Assessing the Needs and Experiences of First-Generation Students' Transition to Remote Learning Due to COVID - 19 Pandemic at a Hispanic Serving Institution

Black, Victoria G. [1a]; Martínez-Ramos, Gloria P. [2b] and Gonzáles, Sylvia T. [3c]

[1, 2, 3] Texas State Univerity
[a] Victoriablack@txstate.edu, [b] gm21@txstate.edu, [c] sylviatgonzales@txstate.edu

Abstract

Due to the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Spring of 2020, college students', including first-generation students, were forced to transition to remote learning. First-gen students traditionally face many challenges in their academic and personal lives. The purpose of this evaluation research project is to understand the impact this major shift has had on first-generation college students' learning and challenges they faced in this process. Initially, a first-gen committee decided to conduct an assessment to evaluate how our undergraduate first-gen students were experiencing an unanticipated and rapid move to remote learning including their college experiences. 1,318 students participated in the survey measuring students' attitudes, perceptions, experiences, and their demographic background information and included feedback from one open-ended qualitative question. The results of the survey showed significant findings pertaining to first-gen students' in three areas: 1) Academic Learning Environment; 2) Financial Challenges; and 3) Psychological Well-Being. In response to the assessment, the First-Gen Proud committee suggested recommendations to faculty and staff to assist in supporting first-gen students at Texas State University.

Black, Victoria G.; Martínez-Ramos, Gloria P. and Gonzáles, Sylvia T.
Assessing the Needs and Experiences of First-Generation Students' Transition
to Remote Learning Due to COVID - 19 Pandemic at a Hispanic Serving Institution

Introduction

Texas State University is a public, four-year, doctoral granting institution located in San Marcos, Texas. It is classified as a Doctoral Institution: High Research Activity by the Carnegie Classification. In 2011, Texas State University was designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution. Texas State University is a state leader in educating Hispanic students. Forty percent of undergraduate students identify as Hispanic and the number continues to increase each year (Institutional Research, n.d). This growth is not specific to Texas State, as the Hispanic population has continued to increase including at post-secondary institutions (Benitez, 1998; Lucas, 2006). Forty-six percent of students at Texas State University are also first in their family to attend college. The significant growth in this population demonstrates a priority in providing intentional services, programming, and awareness of first-gen students' unique contributions and to limit some of the challenges and obstacles first-gen students experience as they navigate their college environment.

First-generation college students continue to be researched and explored in both literature and practice, with 24% of post-secondary students identifying as first in their families to attend college (RTI International, 2019). Although many decades of research and policy have advanced the first-gen discussion, there is no unified and consistent definition determining first-gen status (Toutkoushian et al., 2018). Yet, higher education institutions and policy makers continue to participate in a national movement bringing awareness of challenges, strengths, and opportunities for first-gen students. To better support this population, The First-Gen Proud committee at Texas State University consists of faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate students from across divisions on campus. The committee is focused on bringing awareness,

support, and shared resources to the campus community and providing an inclusive learning environment for first-gen students.

The working group began as a small committee within University College in October 2018 to discuss and plan to celebrate National Celebrate First-Gen Day. Since then, it has evolved by increasing representation from across units who are committed to focusing on first-gen student success. In spring 2019, additional campus partners from student affairs, academic advising, academic affairs, and first-gen undergraduate and graduate students joined the committee. The committee meets bi-monthly to discuss first-gen student success at Texas State University. In Spring 2020, Texas State University was recognized by the The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) as a 2020-2021 First-Forward Institution. This designation allows participation nationally with other institutions regonized for supporting first-gen student success.

In Spring 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Texas State University community transitioned to remote learning. Recognizing that first-gen students are vulnerable to facing many challenges, the First-Gen Proud committee decided to conduct a survey to identify how our first-gen students were experiencing the unanticipated and rapid move to remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In reviewing the survey results, we identified three significant findings impacting first-gen students: 1) Academic Learning Environment; 2) Financial Challenges; and 3) Psychological Well-Being.

Methodology

Currently, there is very little research examining the impact that COVID-19 has on first-generation students. There are a few universities in the U.S, such as Georgetown University and University of California, Irvine, and a larger multi-university impact survey from Columbia

Black, Victoria G.; Martínez-Ramos, Gloria P. and Gonzáles, Sylvia T.
Assessing the Needs and Experiences of First-Generation Students' Transition
to Remote Learning Due to COVID - 19 Pandemic at a Hispanic Serving Institution

University who developed surveys to understand the impact COVID-19 has had on college students. Drawing from limited surveys that have focused specifically on first-gen students, our committee adopted a few questions from the Georgetown University COVID-19 Survey and added a few questions recommended by the First-Gen Proud committee to create a First-Gen COVID-19 Survey for Texas State University. The First-Gen COVID-19 Survey is comprised of thirteen close-ended and one open-ended question measuring students' attitudes, perceptions, experiences, and demographic background information (Appendix X). The study received IRB-exempt approval and was administered through Qualtrics.

Sampling Procedures and Implementation of the Survey

First-gen students for the study were identified using Texas State Institutional Research (IR) data. The first-gen student indicator was determined by parental educational level self-reported through Apply Texas and FAFSA. First-gen status is defined by students whose parents/guardians did not complete a four-year college degree. The first-gen data were then cross-referenced to determine students enrolled during the spring 2020 semester. Because the survey was conducted in the summer, Spring 2020 graduates now alumni were excluded from the study. In total, there were 10,890 first-gen students (see Table 1) who were emailed a link to our study via their Texas State email account. The Qualtrics survey was open from June 10 – July 16, 2020. Students were sent three emails reminding them to complete the survey on June 11, June 23, and July 8. A reminder about completing the survey was also sent out on social media. In total 1,318 (12% response rate) of students completed the survey.

Demographics of the Sample

The sample demographics of participants who completed the survey (N=1,318) were comparable to the original sample pool (N=10,890) and consisted of 51% Hispanic, 32% White, 12% Black/ African American, and 4% Asian American. Most of the respondents were female, 73%, compared to males 26%. Most respondents were fourth- and third-year students, 41%, 34%, compared to second- and first-year students, 16% and 8%, respectively. Most of the respondents did not drop their courses during the spring semester, 94% and 93% reported that they were already registered to take courses in the fall of 2020.

Texas State University's first-gen population is diverse and the quantative data analysis employed using simple descriptive statistics to understand the frequencies of percentages of participants demographic background including educational journey, gender, race/ethnicity. When analiying the qualitative data grounded theory guided the analysis to identifiy which emergent themes participants described in the open-ended question (Miles et al., 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Clusters of data were organized and coded in broader themes using in vivo coding, line-by-line. Followed by using a constant comparative analysis to identify patterns and relationships through continuous categoriztional review and key themes that emerged. To assist in the analysis, Dedoose software was used to capture and organize participants responses for additional review of the data.

Black, Victoria G.; Martínez-Ramos, Gloria P. and Gonzáles, Sylvia T.
Assessing the Needs and Experiences of First-Generation Students' Transition
to Remote Learning Due to COVID - 19 Pandemic at a Hispanic Serving Institution

Table 1

Demographics of First-Gen Students Enrolled Spring 2020

Characteristics	Survey n=1,318	N=10,890 sample
Educational Journey		
First-Year	8%	9%
Second-Year	16%	24%
Third-Year	34%	29%
Fourth-Year	41%	38%
Gender		
Female	73%	62%
Male	26%	38%
Gender Variant/Non-conforming	.6%	-
Not Listed	.2%	-
Prefer Not to Answer	.6%	-
Race and Ethnicity		
Hispanic	51%	54%
White (non-Hispanic)	32%	28%
Black /African American	12%	12%
Asian American/ Pacific Islander	4%	.03%
Native American/American Indian	1%	.002%

Note: Percentages are rounded up.

Results

Since moving to remote or online learning, 57% of the students' living situation

changed. More than two thirds of students, or 76%, moved back with their families, compared

to 12% who moved into other housing, 10% moved with friends or other relatives, and 3%

moved to temporary housing. Overall, most students moved back with their families; this

includes 65% of fourth- year students. A large proportion, 42%, reported having difficulty

accessing technology compared to 58% who did not. A little over a third, or 33%, of students

reported having No One as a source of support (see Table 2), and those who did have

supporreported that the primary source of support came from other students and friends (44%),

professors (19%), advisors (4%), and staff, (1%).

Table 2

Primary Support	No One	Student/Friends	Professor	Advisors	Staff
Educational Journey (n=1,278)					
First Year (n=108)	32%	44%	18%	6%	1%
Second Year (n=203)	34%	45%	15%	5%	1%
Third Year (n=437)	33%	42%	19%	4%	1%
Fourth Year (n=530)	32%	45%	20%	3%	1%
Gender (n=1,227)					
Female (n= 902)	30%	47%	19%	3%	1%
Male (n=317)	40%	34%	19%	6%	1%
Gender Variant/Non-conforming (n=8)	38%	38%	13%	0	13%
Race and Ethnicity (n=1,311)					
Hispanic/Latinx (n=672)	33%	44%	17%	5%	1%
White (non-Hispanic) (n=421)	32%	45%	21%	2%	0.2%
Black/African American (n=153)	32%	40%	18%	7%	3%
Asian American/Pacific Islander (n=47)	6%	6%	2%	0	2%
Native American (n=18)	28%	39%	33%	0	0

Primary Sources of Support by Demographic Background

Specifically, most of our sample reported that their financial situation became worse.

Seventy-one percent of students reported their financial situation became "worse" and "much

worse" (see Table 3). In addition, 21% students reported their financial situation became much

worse than before, and 50% reported their financial situation became worse, 22%

reported no change, and 7% reported better than before. Native Americans/American Indian and

Black/African Americans reported a greater impact on their financial situation becoming

Black, Victoria G.; Martínez-Ramos, Gloria P. and Gonzáles, Sylvia T.
Assessing the Needs and Experiences of First-Generation Students' Transition
to Remote Learning Due to COVID - 19 Pandemic at a Hispanic Serving Institution

"worse" or "much worse," with both reporting 83%. Students reported that their financial

situation became worse for various reasons, including that they or their family members lost

their jobs, and the added costs of moving and accessing the technology they needed to stay

engaged in remote learning. Students also reported that they needed more financial aid and less

campus fees for services that they were not using because of social distancing requirements.

Table 3

Financial Situation by Demographic Background

	Much Worse	Worse Than Before	Not Changed	Better Than Before	Much Better Than Before
Educational Journey (n=1,266)					
1st Year (n=108)	28%	24%	17%	10%	1%
2nd Year (n=201)	15%	54%	20%	8%	3%
3rd Year (n=432)	22%	55%	19%	4%	1%
4th Year (n=525)	22%	47%	26%	5%	1%
Gender (n=1,216)					
Female (n=895)	20%	53%	21%	5%	1%
Male (n=313)	24%	44%	25%	6%	2%
Gender Variant/Non-Conforming (n=8)	25%	50%	25%	0	0
Race and Ethnicity (n=1,300)					
Hispanic/Latinx (n=668)	21%	51%	21%	6%	1%
White (non-Hispanic) (n=418)	19%	51%	24%	5%	2%
Black/African American (n=150)	30%	53%	13%	4%	2%
Asian American/Pacific Islander (n=46)	22%	48%	22%	4%	7%
Native American/ American Indian (n=18)	39%	44%	11%	6%	0

Students were also asked "Since the beginning of social distancing, how has your

condition and feeling changed with respect to your psychological wellness?" Overwhelmingly,

seventy-two percent of students reported that their psychological well-being became "much

worse" and "worse than before", 30% reported no change, and 9% reported better or much

better than before (see Table 4). These findings are similar to the national trends that show that

as a result of the effects of the pandemic, social distancing has had a negative effect on

psychological well-being (Daniels et al., 2020). According to a recent survey by the Census

Bureau of young adults and adults ages 25 to 39, 32% of respondents reported feeling "down,

depressed, or hopeless more than half of the days" or "nearly every day" (Mendez-Smith &

Klee, 2020).

Table 4

Psychological Well-Being by Demographic Background

	Much Worse	Worse Than Before	Not Changed	Better Than Before	Much Better Than Before
Educational Journey (n=1,267)					
1st Year (n=108)	16%	51%	24%	9%	0
2nd Year (n=201)	20%	44%	27%	6%	3%
3rd Year (n=433)	16%	44%	30%	7%	3%
4th Year (n=525)	16%	44%	31%	8%	1%
Gender (n=1,209)					
Female (n=896)	17%	48%	28%	7%	2%
Male (n=313)	15%	37%	37%	9%	2%
Gender Variant/Non-Conforming (n=8)	38%	63%	0	0	0
Race and Ethnicity (n=1300)					
Hispanic/Latinx (n=668)	17%	46%	31%	6%	1%
White (non-Hispanic) (n=418)	15%	47%	28%	8%	2%
Black/African American (n=150)	13%	5%	33%	11%	2%
Asian American/Pacific Islander (n=46)	33%	33%	26%	4%	4
Native American/ American Indian (n=18)	11%	33%	33%	11%	11%

Responses to Qualitative Question: What Can Improve Your College Experience?

Another emergent theme addressed students' financial concerns. Participants reported

their financial situation was impacted by remote learning, as an example, "More financial aid

Black, Victoria G.; Martínez-Ramos, Gloria P. and Gonzáles, Sylvia T.
Assessing the Needs and Experiences of First-Generation Students' Transition
to Remote Learning Due to COVID - 19 Pandemic at a Hispanic Serving Institution

during these times, or less on campus fees." Smiliarly, another student discussed "Reduced

tuition would be nice, with the pandemic I cannot work, and my parents are putting themselves

at risk to provide for our family and my degree." Students stated they were experiencing a

financial burden and were not receiving services they had originally paid for. For instance,

students expressed the need for a rexamination of fees:

> Lower tuition for remote learning because we are still being charged for computer labs, and athletic events & other things we aren't using at the moment, & we cannot even attend sporting events. A lot of the students can use that extra money in tuition for other things like food or even hospitalization due to COVID if needed, and financial issues are rising in students due to the fact that we are getting laid off from our jobs or getting sick & stopped working if they work in the food/customer service industry.

The financial burden expressed by students described a combination of loss of income and their

awareness of unavailable services initially paid for (i.e. fees such as campus rec, technology,

athletic fees).

Another repeated finging addressed faculty specifically. Whether students are learning

remotely or in person, out of 704 responses to the qualitative question, 87 occurrences

specifically mentioned the importance of having more support, empathy, better communication,

and information about course changes from faculty. This includes consistent and frequent

communication from administration/faculty, and reliable resources, such as the access to a high-

speed Wi-Fi internet connection and technology to use video conference and communication

applications such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Canvas. Many students reported that their ability

to learn and their success depended on high quality and uninterrupted remote learning, for

example, not losing their Zoom connection and continuity of instruction. Some examples of

these techonological issues included:

> Really the transition to different platform and miscommunication from professor is what ultimately led to me to not have a good experience with the spring online courses due to pandemic-unfamiliar learning platforms and professor miscommunication."
>
> Professors agreeing on what vocabulary to use for the syllabus. I have one professor that uses the word online to signify that we will be watching online videos and another professor who uses the word online meaning we have a zoom meeting. This caused me to miss a chapter the professor lectured over.
>
> Professors are adding more tedious task and requirements due to COVID-19. For summer, I have to take my exam within a certain time period. While in Spring, there was a 24 [hour] window with a time limit once started. The mandatory time periods make it harder for us to continue to work during the pandemic.
>
> I would change going to online learning. Online learning is not beneficial to every student, that is why there are less students that take online or hybrid courses. The switch to online learning caused me to fall behind in classes because it is difficult for me to learn in remote learning environments.

The quick transition to remote learning, emphasized the importance of technology to student learning and subsequently amplified the lack of technology resources first-gen students have available (i.e. reliable wife, hotspots, hardware) impacting their ability to be successful online. Ramifications of their inability to access technology also impacted communication and learning engagement with their faculty.

Online vs. Remote vs. Face-to-Face

Although this study's purpose was not to assess fall 2020 preferred learning modalities, the qualitative feedback led us to believe there is no strong indication for online versus face-to-face learning. More Many students felt moving to online learning would support their health and wellness; however, some students did request the need for face-to-face learning to support their academic goals as exemplified by these responses:

> "That the school made smarter and wiser choices with putting our classes online, such as putting our health first and not still enforcing face-to-face learning the next coming semester. Also, to have us pay for what we need in our tuition and not for the full accessibilities such as library, athletic fees, things that are only accessible when on campus, etc. The way the school has ran things involving COVID-19 just makes them

Black, Victoria G.; Martínez-Ramos, Gloria P. and Gonzáles, Sylvia T.
Assessing the Needs and Experiences of First-Generation Students' Transition
to Remote Learning Due to COVID - 19 Pandemic at a Hispanic Serving Institution

look like they just want our money, and not worried about the spread of cases and worried about our health."

"Make all lectures held online. Lectures that were held online in spring 2020 were fine. Also, if a student or instructor becomes sick, instruction will not be interrupted if it is already online. This will preserve the quality of education. If a class is a lecture with a lab, at least make the lecture all online."

"I would like to return to in person courses in whatever way possible. I understand that precautions will need to be made for safety, security, and liability reasons. I will follow whatever precautions are put forward (within reason) by the University. However, I am fine with returning up to, and including, without any precautions at all."

"Get back to campus, seeing other students and going to class face to face made learning so much more fun and I was able to absorb a lot more information when I was face to face as opposed to remote learning."

"I wish I would have chosen to stay on campus for the remainder of my spring semester. I did not have the same resources, or stable internet connections to do my schoolwork properly. Some of my professors understood and some did not."

"To have support from online professors. Online professors don't care about the amount of work they give and don't care if we understand or not. It is not the same as face-to-face. Professors should be more considerate."

Students learning modalities varied based on prioritizing their health vs. their learning. Even with the uncertain health and satety guidelines being developed, students were still concerned about their learning experience.

Health and Safety

Students' perspective on health and safety concerns on returning to campus aligns with the faculty perspective as shared through survey results in the *University Star* on July 22, 2020 (Weeks, 2020). Students are worried about the risk of contracting COVID-19, even with the current health and safety guidelines put in place. Students' indicated:

I don't want anyone to have to worry about falling ill and infecting others-classmates or their families. The risk is too great. COVID-19 is far too unpredictable.

"If I could make COVID-19 go away, I would. If I could make everything return to "normal," I would. I would like to return to campus; however, I am scared. One thing I would change is to have classes moved remotely, via Zoom. I do not want to have to go through the traumatizing experience of communicating with professors/peers while using face masks, having to sit/talk 6 feet away from everybody, and I do not want to constantly be fearful of the risks I am taking by going back to campus."

Every student has potential underlying medical conditions as well as their family members and I do not believe it would be wise to forcing students to come back to campus if they fear they will be infected. We are the ones paying for tuition after all, I firmly believe we should have a say in the matter of how we proceed in school under these circumstances.

These health and safety remarks illustrate a student's decision procees to return to campus to complete their degrees and the evaluation of the risks and benefits of doing so during the pandemic.

In the face of adversity and uncertainty, first-gen students are persevering despite the complex and significant obstacles they are facing. Nonetheless, first-generation students are persevering to complete their degrees while facing many of these unforeseen challenges that exhasberate inequities. When asked what motivated them to re-enroll at Texas State University, 81% said to complete their degree, followed by 10% who said having financial aid, 4% said having parental or family support, 3% said having strong social support, and 3% said Texas State University is ensuring my safety. A small number of students, 7%, reported not enrolling for several reasons: 2% financial instability, 1% did not plan to return, 1% fear or anxiety of COVID 19, and 1% reported uncertainty.

Limitations

Limitations of this study consisted of a sample of slightly more third- and fourth-year first-gen students compared to first- and second-year students at Texas State. The study was

Black, Victoria G.; Martínez-Ramos, Gloria P. and Gonzáles, Sylvia T.
Assessing the Needs and Experiences of First-Generation Students' Transition
to Remote Learning Due to COVID - 19 Pandemic at a Hispanic Serving Institution

conducted during the summer of 2020, a time when most students were not enrolled at Texas State University and when the course semester is shorter, which yielded a low response rate of 12%. Additionally, this study only sampled undergraduate students, and further research is needed to include graduate students. This study is not a comprehensive needs assessment; however, First-Gen Proud will plan to conduct a more comprehensive follow-up survey. This follow-up survey will focus on understanding first-gen students' learning experiences, utilization of support services, and access to technology. More research is needed to understand the impact, which remote learning that is heavily dependent on technology has on academic learning, students' financial situation and psychological well-being among college students.

Conclusion

The initial goal of the COVID-19 First-Gen Survey was to understand the impact of moving to remote learning and to improve support for first-gen students at Texas State University. Texas State has a greater share of first-gen students, 46%, compared to the national average of 24%, listed by NASPA (RTI International, 2019). First-gen students face significant challenges in accessing, persisting, and completing a college degree since they are financially vulnerable and face many barriers. First-gen students also face considerable institutional barriers to postsecondary access (Cataldi et al., 2018; Inkelas et al., 2007; Soria & Stebleton, 2012), hence the importance of understanding their needs and barriers impacting their progress towards degree completion. Further impacting their success are individual financial struggles, psychological impact, academic preparation and belonging (Stebleton et al., 2014; Redford et al., 2017; Wilber & Roscigno, 2016). COVID-19 has become a growing concern for institutions and their students, and an additional barrier for first-gen students. First-Gen Proud decided to

conduct a short survey to further understand the impact that COVID-19 has on students' transition to remote learning. The results of the COVID-19 Impact Survey on first-gen students show that students have been negatively impacted by the pandemic. Students' academic learning environment was negatively affected, such as by not having access to technology and facing communication or miscommunication problems with faculty when transitioning to remote learning. Additionally, first-gen students' financial situation and psychological well-being became worse. First-gen students are a valuable but vulnerable population at Texas State, and have few contingent resources to rely on. As a result of this survey, we learned there is a need to prioritize resources to support and ensure their academic success at Texas State University. A Pew Research study indicated that 61% of Hispanic and 44% of Black/African Americans reported being negatively impacted financially during COVID-19 as a result of job losses, wage reductions, and lack of savings compared to 38% White (non-Hispanic) Americans (Lopez et al., 2020). Other studies show that young adults, Hispanic women, and immigrants have been most negatively impacted economically from job loss as a result of the pandemic (Kochar, 2020). More research is needed to understand the complex impact that COVID 19 will have on First-Generation students' access to higher education in a new learning enviornment that is dependent on remote learning. The information from this initial evaluation assisted us with the discussions held in our organization on the challenge of equity in higher education under COVID-19 and how to address these challenges.

Recommendations

In response to the assessment, the First-Gen Proud committee developed recommendations for faculty and staff to assist in supporting first-gen students at Texas State University. The results were shared with the campus community, including faculty senate, staff

Black, Victoria G.; Martínez-Ramos, Gloria P. and Gonzáles, Sylvia T.
Assessing the Needs and Experiences of First-Generation Students' Transition
to Remote Learning Due to COVID - 19 Pandemic at a Hispanic Serving Institution

council, key university administrators, and were also posted on the university website.

Distribution of the survey allowed students, faculty, staff, and administrators to understand and

learn more about COVID-19's impact on first-gen students. The recommendations below

address findings from the survey results and provide intentional actionable suggestions.

Increase Financial Support

1. Provide a weekly email on information and opportunities for financial aid, scholarships, grants, emergency funds, and federal assistance funding opportunities.

2. Provide additional technology resources and information for students to engage in online learning. To access these online resources, it is four clicks from the homepage to learn about available internet essentials.

3. Review fees associated with the move to online course work and the inability to access in-person services. Students expressed not wanting to pay for services while learning remotely and social distancing.

Improve Psychosocial Support

1. Increase individual and group counseling sessions prioritizing first-gen students' mental health and well-being.

2. Establish a "warm-line" for emotional support for those who need it most such as a free hotline for students who need immediate assistance with COVID-19 stress.

3. Provide additional online resource support by keeping websites updated and listing resources first-gen students, faculty, and staff can reference during this time of elevated support.

4. Within the PAWS, early alert system, identify first-gen students' needs as "critical," as well as the need to address every concern for students' well-being in a timely manner.

Encouragement and Understanding from Faculty

1. Promote strength and empowerment during a time of change by providing students with information about how to manage stress and develop resiliency. Ask faculty to include mental health resources and incorporate curriculum focused on non-cognitive factors such as, Growth Mindset and Resiliency theories.

2. Encourage faculty to send emails to their students checking in on them. Create an email template that suggests faculty concern and empathy to be sent out on a regular basis.

3. Include syllabus information that suggests that the health and well-being of our Bobcat Community is a priority to everyone.

4. Inspire strength during a pandemic and practice mindfulness by incorporating time for reflection and introspection through journaling, class discussion, or group chats in Canvas.

5. Allow time for community building within the classroom space by encouraging student engagement.

6. Implement initial academic feedback (mid-term grade reports) for all courses and develop a comprehensive "Support Team" to address students who are impacted by external factors impeding their course completion.

7. Host a webinar, Zoom meeting, or podcast on topics related to career development in their area of profession or specialization so students can stay connected and engaged in the subject they are learning.

Black, Victoria G.; Martínez-Ramos, Gloria P. and Gonzáles, Sylvia T.
Assessing the Needs and Experiences of First-Generation Students' Transition
to Remote Learning Due to COVID - 19 Pandemic at a Hispanic Serving Institution

Consistent Communication and Resources from Staff/Administrators

1. Send bi-monthly emails from advising centers to remind students of the support available to them in these times of transition and constant change.

2. Create an interactive website with a virtual assistant to encourage simulated and in-person engagement opportunities.

3. Student-facing offices should adopt a one-stop referral policy. Students' needs and concerns should be met at the initial disclosure, or they should be referred to the office where their questions or concerns can be satisfactorily resolved.

4. Establish resources to assist and elevate first-gen student success. Refer students to additional resources specific to the first-gen experience.

References

Benitez, M. (1998). Hispanic-serving institutions: Challenges and opportunities. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 102, 57-68. https://doi.org/10.1002/he.10205

Cataldi, E. F., Bennett, C. T., & Chen, X. (2018). First-Generation Students: College Access, Persistence, and Postbachelor's Outcomes. Stats in Brief. NCES 2018-421. National Center for Education Statistics.

Daniels, B., Jishnu D., Ali H., & Béatrice L. (2020). "COVID-19 Student Impact Survey." Georgetown University Initiative on Innovation, Development and Evaluation.

Kochar, R. (2020). Hispanic women, immigrants, young adults, those with less education hit hardest by COVID-19 job losses. Pew Research Center.

Inkelas, K. K., Daver, Z. E., Vogt, K. E., & Leonard, J. B. (2007). Living-learning programs and first-generation college students' academic and social transition to college. *Research in Higher Education*, *48*(4), 403-434. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-006-9031-6

Lopez, H.L., Raine, L. and Budman, A. (2020). Financial and health impacts of COVID-19 vary widely by race and ethnicity. Pew Research Center.

Lucas, C. (2016). *American higher education: A history* (2nd Ed.) Palgrave Macmillan.

Mendez-Smith, B. & Klee, M. (2020). Census Bureau's New Household Pulse Survey Shows Who Is Hardest Hit During COVID-19 Pandemic. Census Bureau.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook. 3rd. Sage Publications.

Redford, J., & Mulvaney Hoyer, K. (2017). First generation and continuing-generation college students: A comparison of high school and postsecondary experiences. http://hdl.handle.net/10919/83686

RTI International. (2019). *First-generation College Student's Employment*. NASPA.

Soria, K. A., & Stebleton, M. J. (2012). First-generation students' academic engagement and retention. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *17*(6), 673-685. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2012.666735

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory methodology. *Handbook of qualitative research*, *17*(1), 273-285.

Stebleton, M. J., Soria, K. M., & Huesman, R. L. (2014). First-generation students' sense of belonging, mental health, and use of counseling services at public research universities. *Journal of College Counseling*, *17*(1), 6-20. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1882.2014.00044.x

Black, Victoria G.; Martínez-Ramos, Gloria P. and Gonzáles, Sylvia T.
Assessing the Needs and Experiences of First-Generation Students' Transition
to Remote Learning Due to COVID - 19 Pandemic at a Hispanic Serving Institution

Toutkoushian, R. K., Stollberg, R. A., Slaton, K. A. (2018). Talking 'bout my generation: Defining "first-generation college students" in higher education research. Teachers College Record, 120(4), 1–38.

Weeks, D. (2020). Poll shows faculty discontent with return to face-to-face instruction. *University Star*. https://universitystar.com/40754/news/poll-shows-faculty-discontent-wish-return-to-face-to-face-instruction/

Wilbur, T. G., Roscigno, V. J. (2016). First-generation disadvantage and college enrollment/completion. Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World, 2(1). http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2378023116664351

Appendix A

COVID-19 Impact on TXState Students Survey

Q1 We hope you are doing well in these difficult times. We are seeking to understand how COVID 19 is impacting first-generation students at Texas State. We are asking you to complete this very short survey and help us learn how our program can better serve you. Your response will be completely anonymous and confidential. All the information that is collected from this survey will be aggregated into a final report. Thank you for your participation.

Q2 Where are you in your educational journey?
First Year (1)
Second Year (2)
Third Year (3)
Fourth Year (4)
Graduate Masters (5)
Graduate PhD (6)

Q3 Did you drop any of your courses as a result of going to remote learning during the spring semester?
Yes (1)
No (2)

Q4 Did your living situation change since moving to remote learning?
Yes (1)
No (2)

Q5 How did your living situation change once you transitioned to remote learning?
Moved back with family (1)
Moved in with friends/other relatives (2)
Moved to temporary housing/non-student housing (3)
Other (4)

Q6 Did you have difficulties with accessing technology (internet, software, hardware etc.) for you to learn remotely?
Yes (1)
No (2)

Q7 Who was your primary source of support during this transition to remote learning?
Advisor (1)
Professor (2)
Staff (3)
Other students and friends (4)
No One (5)

Q8 Since the beginning of social distancing, how has your condition and feelings changed in the following areas?
Financial Situation
Lickert scale
Much Worse than Before (1)
Worse than Before (2)
Not Changed (3)
Better than Before (4)
Much Better than Before(5)

Psychological Wellness
Lickert scale
Much Worse than Before (1)
Worse than Before (2)
Changed (3)
Better than Before (4)
Much Better than Before (5)

Q9 Have you registered for the Fall 2020 semester?
Yes (1)
No (2)

Q10 If you are not enrolling in the fall semester, why not?

Black, Victoria G.; Martínez-Ramos, Gloria P. and Gonzáles, Sylvia T.
Assessing the Needs and Experiences of First-Generation Students' Transition
to Remote Learning Due to COVID - 19 Pandemic at a Hispanic Serving Institution

Fear/anxiety of COVID 19 (1)
Financial instability/loss (job loss, lost home) (2)
Prefer to not to enroll due to uncertainty about remote learning (3)
Did not plan to return anyways (4)

Q11 If you are enrolled in the fall, what motivated your return to Texas State University?
To complete degree (1)
I have parental/family support (2)
I have financial aid (3)
I have a strong social support system at TXST (4)
I feel TXST is ensuring my safety and providing a healthy learning environment (5)

Q12 If you could change one thing to improve your college experience during the Covid-19
pandemic, what would it be? (Open Ended Question)

Q13 What ethnicity/race do you primarily identify with? (Check all that apply.)
White (Non-Hispanic) (1)
Black/African American (2)
Asian American/Pacific Islander (3)
Native American/American Indian (4)
Hispanic/Latinx (5)
Other (6)

Q14 What gender do you primarily identify with? (Check all that apply)
Male (1)
Female (2)
Gender Variant/Non-Conforming (3)
Not listed (4)
Prefer not to answer (5)