

# HLC Next Chapter Grant: First Generation Pilot Program Final Report

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## Narrative

First generation college students include students of all ages, genders and ethnic groups who have various issues and characteristics in common. The most basic issue this group shares is the fact that neither parent has persisted and earned a bachelor's degree. Some parents may have attended college and some may even have earned some type of training certificate or associate degree, but neither has completed a four year degree (Riehl, 1994). Therefore, these students may not have the benefit of advice or college navigation tips from their primary role models, their parents.

First generation students consistently leave college at a higher rate than their continuing student counterparts (Riehl, 1994). Approximately 43 percent of first-generation students who entered postsecondary education in 2000 left without a degree and 24 percent had graduated with a bachelor's degree. The opposite pattern was observed for students whose parents were college graduates: a large majority (68 percent) had completed a bachelor's degree, while 20 percent left without a degree (Nation Center for Education Statistics, 2005). A study by Chen and Carrol (2005) shows similar results. Among a group of high school students who indicated they planned to complete a bachelor's degree, 47 percent of the first generation students completed this goal compared to 78 percent of continuing students. Admitting and enrolling any college student requires an investment from the institution and therefore, it is important for colleges and universities to retain students once they are registered.

Chen, X., & Carroll, C. D. (2005). *First generation students in postsecondary education: A look at their college transcripts*. (U.S. Department of Education, NCES 2005-171). Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2005). *First Generation Students in Postsecondary Education: A Look at their College Transcripts*. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/das/epubs/2005171/executive2.asp>

Riehl, R. J. (1994). The academic preparation, aspirations, and first-year performance of first-generation students. *College and University*, 70(1), 14-19.

MnSCU and WSU also identify first-generation students as an underrepresented at-risk group. This First Generation Pilot Program was designed to be a distinct and innovative initiative that would increase awareness and create a FG culture of support at WSU. It is the opinion of those involved in the FG Pilot Program, including Darcie Mueller, Charlie Opatz, Kate Parsi, their colleagues and supervisors, that the program has been a tremendous success.

## Financial Report

The total grant request was \$15,000 to be divided equally between Darcie Mueller, Charlie Opatz and Kate Parsi. This includes \$1300 each for teaching a section of OR 100 for first generation freshmen. Each member of the team received payment for OR 100 (\$1300 each) throughout the fall 2012 semester, leaving a remaining amount of \$3700 each to be paid to each team member in June 2013.

## Activities Conducted

**ORIENTATION 100:** We created three sections of OR 100 designed specifically for FG students. The philosophy of these sections was appreciative instruction, encouraging students to identify and embrace their own strengths. These sections were offered independently, but at the same time and on the same day, allowing our team to collaborate. We

coordinated speakers and panels, and developed a shared syllabus with consistent learning outcomes addressing 1) the unique aspects of being a FG student 2) the benefits of education and life-long learning and 3) project-based experiences. Students were given project topics such as Money (financial issues related to college), Major and Career Exploration, Academic Success (tutoring, counseling services, advising and other services), Engagement (clubs, athletics) and an opportunity to apply their own leadership skills. Students presented their projects as part of a group at the end of the term. An example syllabus (**Appendix E**) and a rubric for the group projects (**Appendix F**) are also attached.

**FIRST-GEN WARRIOR CLUB:** Students in the FG sections of OR 100 were invited to join the FG Warrior Club. A series of emails was also sent to all FG students at WSU inviting them to attend a club information meeting in fall 2012 and to consider joining the First-Gen Warrior Club. The FG student club was launched in spring 2013 with 7-10 students attending club meetings on a regular basis and over 40 students who have requested to remain on the email distribution list. Club officers were elected and the club is moving forward with community service projects, fundraising ideas and social events. The FG club is connecting FG students to each other and to the WSU community. The club is providing leadership opportunities for FG students and is increasing awareness of and support for the FG student population on campus.

**PANEL SERIES:** A series of four panels were facilitated as part of the FG Pilot Program. Attendance at the WSU campus panels was required for FG OR 100 students and attendance at the Rochester panel was encouraged. The entire WSU community (Winona and Rochester) was invited, with a targeted invitation being sent to current FG students (all grade levels).

1. The first panel consisted of upper division FG students who had a history of success. They shared their experiences and fielded questions from the group. (**Appendix A**)
2. The second panel consisted of faculty and staff representing resource/student service offices on campus, such as travel study, tutoring services, student support services, the university conduct office and counseling services. Each office representative explained their purpose and fielded questions from the group. (**Appendix B**)
3. The third panel consisted of working professionals on campus and in the community who were first-generation students themselves. They each shared their own experience, barriers they faced and overcame and benefits regarding their educational achievements. They also fielded questions from the group. (**Appendix C**)
4. The fourth panel consisted of four working professionals in the Rochester area who were first-generation students. Despite our best efforts to promote this event, no students attended so we interviewed the panelists and posted their stories on the First-Gen Warrior website.

**FIRST-GEN WEBSITE:** The website was created and published to serve as a tool to raise awareness regarding FG students, as a welcome for prospective FG students (recruitment tool) as well as an information center for current WSU students (all campus locations), WSU employees and community members. The website also functions as an information source for the First-Gen Warrior Club. <http://www.winona.edu/firstgenwarrior/>

**ADVISORY BOARD:** The advisory board consists of at least five (5) members of the WSU and Winona community. One member of the advisory board will always be the President of the First-Gen Warrior student club. Current board members are: Darcie Mueller, Charlie Opatz, Kate Parsi, Nicholas Becker (President) and other members are TBD. The purpose of the board is to foster ideas and develop strategies for 1) connecting FG students to WSU 2) preparing FG students for jobs/careers after graduation and 3) encouraging FG students to become life-long learners. Each board member term is a minimum of one (1) academic year.

**FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SESSION:** Submitted a proposal to the WSU faculty development committee for consideration. The proposal was accepted and the presentation was delivered on January 25, 2013.

**Title:** Celebrating and Supporting First-Generation Students at Winona State University

**Description:** According to the National Center for Educational Statistics only 49.8% of first generation students complete a bachelor's degree within 6 years of enrollment at a 4-year institution compared to 65.6% of students whose parents have a bachelor's degree. Why are first generation students less likely to persist to graduation? There are many

factors surrounding first generation student retention and persistence. To address some of these factors a next chapter grant was awarded to launch a first-generation pilot program in 2012-2013. This professional development session will share initiatives and results from the pilot program. It will also cover first generation student 1) characteristics, 2) retention strategies and 3) best practices in the classroom. (**Appendix D**)

## Goals

1. Increase student retention among all FG WSU students by 3%  
Upon reflection and after additional research on first generation student retention, it was determined that increasing retention among this large group of students should be explored longitudinally. Although the first generation pilot program was multi-faceted and effective, it was unrealistic to expect a significant retention impact campus-wide after such a short period of time. Although the overall awareness of first generation students may have increased, no measures were created to assess this. This may be one area to explore in future research.
2. Increase retention in the FG sections of OR 100 (compared to other sections of OR 100) by 5%  
Please note that these retention figures have been collected in May 2013, registration is on-going and therefore final retention numbers will not be available until the 10-day report on September 6, 2013.

OR 100 Section	Instructor	Numbers	Percentage Retained Fall 2012-Fall 2013
44	Charlie Opatz	19/23	82.6%
31	Kate Parsi	23/31	74.2%
45	Darcie Mueller	21/25	84.0%
FG OR 100 Average Retention Rate		63/79	80.3%
National Average Retention Rate			69.3% (+ 11%)
WSU 2011-12 Retention Rate (ALL)			78.3% (+ 2%)

According to the ACT Institutional Data File (2012) the national retention rate for public 4-year institutions is 69.3% (Table 3). [http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/retain\\_2012.pdf](http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/retain_2012.pdf)

According to the National Center Education Statistics the retention rates for first-time, full-time degree seeking students at Winona State University is 78.3% (2010-2011). This retention information has been confirmed by the WSU Institutional Planning, Assessment and Research Department. <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>

3. Increase FG student engagement by 3%  
A pre-test was conducted with the freshmen enrolled in the three sections of OR 100 for first generations students. The data collected was inconclusive and upon reflection, does not address the issues of student engagement. A limitation of this measure is that engagement is broad and was unclear in the pre-test. A better measure moving forward may be conducting focus groups with first generation freshmen to identify levels of engagement and types of engagement activities such as joining a club or athletic team, participating in student senate or residential life activities.
4. Coordinate and teach OR 100 for FG students – see section above regarding Orientation 100  
Created a shared syllabus integrating effective teaching strategies and pedagogy for FG students (**Appendix E**)
5. Establish a FG student club – see section above regarding First-Gen Warrior Club  
In addition to establishing the club itself, the club has been able to begin community service and engagement experiences. Two organizations the club is working with are Miller Mentoring (<http://www.wms.new.rschooltoday.com/page/2491>) and the Warrior Community Impact Program (<http://www.winona.edu/career/Community-Impact-Program.asp>)
6. Establish a FG advisory board – see section above regarding Advisory Board

## Lessons Learned and Closing Thoughts

Many colleges and universities in the United States are facing financial challenges and limitations due to economic pressures. Many of these institutions are also facing an increase in first generation college students, or students where neither parent has a four year degree (Collier & Morgan, 2004). First generation college students are different from students where at least one parent graduated college. Understanding these differences and first generation student issues and characteristics can help a university improve retention rates among this student group.

Characteristics that first generation students share include significantly lower income and self-reported lower levels of social and on-campus involvement, as well as less social involvement overall than continuing students (Mehta et al., 2011). Due to these factors the First Generation Pilot Program was a multi-faceted approach. The team and program design addressed financial concerns, engagement, academic success and social connections through OR 100 content, panelists and guest speakers, a guided campus/community tour and the FG Warrior Student Club. First generation student awareness was also improved and increased through the creation of the website, the Faculty Development Session and campus/community panels on both the Winona and Rochester campus.

Collier, P. J., & Morgan, D. L. (2008). "Is this paper really due today?": Differences in first-generation and traditional college students' understandings of faculty expectations. *Higher Education*, 55, 425-446. doi: 10.1007/s10734-007-9065-5

Mehta, S. S., Newbold, J. J., & O'Rourke, M. A. (2011). Why do first-generation students fail? *College Student Journal*, 45(1), 20-35, 16p.