

Call for Proposals: First-Generation Students and Transfer

Background

Learners who are the first in their immediate families to pursue post-secondary education, *first-generation* students, face different challenges than learners whose parents or guardians have post-secondary experience (*continuing-generation* students). First-generation post-secondary learners are significantly more likely to have multiple, intersecting equity-deserving identities (Finnie, Childs & Wismer, 2010; Deller, Kaufman & Tamburri, 2019; Cheng, 2022), and with limited access to the social capital that facilitates the search-apply-enroll cycle, their persistence and graduation rates—including those of first-generation learners from higher-income households and with higher academic preparation—are significantly and persistently lower than those of continuing-generation peers, suggesting that *cultural* barriers faced by this group of students are more consequential than academic and financial ones (Nolan, 2025).

Information gathering and institutional supports focused on this subgroup of students in the Canadian context has been less coordinated and intentional than in the US, and post-secondary support systems and resources for first-generation students are almost uniformly led by student groups with limited institutional investment (Grajczyk, Hu & Paris, 2024). Consequently, while transfer is designed to remove many of the barriers faced by first-generation learners, it is not yet well-understood how effectively this segment of the student population is able to access and leverage transfer: this project is meant to address this informational gap.

Purpose/Goal

To examine first-generation learners' use of transfer and its effect(s) on their educational outcomes.

Scope

Multijurisdictional: BC, Canadian, and US contexts.

Objectives

1. To explain how “first-generation” is defined in different jurisdictions and implications for data collection and analysis.
2. To review the development, mobilization, and use of transfer and admissions resources and policy tools for first-generation learners in different jurisdictions.
3. To identify areas for further research.

Timeline

Dependent on start date: the estimated completion date is March 2027.

Budget

Maximum budget available for this project is \$25,000, inclusive of all hourly charges, travel and associated costs, and GST.

References

- Cheng, Y. (2022). *Experiences, Challenges, and Assets of First-Generation College Students*. University of British Columbia. <https://open.library.ubc.ca/media/stream/pdf/66428/1.0435791/2>
- Deller, F., Kaufman, A. & Tamburri, R. (2019). *Redefining Access to Postsecondary Education*. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. <https://heqco.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2020/02/Formatted-Access-Paper.pdf>
- Finnie, R., Childs, S. & Wismer, A. (2010). *First Generation Post-Secondary Education Students*. York University. <https://www.yorku.ca/retentn/rdata/Firstgeneration.pdf>
- Grajczyk, I., Hu, K. & Paris, T. (2024). *Establishing a Unified Cross-Canadian Network for First Generation Student Success*. https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/sites/internet/files/2024-09/AmOc_FirstGen--2-.pdf
- Nolan, S. et al. (2025, October 2). *First-generation status in context, part four: Enrollment, persistence, and completion by first-generation status*. Common App. <https://www.commonapp.org/files/DAR/Common-App-Brief-First-Generation-Part-4.pdf>