of college students said that being supported by their parents made them more comfortable in college.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that college prep high schools create opportunities for parents of first-generation middle school and high school students to talk to each other, as well as talk to parents of college students. Programs designed just for parents to talk to other parents will provide opportunities for them to be influenced by their peers about being supportive, encouraging, and positive about college. Hearing from other parents about their beliefs and how they see their role might help reduce worries and fears. Similar programs could involve the teen children of the parents so they can learn directly from them how important and special it is that parents care for our education.

● FIRST-GEN PARENTS

FINDING #2

Parents of first-generation students **need and want more knowledge** and information about the college application process, financial aid, and the college experience. They also are **very willing to seek** such knowledge, and do so in two places:

- 1** Parents seek information **internal** to their social network—people they know, such as extended family members or friends who have experience.
- 2** Parents seek information from sources **external** to their personal and social network, such as from online resources and college counselors at their child's high school.

SUPPORTING DATA

- In-depth interviews with parents revealed parents' desires for more information because they have not had the college experience themselves.

"I try to give her explanations that I don't have."

"I feel ignorant in these cases."

- Simultaneous to yearning for more information, parents spoke clearly of knowing that they must look to their personal and social networks—and to college prep programs and their school resources—for support.

"By asking there is a way [to get the knowledge needed]."

- The desire for more financial information and guidance was significant and rooted in fears about debt and the financial unknowns of college costs.

"I would like help with financial aid because I feel like I need to learn more about college payments so I don't fall in debt with so much money given."

- In-depth interviews revealed parents' willingness to take the initiative to get information they lack and are open to receiving information from others. They also share advice and encouragement for other first-generation parents.

"They should support their kids. Look for tons of

information. There's so much info on the internet and in our community. It's all about talking and asking around. You must knock on doors and speak to those who know a lot more than we do."

"Talk to people who are more specialized in these types of things."

- Parent interviews revealed that parents want to talk to more to college counselors, and would like a specific contact for first-gen parents at the college their child is going to. They also expressed appreciation for what their current high school (Cristo Rey-Twin Cities) provides them about college information.

"I think the information at Cristo Rey is very helpful for the students and me. I've learned a lot more because of the school."

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that colleges and high schools run parent-led support groups—and create mentoring programs where more experienced parents serve as mentors and provide conversation for new first-generation parents. Further, it is essential that these classes and programs be offered in multiple languages so all parents can access the information. Because parents do want information and are willing to seek it—although sometimes they don't know where to look—we also recommend that high schools and colleges create an online space in multiple languages where parents of first-generation students can find all of the linked resources specific to their needs and worries.

● FIRST-GEN PARENTS

FINDING #3

Parents of first-generation students have two primary fears:

- 1 The **financial realities** of college.
- 2 Their sons' and daughters' **personal well-being**, specifically their **safety**, feelings of **inclusion** at college, and their **emotional health**.

SUPPORTING DATA

- In-depth interviews with the first-generation parents reveal that all have fears about how to finance college and, as a result, have a strong desire for information related to scholarships and financing college education.

“Even though we tell them that we’re going to help, we know that in reality we probably can’t. But, we won’t close their mindset by saying that we cannot. I don’t know how I’m going to pay for it but I will.”

[Wish we had] “more about financial aid or scholarships ...”

“How to pay for college is my biggest worry.”

“... everyone [in the family] thinks about how we’re going to pay. I don’t think the doors will close on me. I have faith in God that the doors will open.”

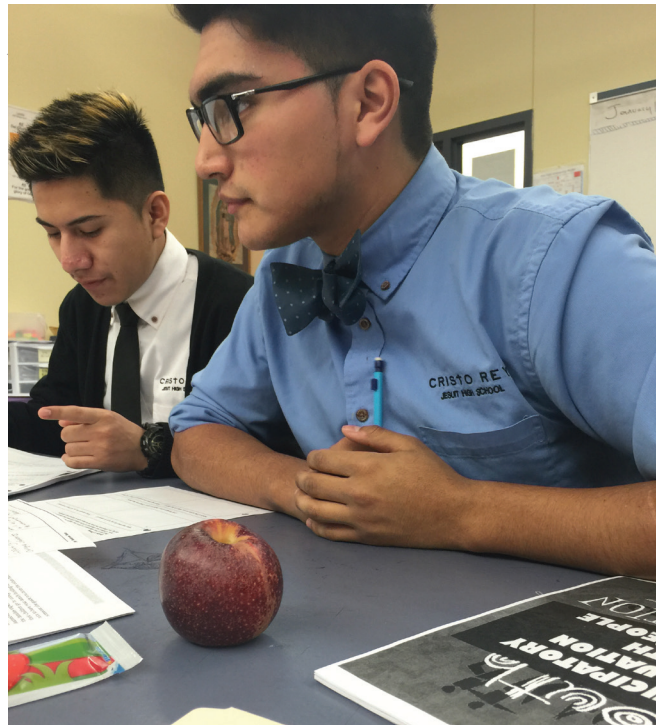
- According to survey respondents, more than 90 percent of parents identified the cost of college as playing a significant role in the college decision process, affecting their child or children going to college.
- In-depth interviews with the first-generation parents revealed a vast set of fears about their child’s personal and emotional well-being when they go to off to college.

“I just hope my daughter feels safe and that’s all I wish.”

“Who will she surround herself with?”

“[I’m] scared of her falling into a bad vice.”

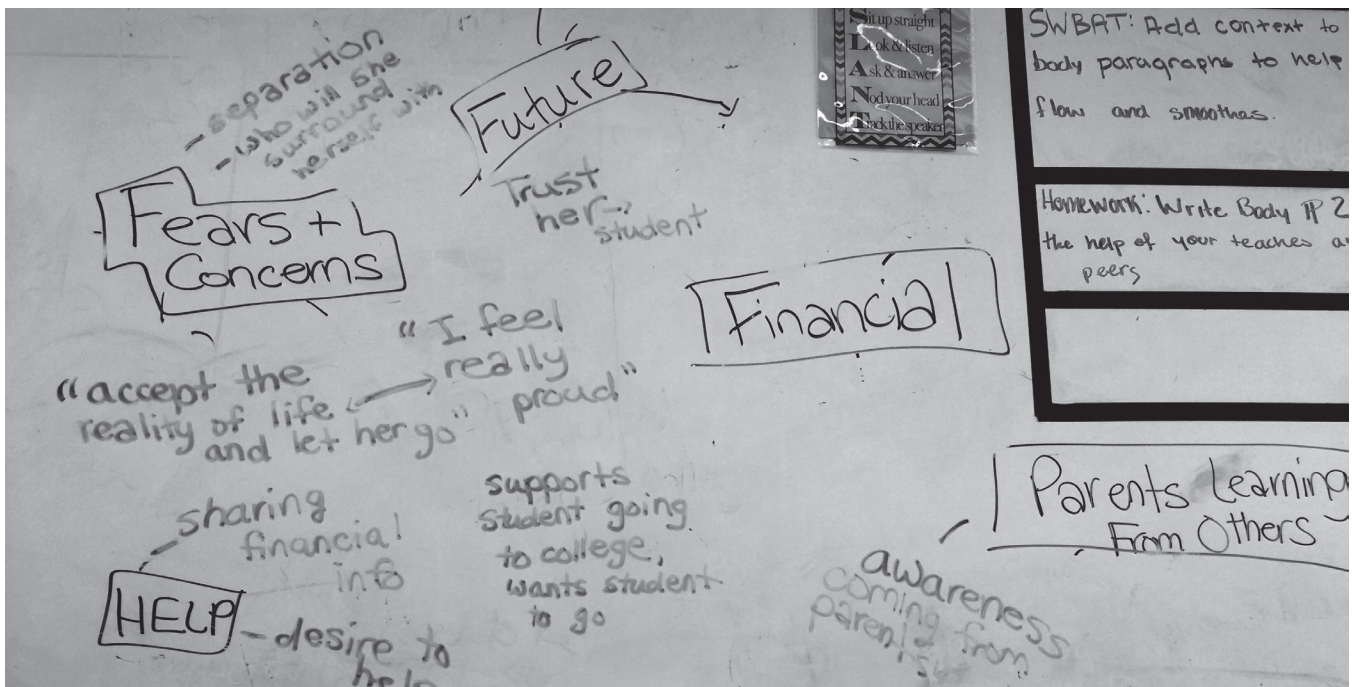
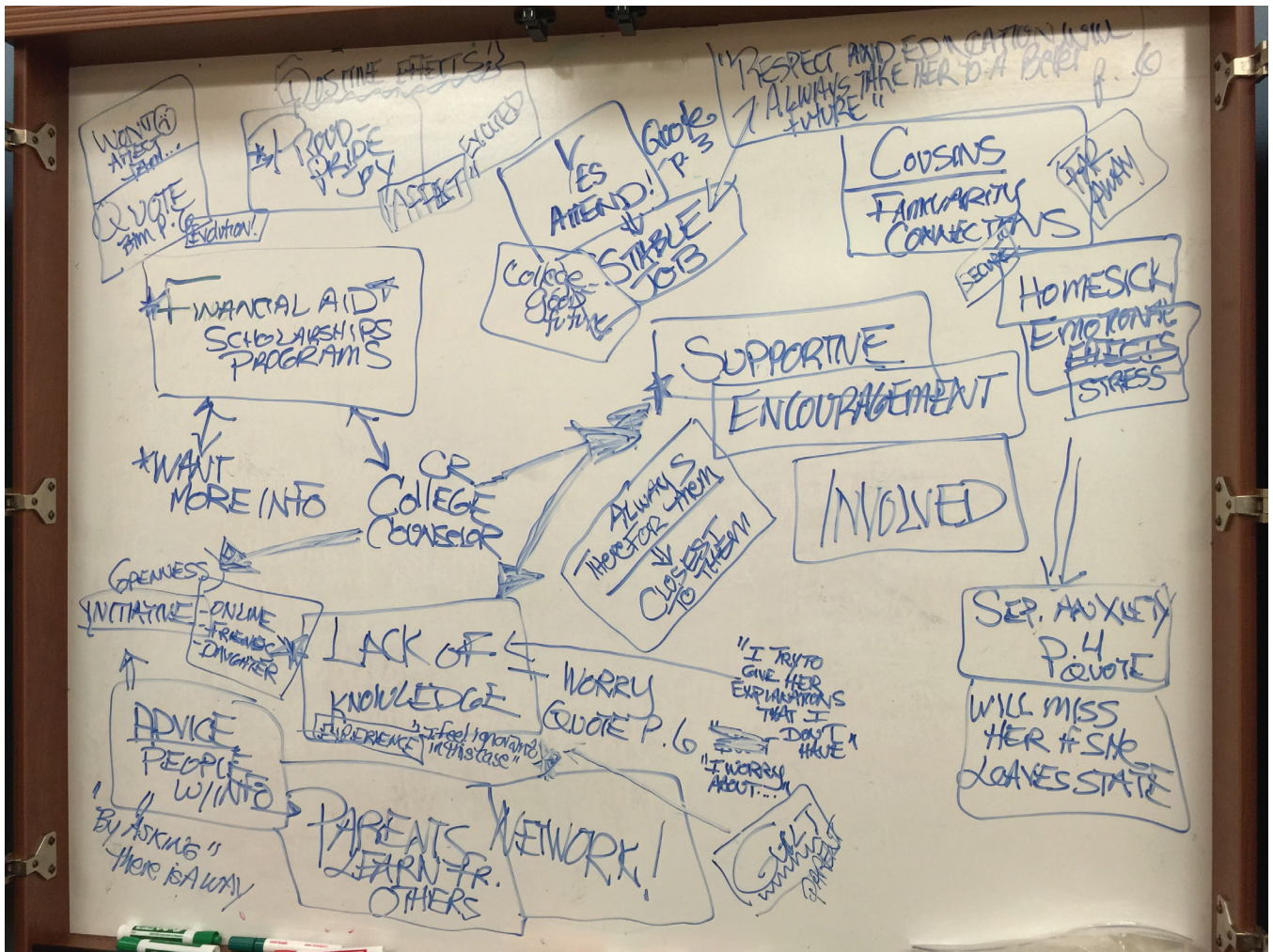
“I’m scared that she won’t feel like she belongs ... ”



RECOMMENDATIONS

Similar to our recommendation above, we urge colleges and high schools to boost the volume and frequency of the financial information they give parents. Parents should be educated in multiple formats, offered in multiple languages, and offered at every step along the middle school and high school path about the financial realities of college applications, college costs, and college financial aid options and processes.

We also strongly recommend that parent-to-parent mentor programs, with the assistance of social workers and school counselors at both the high school and college level, be developed to address the emotional challenges their child might face at school—and provide skills and information so the parent can be a helpful and appropriate support for their child when she/he is in college.



● FIRST-GEN COLLEGE STUDENTS

FINDING #1

First-generation **college students** of color articulate that they face and experience a unique **reality**—one that comes with **assets** and opportunities, as well as inevitable **obstacles** and challenges. Overwhelmingly, they encourage other first-gen students to definitely **“Go to college!”** They also believe that by sharing their lived experiences they can ensure a better transition to college for other first-gen students and their families.

SUPPORTING DATA

- Interviewees articulated the many **assets and opportunities** they have encountered, experienced, and want other first-gen students to know about. Each, they say, is part of the reality of being first-gen. Specifically ...
 - 100 percent of students interviewed mentioned the importance or value of college prep programs (such as College Possible and Project Success) that they had been a part of throughout their middle and high school years. Interviewees note the way such programs simultaneously supported and pushed them.
 - Seven out of the 10 survey participants who cited programs such as AVID, Upward Bound, the REAL program (at the University of St. Thomas), and summer programs specific to certain colleges and universities said such pre-college experiences are either helpful or very helpful. Survey participants expanded on their answers, offering reasons such programs are helpful opportunities: They provide “early networking and exposure to workload” and opportunities to “connect with students of color sharing similar experiences.”
- Of the 18 surveyed college students, seven noted that their own college had programming specifically for first-generation students, but none knew of any programming for the parents of first-generation students.
- Interviewees reported college prep and mentorship programs as an essential asset because they “enforce the idea of college” and they “follow you” though the process.
- 65 percent of survey participants believed the most helpful method of support that their university could offer to first-generation college students is a monthly support

group over dinner with other first-generation students.

- A very strong theme, mentioned by almost every interviewee, was the way college is an essential opportunity for first-gen students and is something that they want other students to know they can, should, and “must” do. They were clear in their advice to future first-geners about going to college:

“Do it!”

“If you want to work in a place that you love ... the only way you will be able to do it is by going to college and studying that major or pursuing that career. Education is key to opening your mind.”

“Go for it.”

“A lot of people think it’s not their path. A lot of people think it’s not the right thing for them. ... but it’s like the big thing you need.... Just do it.”

“You are able to see the world in a different way.”

“I would say education and knowledge is power. It is probably the best and most important way to navigate [your] future, aspirations, dreams, and goals.”

“It is very important to get an education and learn for the sake of it and for your dreams, versus getting a good grade or getting a diploma.”

“Go [to college] at all costs.”

“This is your future, so don’t mess that up.”

- Interviewees also discussed the reality of **obstacles and challenges** first-gen college students face.

“I’m already at a disadvantage simply by being a minority and by being of low income. Things are going to be especially hard for me.”

“I wish I knew how hard it would be to walk around and just be uncomfortable.”

“Once going to college, I knew I had to put in double the work. I had to try twice as hard as my peers just to do the same thing.”

- Survey participants confirmed similar obstacles:
 - 10 out of the 18 college student survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that their parents were involved with their preparation for college. However, 100 percent of college students surveyed said they would have been more prepared for college if their parents knew and were aware of the skills they would need to do well in college.
 - Only one out of the 18 first-generation college student survey participants did not cite the cost of college as having had an impact on where to attend college.
- More than a few interviewees spoke of the reality of the “hidden curriculum.”

“I feel that I always learn things that I wish I had known before. I would say there is a hidden curriculum. It is the knowledge that college-educated parents pass on to their kids when they are in college. It is not something they teach you in high school. It’s passed on from someone who has gone to college, the pros, cons, how to succeed ... but when you are a first-generation student you don’t get that curriculum, you don’t get that knowledge.”

- Students disclosed how being a first-gen student of color “can be intimidating.” They also discussed how they overcame their fears.

“... Being in a predominantly white classroom, predominantly white institution, sometimes it’s uncomfortable. But as the years went by I learned how to come out of my comfort zone with that aspect.”

“I’ve learned that we’re all learning. There’s no such thing as a dumb question. There really isn’t. And ... I just really learned to accept myself for who I am, you know. I may not be as intelligent as others, but I know there’s always someone who is in the same boat ...”

“I was worried about if I was ready, if I would be able to compete with my peers. ... These are the things that crossed my mind but once I started college you realize you can overcome any fears you may have as long as you work hard and are willing to get back-up when you fail.”

- Many students also spoke of the obstacles of parents’ lack of understanding because of language barriers and/or lack of college experience.

Parents “have the language barrier and didn’t know the things needed to go to college. They weren’t able to support me as in what to study for the ACT, what forms to fill out, how to pick a college. But they were always there for

emotional support, to guide me, and were always there to listen to me.”

“Sometimes it’s frustrating when they [parents] don’t understand the workload. They say I should do my work in this time, and I have to tell them I don’t know how long it will actually take. It’s frustrating. The communication of what college entails, the workload and social life. Trying to balance everything. They thinks it’s easy, but it’s not.”

“... It is much tougher for first-generation students because they did not get that world of experience from family to let them know how hard it is or how difficult it is.”

- 16 out of 18 first-generation college students surveyed stated they would have felt more comfortable through the college process with more parental support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that first-generation college students of color share their reality—their lived experience of the unique assets they bring to campus and specific obstacles they face—with their future and current peers. First-generation college students of color should consider their role as leaders before, during, and after college and offer panel discussions at high schools with underrepresented student populations to set expectations for what incoming students will experience as well as encourage them to try their best and get involved. Throughout their college experience, first-generation students of color should help facilitate social gatherings for all first-generation students in order to create and maintain a community of support. Finally, first-generation alumni should talk with current first-generation college students about their experiences in and outside of the university.

Our recommendations for first-generation college students of color come with the understanding that many outreach programs and resources currently exist on a variety of campuses. We acknowledge that first-generation college students cannot be forced into learning how to deal with their unique reality and that they must seek out information on their own. We hope that early discussions of the first-generation reality will help incoming college students accept their circumstances, recognize that they both bring special assets and will face unique obstacles, and understand that they can benefit from the teachings of other first-generation students of color and the institutional resources available to them.

● FIRST-GEN COLLEGE STUDENTS

FINDING #2

First-generation **college students** possess **wisdom** emerging from their lived experiences as first-gen students of color, and based on that experience have clear and compelling **advice** for other first-generation college student **peers**—information they **wish they had known** about academic success and social/personal well-being.

SUPPORTING DATA

- Interviews with the first-generation college students revealed a **wisdom** about college, and **advice** for other first-gen college students **about academic success**.

“You only get one shot to get something right in college” (unlike high school, where you can do things over). “Professors don’t care if you pass or not. It’s your responsibility.”

Many students said they wish had known how many hours it takes to study.

Students said they wish had know how to succeed **IN** college, not just how to get **INTO** college.

Students said they went in expecting it to be easier than it was.

Students suggested other first-gen students must “seek help” and “learn how to study if you need to.” “I spoke to my professor every day to do homework and practice problems with him. I asked him how to study and that was my first real wakeup call that I was as not academically prepared as my peers.”

They wanted first-gen high school students to know they should take the information offered in high school about college success seriously.

“I didn’t take it seriously, but I should have. I went to a college prep school and they told me it would get harder. But I believed that since I already went to a college prep school it would just be a next step in my life ... like going from eighth grade to high school, just like that.”

Many emphasized the reality of time management skills:

“You’re more on your own.”

*And you have to “work on discipline and time management.”
“Be selfish with your time.”*

They had advice about the workload, and general advice about motivation and choices:

“Strive and thrive. ... Really do the most rather than doing the least.”

“Push yourself because if you don’t push yourself nobody else [will].”

“Once you start college you realize you can overcome any fears you may have as long as you work hard and are willing to get back up when you fail.”

“You’re going to have to try twice as hard to achieve the same as [your] peers.”

“It is okay to not know what you want to do because college is where you figure it out eventually. As a high schooler, it was very stressful to think that I have to know what I wanted to do for the rest of my life and that was not the case.”

“Don’t go where your friends are going” (to school).

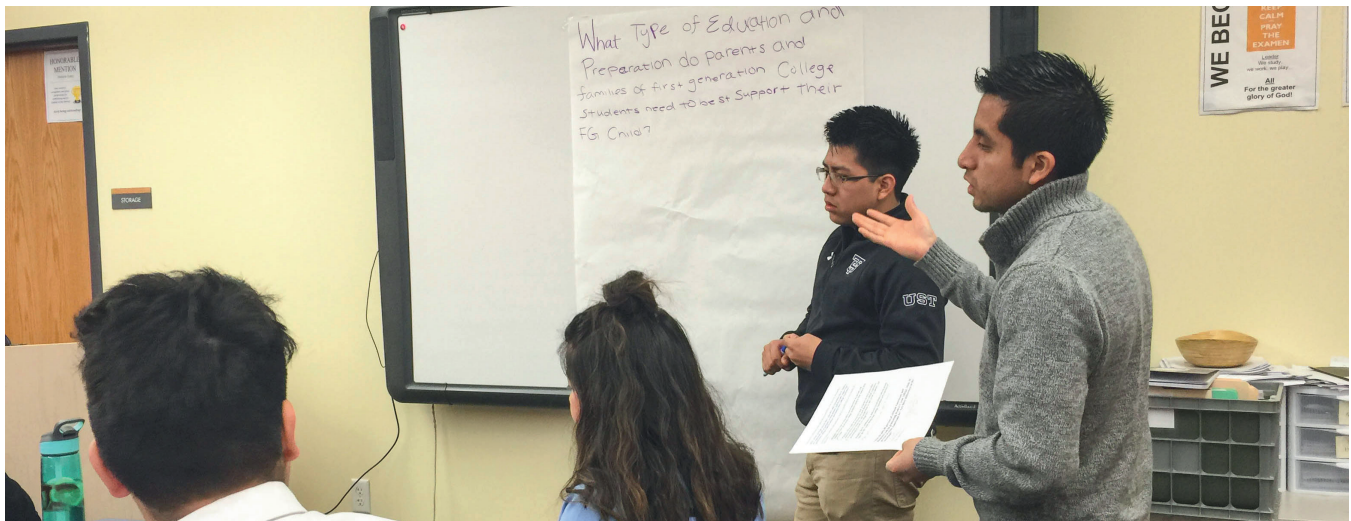
- Of the 18 first-generation college students surveyed about types of support they would utilize if offered to them:

- 15 want financial health and financial aid
- 14 want study skills workshops
- 12 want academic guidance
- 12 want discussions with professors or staff who were first-generation college students
- 11 would go to tutoring
- 11 want career development
- Nine want social activities
- Eight want community service
- Eight want a peer support group

- Interviews with the first-generation college students also revealed much wisdom and advice about the **social, relational, and personal aspects of well-being** as first-gen college students. Students spoke frequently about what they wish they had known, and what they want other college students who are first-gen to know.

They had advice about navigating relationships with parents and family:

“Don’t leave them [parents] out of your college experience because they just want what is best for you and to support you.”



“Be very patient and thankful” (to your parents).

“... your parents will be able to help you [in more ways than the financial]. ... It does not mean they are supporting you any less, just in different types [of ways].”

They offered advice and thoughts about friendship, health, and being ready for the reality of looking different than your peers:

“Keep an open mind. ... sometimes people can be rude to you, especially for students who go to a school where they look different than the majority.”

“Learn to say no to friends, food, staying up at night, things like that. Say no to your friends when going out to party.”

“It’s a bit of ‘culture shock’ ... in high school I was the majority and here I am the minority.”

“Be outgoing!”

“... just reach out more to people who are already in college ... instead of thinking [you have] it in the bag.”

Students also suggested that to boost both academics and make friends, they should get involved in many clubs, activities, and leadership opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Similar to our recommendations for dealing with the unique reality of first-generation students of color, we strongly suggest that incoming students actively seek advice and support from their peers and university

administration—with a reminder that colleges must facilitate the support, and high schools should offer ways to support or work into their curricula ways to prepare youth for college. Our data clearly revealed that first-generation students of color, in particular, need specific support to succeed academically and socially in college. We recommend that high schools and universities facilitate discussions between first-generation college students of color and high school seniors who will join them in the near future. These forums will allow first-generation college students of color to share their experiences in the classroom and around campus, discuss cultural challenges, and address any questions or concerns of the high school students. We also strongly recommend that from their very first day on campus, incoming first-generation students of color explore the various forms of academic and social support that are available such as the offices for financial aid and student diversity.

Finally, we recommend that first-generation college students of color not limit themselves to one peer group of support. While seeking out students who share similar experiences can be helpful because they can share their wisdom of navigating through college as a first-generation student of color, it is important to also find groups of friends that support different needs in your life; friends you can study with, work with, eat with, or even socialize with. First-generation students should not feel they will only benefit from spending time with the same people every day.

● FIRST-GEN COLLEGE STUDENTS

FINDING #3

First-generation **college students** possess **wisdom** emerging from their lived experiences as first-gen **daughters and sons**, and based on that experience have clear and compelling **advice** for other first-gen **parents**—information they **wish their parents knew** during their college transition and experience.

SUPPORTING DATA

- In-depth interviews with first-generation college students revealed they wish their parents knew more about the **volume of work** in college.

“Sometimes it’s frustrating when they [parents] don’t understand the workload. They say I should do my work in this time, and I have to tell them I don’t know how long it will actually take. It’s frustrating. The communication of what college entails, the workload and social life, trying to balance everything. They think it’s easy but it’s not.”

“I know that they will never understand this, but I wish they knew the amount of work I am doing. It is kind of hard to show them that I am staying up all night or you have to sacrifice your free time to do homework.”

“... They [parents] should just support them, and understand they won’t be around the family a lot because they will be doing homework. They should understand that.”

“It would help if parents knew that their kids didn’t call not because we don’t want to, but because we are really busy trying to get everything done and graduate on time.”

- In-depth interviews revealed **advice** that first-gen college students have for other parents going through the process of supporting and navigating the college process with their first-gen child:

“Don’t be discouraged by the price tag. ... There are resources out there.”

“It’s a possibility and you really can afford it.”

“Encourage them [your child] to go to college. Education is key to many benefits.”

“I know when you are a parent of a child who is the first, you might feel like you will not be able to support your

child as much as other parents who are college educated. ... It will definitely be hard but try to support them.”

“Money is not the only way to support them ... Give them a call when they are in college. That goes a long way ...”

“Trust [your child]. If your child was mature and self-driven to get themselves to college, you should be able to trust what they are doing.”

“If parents don’t know something ... just look for the resources to help, because you are not alone.”

“Always encourage, always support.”

- Every one of the college student interviewees revealed that the relationship they had with their parents became stronger after they went to college. They wished all parents could know that to reduce parents’ worries about changing relationships with their child(ren).

“They see me more as an adult when I go home. I feel that now what I have to say matters.”

“After the first year, now they know how tough it is and they support me even more.”

“Try to let them [parents] know you appreciate what they did ... Say thank you.”

“... Me and my dad have never been that close but ... as I shared more about my personal life goals he has gotten more understanding and our relationship has gotten better ...”

“They have learned that I have a lot to do at school like extracurriculars and jobs, not just academics. So our relationship has gotten stronger.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Like our other recommendations, we strongly suggest that first-generation students of color and their families communicate as much as possible throughout the college process. We recommend networking events for parents of first-generation students at high schools and universities. Discussion forums will allow parents of first-generation students of color to meet similar parents who can share their unique wisdom on supporting their children throughout college. Networking events will not only share wisdom but also connect parents who can continue to stay in contact and exchange ideas on maintaining a strong relationship with their first-generation students of color.

We also recommend that high schools and universities think comprehensively about student-parent communication for first-generation families of color. High schools should facilitate discussion forums between high school seniors and parents of first-generation students in order to highlight the perspective of the parents. It would be good for high school seniors to hear about what recommendations parents of college students have for students other than their own children. Likewise, parents of first-generation students should hear as many perspectives as possible. Universities need to better advertise their orientation programs for students and parents so the whole family can learn about their campus and its culture. Relying on first-generation students themselves to promote these events to their peers would help ensure parent participation.



● FIRST-GEN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

FINDING #1

First-generation students experience a **different educational reality** and must consider that they are **uniquely linked to their families** in the college process.

SUPPORTING DATA

- In-depth interviews with high school students revealed how influential family status and support are for the college process.

“I think First-Generation college students are at a disadvantage but are still capable of achieving things.”

“They [families] want to see us being better than them. They don’t want us to have the same jobs as they do. They want us to be someone professional.”

- However, 52 percent of high school students surveyed said that they rarely communicate with their parents about college.
- In-depth interviews with high school students revealed the conflicting experience of being the first in their families to consider college.

They reported that first-generation students often have “pressure” to get into college.

They also discussed that being DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) is a factor in the college process:

“My parents have always thought about our situation about being DACA students so they know it’s a struggle.”

- 89.7 percent of the high school student survey respondents said tuition and the cost of college would be the most significant barriers when applying to college
- 50 percent of students surveyed said “Application Process,” “Application Fee,” and “Lack of College Information” are significant barriers when applying to college.
- About 32 percent of high school students were involved with pre-college programs, with the majority reporting involvement with P2N, Advance Via Individual Determination, and college visits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that high school students of color who are the first in their family to attend college recognize and embrace the academic and personal circumstances that will influence their college access and success. Quantitative and qualitative research demonstrates that first-generation students of color face a number of challenges in the college process that are linked to their family status. Lacking a parental role model, first-generation students often work extra hard in high school to ensure their academic and extracurricular performance positions them well for college acceptance. Moreover, some students who immigrated with their parents are also concerned about the ability to access college given their legal status due to Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). We strongly recommend that acknowledging and accepting the academic and financial challenges of first-generation students of color and their families will allow them to move forward and take advantage of the many existing opportunities to ensure their college future.

We recommend that high schools take an involved role in encouraging first-generation students to work with their families to maximize their opportunities for college. High school teachers and counselors should affirm and discuss the common challenges for first-generation students with the students and their parents. Similarly, high school students should discuss available opportunities with their parents so families are united in their commitment to participating in college prep courses and programs. Finally, high schools should offer bilingual information sessions that honor the challenges and opportunities that are unique to families of first-generation students of color in order to highlight the possibilities of college versus the difficult statistics alone.



● FIRST-GEN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

FINDING #2

First-generation students recognize the need for **unique personal support** in the college preparation process.

Specifically:

- 1** First-generation high school students need **additional support** with learning about **financial aid and college affordability** because their families often lack the ability to pay and familiarity with the different ways to pay for a college education.
- 2** First-generation high school students rely on emotional support from their family in the college process. Their **families are the backbone** to support their future despite all of the outside stressors.
- 3** First-generation students have a mix of emotions in the college process that can make them **feel equally motivated and fearful**.

SUPPORTING DATA

- In-depth interviews with first-generation high school students revealed that they know their families will not be able to pay for college. Their own financial responsibility increases fears and stress about college. For instance, first-generation students automatically have to think about financial aid, and often on their own.

"It's all on me."

"It's never been on my mind 'Oh, they [parents] are going to pay for college.' It's always been, 'I have to get scholarships because if I don't, I won't be able to make it.'"

"I think they think that college will allow me to get the opportunities that they never did and they've always struggled with money when they were kids and I always struggled with money as well with my family and I think they don't want that for me."

- In-depth interviews also revealed that families of first-generation students play an important role in the college process—even though they lack the technical expertise—by motivating and being there for the student.

Parents do "check-ups [on me] for support."

"I want them to be proud of me and I want to prove to people that even though my parents didn't go to college, I can still make change."

"My parents are being supportive as to saying 'yes, you're going to college, we'll figure something out.'"

- The mindset for first-generation students in the college process includes different realities that require unique personal support.

They often reported lack of confidence and lower *"academic self-worth."*

They discussed being especially focused, *"fearful of, and motivated by"* the financial element of college.

"It's going to stress me out financially. My parents can barely pay for the school we're in and it's a high school so I think that's going to be really hard on everybody in my family to try to afford college but I'm ready to fight for it so it's definitely okay."

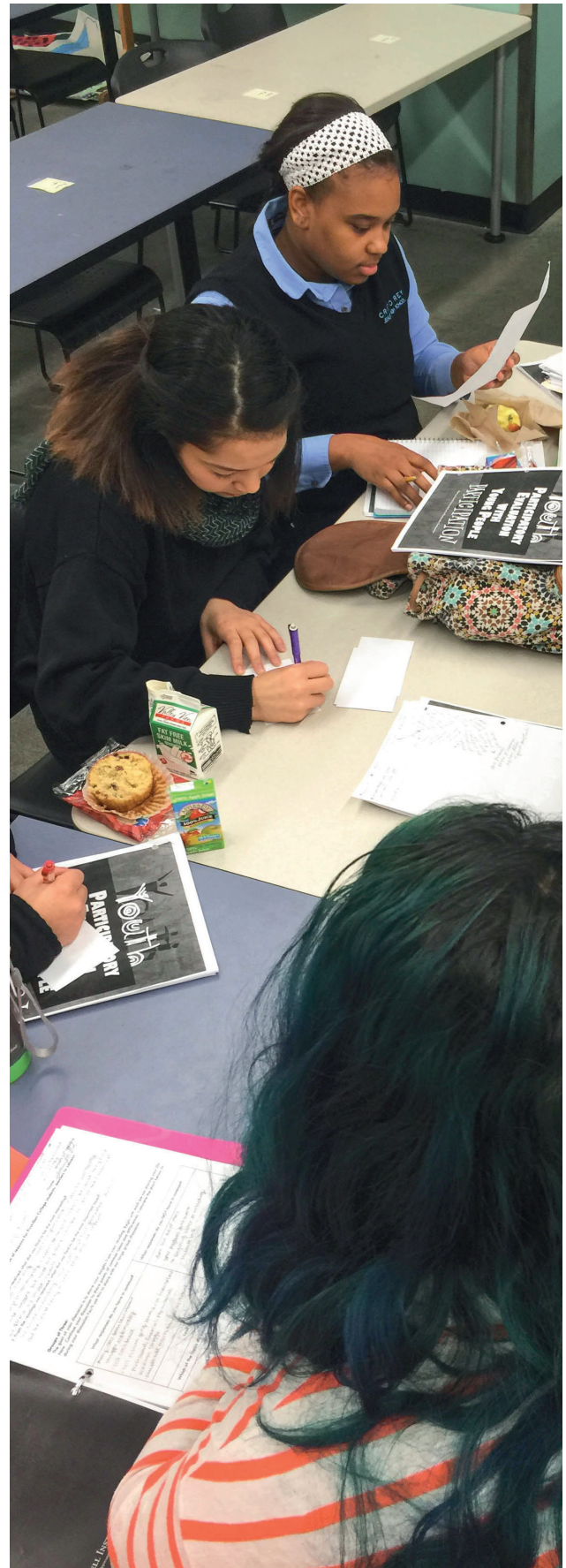
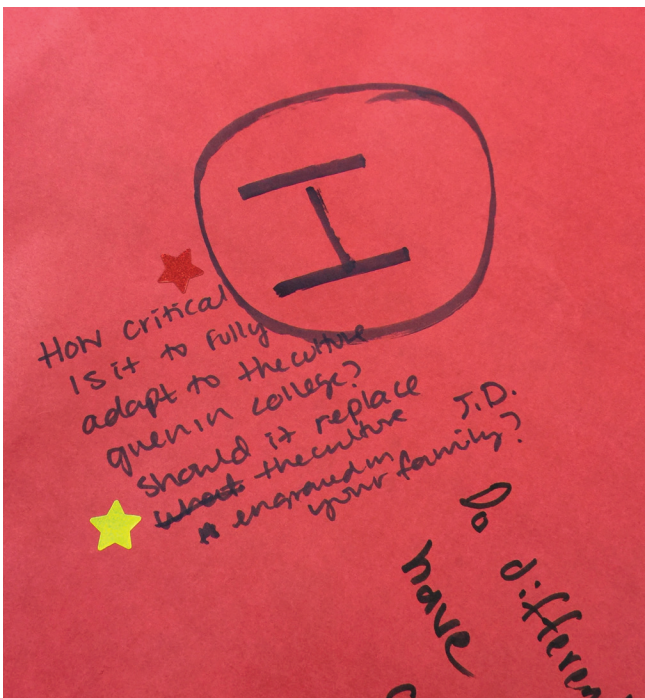
"I would tell them [juniors and DACA students] to not give up. They can do it. Just because you're an immigrant it doesn't mean that you cannot go to the next step. Follow your dream and don't give up!"



RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that first-generation students in high school seek support that is tailored to their personal needs in the college process. In particular, we found that first-generation students of color experienced the conflicting emotions of fear and pride with respect to a future college education. They fear the unknown elements of college preparation and the admission process as well as feel insecure about their academic ability. At the same time, they take pride in their family's expectation that they can overcome obstacles to college and will experience better career opportunities than their parents.

We recommend that high schools offer workshops and informational sessions to help with the college preparation process that specifically address these two emotions. Stressing the important role of parents of first-generation students in college preparation, despite being familiar with the process themselves, forums on college access should honor the emotional support of families and encourage patience and understanding with their children. At a minimum, high schools should require, or strongly incentivize, parents to attend school events with their students such as conferences and award ceremonies so that parents are very involved in and aware of expectations with their children's education. Most importantly, these discussions and information sessions should begin no later than the beginning of junior year of high school so families can become familiar with and prepared for the college process.



● FIRST-GEN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

FINDING #3

First-generation students recognize the **need for unique types of technical support** in the college preparation process.

1 Specific **college prep courses and college prep programs** can help first-generation students feel more prepared for and confident about college.

2 First-generation high school students have unique circumstances with **financial aid and college affordability** because their families often lack knowledge about scholarships, financial support, and budgeting.

3 **Affordability** is a highly **convincing factor** for first-generation students when choosing which college to apply to or attend.

SUPPORTING DATA

- In-depth interviews with the first-generation high school students underscored how crucial college prep courses and programs are for making college access and success a reality.

“Cristo Rey never talked us down, that’s one thing ... they always pushed us toward doing our best.”

“College prep high school gets you prepared with AP classes and everything so that helps you because it’s kind of like college classes.”

“[AP courses] are a really good example of what awaits in college. I feel kind of prepared. I’ve experienced it already so I think I can manage it a little.”

- Interviewees reported that college preparation support that recognizes first-generation status is key, and having supportive teachers and counselors—like they reported they do at Cristo Rey—is invaluable.

“I think that the school [Cristo Rey] prepares us so I feel somewhat prepared. I don’t feel completely blindsided to the whole topic but I don’t feel completely prepared as to what to expect and I don’t think you really do until you actually get there.”

- In-depth interviews with the first-generation high school students revealed they have fears about how to seek financial aid and therefore have a strong desire for information that addresses language barriers, legal status, and unfamiliarity in general.

“When it comes to paying for college, I have to look for scholarships and all that by myself and find out how to fill out my FAFSA because they [parents] have never gone through this.”

“... Our college counselor really helped us actually put our minds into reality like what we were actually going to pay for college and what it’s actually going to be like.”

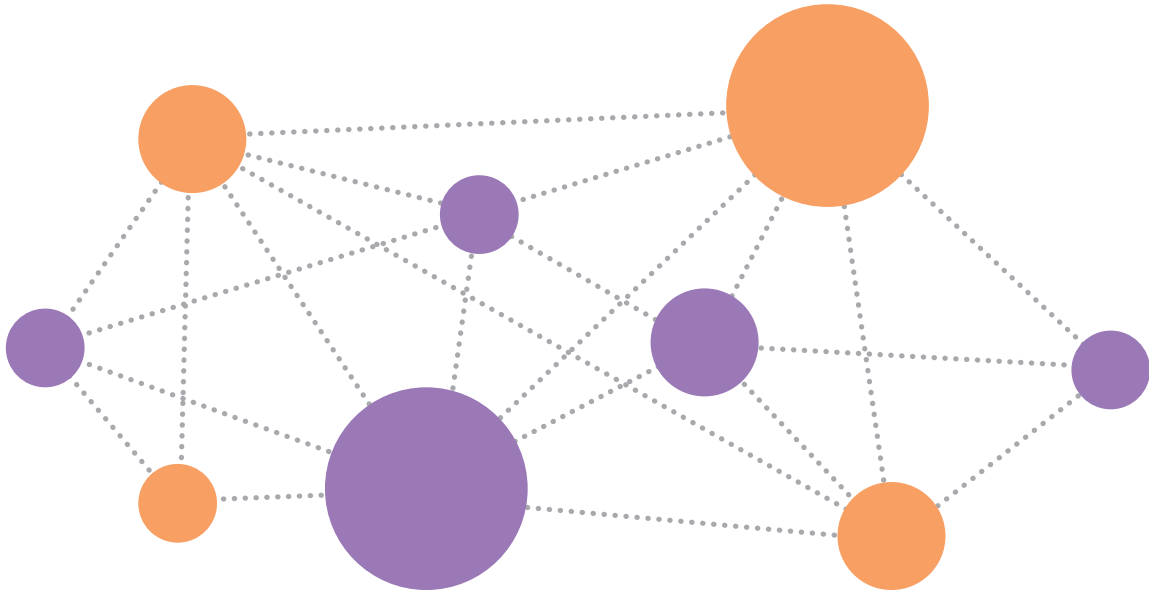
“Financially I don’t have much support. I’d have to be looking into student loans and scholarships if it’s possible with applying to college. Good thing we come to this school [Cristo Rey] because it’s helpful.”

“My biggest fear wasn’t applying for college; it was more applying for and looking for scholarships.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Similar to our recommendations for increased personal support, we recommend that first-generation students in high school recognize and seek assistance with the technical challenges they face in the college process. High school students should participate in college prep courses and programs that are designed for those who will be the first in their family to attend college. In addition to helping them prepare for the academic demands for college admission, these programs will increase their confidence about college and ensure that college attendance and success is a reality.

We recommend that high schools provide information to all incoming juniors and their families in various formats and languages on college prep courses and programs, financial aid, and college affordability. First-generation students and their families lack foundational knowledge about applying for financial aid, scholarships, financial support, and budgeting. High school college counselors can dispel many of the fears about college affordability and access.



LIMITATIONS AND ADVICE FOR OTHER YPAR TEAMS

● LIMITATIONS AND ADVICE FOR OTHER YPAR TEAMS

SOME LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES WE ENCOUNTERED

Like any group of researchers, we faced challenges and thus our project has limitations. Because we were a very large group—and many of us were first-time researchers—we had a lot to learn in a short period of time about the research process. The students on our team were particularly challenged by the steep learning curve this project demanded. For many of them, this was their first foray into literature reviews, interviewing, and analyzing data. It was a challenge.

Further, we had an ambitious project that required interviewing a very specific group of people—and finding all those interviewees was very time consuming, which resulted in fewer interviews in some categories (especially the parents) than we had hoped. We also asked personal questions about what for many is a sensitive topic—so we were worried about getting edited answers by some people, especially those we knew. Because we carefully followed all IRB rules and learned about the ethics of doing good research with human subjects, we couldn't simply do “person on the street” interviews, something that could have given us a much larger sample size in a shorter period of time and resulted in even more honest and revealing answers. We also wished we could have gotten a sample that wasn't just from our own immediate communities of high school and college students (and their families). National data and information from other schools in different states would have made our findings richer and more robust.

Time and efficient communication was a huge challenge for our large, diverse, and geographically split team. Trying to find good meeting times for our mix of full-time high school students, college students, college professors, and high school teachers was extremely difficult. As such, we got behind at times and thus we had to rush some of our data analyses right at the end. We also ended up not collecting all of the demographic data we wanted from some participants—a result simply, we believe, because the majority of our team was brand new to the research process and it was complicated with all of the consent, assent, and other forms we needed. Further, the scope of questions students wanted to explore was extensive, and time limited how much we could explore. We narrowed our focus significantly and

still felt overwhelmed by the amount of information we needed to analyze.

Finally, we also wanted to respond to the literature, which was pretty grim, in a way that affirmed students' and families' assets. The challenge we faced was to be both real and aspirational during the entire research process. On a related note, we (the teacher-staff leadership team) faced the ongoing dilemma of when to step in and when to step back during the process. We faced the ongoing challenge of wanting to “let the students figure things out” versus needing to “keep things on track.” As such, a limitation was at times what felt like too much “nudging” when perhaps it would have been better for us as the faculty-staff leaders to allow things to unfold, and let the students learn (more often than time allowed) by making mistakes/trial and error.

SOME THINGS WE WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME

Youth Participatory Action Research was new to every single one of us on the team—teachers/faculty/staff and students alike. As such, we will all know a lot more about what to expect and where the sticky parts might be next time around! Specifically, we offer below thoughts from the youth on the team followed by thoughts about what the faculty/teachers/staff would do differently next time.

According to the youth: As mentioned above, we would have liked to have interviewed and surveyed a greater variety and number of people. We also would want to give ourselves more time to analyze and make sense of all the data. We had to rush in the end because we didn't know how long the entire process would take. Another thing we should do, as interviewers, is schedule time with interviewees sooner, like a few more days ahead of schedule. The transcribing took a lot of time, so we could have scheduled more time for that. We would want to make sure that everyone will be able to be present during meetings and have the work done that is required so at the next meeting everyone is at the same level and point. We should probably have more sessions for meeting as well to keep us on track.

According to the teachers/faculty/staff: We all wanted to be faithful to the goal of YPAR, which is to create a

youth-led project, but sometimes the balance between teacher-directed and student-directed was a bit off. We erred on letting students lead and sometimes we should have taught them more skills (e.g., spent more time training them how to interview; how to shift questions during the interview if needed; given them more handouts and readings for ideas as well as brainstorming; taught all of them how to write a really good literature review instead of giving that task to our most advanced writer on the team, etc.). At other times, we took too much lead because we were running out of time. Next time we would attempt to set up a weekly face-to-face meeting just for us (the leaders) to be able to all be on the same page with what's next, where we're at, what we might do to better understand when to direct the students and when to let them learn by exploring and doing. In our desire to have a broad understanding of the topic and preparation before the research-gathering, we were very time-crunched when we needed to analyze the data and report our findings. We would probably map out our time together differently next time around.

From the YPAR team perspective: We'd want to find a much better way to communicate as an entire YPAR team. We bounced around throughout the year with a variety of digital/online options for document sharing and communication (Schoology, email, Dropbox, GoogleDocs), none of which was ideal for every participant—and sometimes it was hard to get everyone to participate at the same level and in a timely way. Next time, we'd be wise to pick one platform and create an explicit set of guidelines and commitments from every team member to login every two-three days to see what tasks needed attention and what work needed to be done before our next meeting.

MORE QUESTIONS THAT SHOULD BE RESEARCHED ON THIS AND RELATED TOPICS

During our research process, we often would be overheard saying, “We should study that too!” Or, “someone should be sure to study _____ so we can know more about this topic.” Some of the general and specific ideas for future research emerging from both our conversations as a research team and the data we collected include:

- Zero tolerance policies in schools – what effect do they have on future college experiences for first-gen students in particular?
- What **specific** online **and** social-network (face to face/family/friends) resources do first-gen parents prefer

when seeking college information and support? Does this differ between ethnic groups? Does primary language spoken at home affect which resources families/parents turn to for college info?

- What are the specific needs of undocumented first-gen students in the college process? While in college?
- What effect does youth incarceration have on first-gen students?
- Youth entrepreneurship: How can it be optimally encouraged and facilitated toward increasing the chances of college success for first-gen students?
- Current programming for parents of first-gen students at universities: What is successful and what is not?
- What determines the success rates for first-gen students who re-enter college after taking time off?
- What are the variables in success rates of part-time versus full-time first-gen students?
- What is the impact of debt on students' ability to stay enrolled?
- A study that looks at the accessibility of internships, both paid and unpaid, for first-gen students.
- An in-depth study on the assets of first-gen alumni for universities and current undergrads.
- A longitudinal study of first-gen students' experiences before, during, and after college.
- How does the financial aid package contribute to the success of a first-generation student?
- Does the percentage of first-gen faculty at a college significantly impact the success of first-gen students at that college?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHERS DOING YPAR

We've now completed a very successful yearlong YPAR project, and have advice and tips for others who are diving into the world of Youth Participatory Action Research. Specifically, we have tips for the youth on the team, as well as for the adult leaders on the research team.

ADVICE FOR OTHER YPAR STUDENTS

- Try to hit the ground running and be prepared for a lot of work! If you can engage deeply in a precise question that moves you, success will come!
 - Have a firm commitment and understanding of what the work will be and an ability to adapt and be satisfied with the results of hard work, even if it is a different outcome than anticipated!
 - Do not give up. It is an interesting project and there are days when you will feel overwhelmed due to also being in school and adding other activities to your plate. Try staying positive and know that this project can help benefit others in the long run.
 - Be aware that a lot of work has to be put in, and be ready to sacrifice time doing anything else in order to complete the work because getting it done in a timely manner is important.
 - Some small time wasted could change the whole course of the project. For example, in our case we took a bit longer than we expected on certain parts, and we had to rush everything at the end, causing us to not have much time to analyze data the way we wanted.
 - Be sure to have good communication with your team. Communication with the team is key to a successful project.
 - Know this is a real time commitment. It can be slightly difficult but it is worth it. I would tell them to be honest and share their opinions with others if they do not like certain ideas or have better ideas. Make sure you are fully devoted to this program because it requires a lot of encouragement and time in order for the results to come out well. Every idea of an individual can help!
- week as an entire YPAR team: one for practicing the basic skills of research, writing, interviewing, statistics, etc., and another that is strictly youth led where they do their own brainstorming, reacting, tweaking, practicing, reflecting, etc. It's important that the students do the work, but also remember that the tools we provide them will help them to do that very well.
- We highly recommend an occasional debrief with a social worker. We did this and it helped our students process sensitive and sometimes emotional material.
 - If you're connected with a university, be sure to give yourself much more time than you might imagine it will take getting human subjects review approval. As our institutional research review board said: This was the first time they had ever received an application that involved minors doing the research. As such, it was a long, complicated application that took more than a month to prepare. If you are a faculty member on the team, know that this is going to be very time consuming.
 - We were most effective when we divided the work among adults and each adult took charge of a smaller section of the YPAR curriculum or students, rather than all sharing common tasks. We went through several structures, platforms, and technologies in pursuit of the best way to share and edit information. Having that component set with clear instructions for students at the start would have helped our efficiency.
 - As one of our YPAR youth smartly wrote as advice to other adult leaders: "I recommend staff to build relationships with the students because it's not just about work." We couldn't agree more. Be sure to build in plenty of time for such conversation and relationship-building. We would do this, and would then get behind on content during our short meetings.
 - Always provide food and snacks at meetings! Youth (and adults) work better when their taste buds are happy.

ADVICE FOR OTHER YPAR LEADERS AND ADVISORS

- Be prepared for a bit of beautiful chaos and many unexpected tasks, especially if it's your first time doing YPAR.
- Expect that almost everything about this project will take longer than you imagined; getting a large team of youth—outside of a classroom setting—to move swiftly is difficult!
- We also suggest scheduling two meeting periods each



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