

An Exploratory Study of First-Generation Student Status as a Predictor of Participation in Selected High-Impact Practices at the University of New Hampshire

Research Questions:

- RQ 1** Does first-generation student status predict the probability that a college student will participate in selected, optional high-impact practices (faculty-led research, internships, study abroad) at the University of New Hampshire, without controlling for demographic variables?
- RQ 2** Does participation in faculty-led research, internships, or study abroad differ when controlling for demographic characteristics such as gender and race?

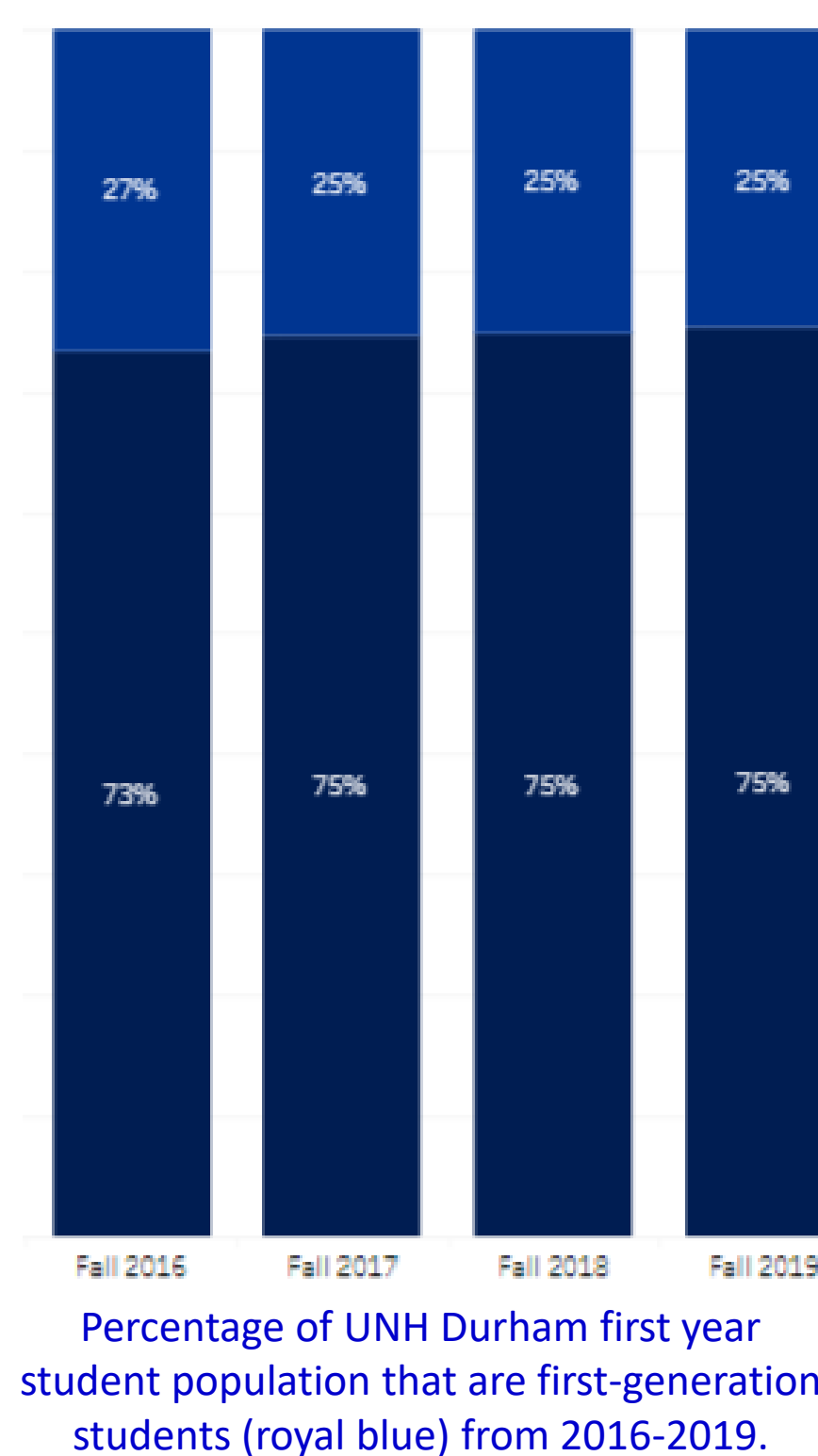
WHY?

Student persistence and retention are of increasing concern to institutions of higher education today, as the number of high school graduates is expected to decline steadily over the next decade, especially in the northeast region of the U.S. Obtaining a bachelor's degree has long been associated with greater lifetime earnings, and other positive outcomes for students. Due to the increasing cost of higher education, and the burden of student loan debt, students and their families must carefully consider ROI and value for their educational investment.

Student Engagement Theory suggests that the more students engage with their academic and social life during college—not just participate but engage deeply and reflectively, the more likely they are to persist to graduate AND to be satisfied with their collegiate experience.

WHO?

First-generation college students are defined as undergraduate students whose parents or guardians have not attained a bachelor's degree. Research has shown that FG students have lower graduation rates than non-FG students. Roughly 25% of UNH undergraduate students are first-generation students.



WHAT?

High-Impact Practices or HIPs are defined as highly-engaging academic opportunities that research suggests can improve student achievement, retention, and satisfaction with education (Kuh, 2008). This study focuses on just 3 of the 11 activities defined by the AAC&U as High-Impact Practices:

- Faculty-led Research
- Internships
- Study Abroad

HOW?

This study is a secondary analysis of data collected by UNH through the **National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)**, during spring of senior year, 2016-2019. Logistic Regression analysis was used to determine if student generational status can serve as a predictor of student participation in one of the three designated HIPs.

The **independent variable** was participation in one of the selected HIPs: faculty-led research, internships, or study abroad.

The **dependent variables** were student generational status, gender identity, and race/ethnicity.

FINDINGS:

The average UNH first-generation students is...

- 29%** less likely to engage in faculty-led research ($\beta = -0.35$, OR = 0.71)*
- 23%** less likely to participate in an internship or field experience ($\beta = -0.35$, OR = 0.371)*
- 32%** less likely to study abroad ($\beta = -0.38$, OR = 0.68)* ...than the average non-first-generation student

Student generational status is a statistically significant ($p < .05$) predictor of participation in these 3 HIPs at UNH.

Holding GENDER IDENTITY constant...

Gender identity is a statistically significant predictor ($p < .05$) for participation in internships ($\beta = 0.78$, OR = 2.18) and study abroad ($\beta = 0.34$, OR = 1.41), but not faculty-led research at UNH. A student who identifies as female is 41% more likely to do an internship and 118% more likely to study abroad than a student who identifies as male.

Holding RACE/ETHNICITY constant...

Student race/ethnicity is not a statistically significant predictor of participation in any of the 3 HIPs at UNH.

RECOMMENDATIONS:



Policy Recommendations:

Invest in professional advisors and mentoring programs that focus on building relationships & trust with first-generation students, without requiring other identities or qualifications. Consider applying for **First Gen Forward** institutional designation (NASPA).



Recommendations for further study: Qualitative inquiry—focus groups and interviews with FG students—and additional quantitative analysis using additional variables such as other HIP participation data from NSSE, family income level, disability status, etc.



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