



# First-Year Experience (FYE) & Student Success and Engagement Among First-Generation Students

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## Abstract

This research focuses on how we can use first-year experience (FYE) seminars to support first-generation students in college. There is a heavy focus on how integrating student support services into a classroom setting can help promote social engagement, academic success, and retention among first-generation students by giving them all of the tools they need under one curriculum.

## Problem Statement

A first-generation student is the first in their direct line of family to obtain a college degree. These students are considered “at-risk” of failing or dropping out due to lack of preparation, resources, and/or confidence. It’s important to provide support and resource(s) right in the classroom; since first-generation students are the first to go through college, they will benefit from the extra support.

## Research Questions

- How can we use a FYE approach to best support our first-generation students?
  - How do FYE seminars promote social engagement among first-generation students in college?
  - How do FYE seminars further academic success among first-generation students in college?
  - How do FYE seminars improve retention rates among first-generation students in college?

## Research Strategy

- A structured review of academic journals from ERIC\* with keyword search including “first-generation students” OR “first-year experience seminar” OR “first-generation student success” OR “first-generation student retention” published between 2012 - 2022.
- Additional data was pulled from a report from the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP).

## Results

**Table 1**  
*Strategies to support first-generation students in the classroom*

CURRICULAR AND PEDAGOGICAL REDESIGN		
STRATEGY	HOW	RESULT
Redesigning developmental and/or general education as a means to advance first-generation students to discipline-specific courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce high-impact practices into developmental/general education delivery.</li> <li>• Consider new tools and assessment measures to refine student placement and intake.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renewed and/or reformed approaches to the delivery of remedial and general education.</li> <li>• Stronger student performance and pass rates.</li> </ul>
Embedding supplemental services such as instructors and peer tutors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Train peer learning facilitators/instructors to serve as additional classroom mentors.</li> <li>• Embed supplemental instruction in specific high-failure courses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stronger student pass rates.</li> <li>• Stronger faculty-student relationships.</li> <li>• A more accountable and engaging classroom environment.</li> </ul>
Introducing and including culturally relevant material into classroom practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate specific cultural characteristics from the local community and students.</li> <li>• Establish forums for cultural exchanges and awareness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More inclusive and attuned classroom practices to engage students.</li> <li>• More engaging and applied curriculum.</li> </ul>

From “Supporting First-Generation College Students through Classroom-Based Practices.” *Institute for Higher Education Policy*, Sept. 2012, [www.ihep.org/publication/supporting-first-generation-college-students-through-classroom-based-practices/](http://www.ihep.org/publication/supporting-first-generation-college-students-through-classroom-based-practices/).

## Discussion

Data shows that program services such as student support, preparation, and campus resources all helped contribute to success in college. FYE seminars are transitional workshops that provide an opportunity for schools to integrate elements such as advising, tutoring, and campus engagement into a classroom curriculum where they are mentored by faculty members and connected with other students. All of these factors help retention rates.

### Academic Success

- FYE seminars help further academic success and retention rates among first-generation students.
  - Within FYE, students learn and practice transferable skills (i.e. time management, event planning, study habits, networking, etc.) that will help them to become well-rounded students.
- FYE requires the students to connect with services that are beneficial to their academic success, which will increase retention.
  - Examples of services: academic advising services, career development services, tutoring services, how to access library databases, etc.
    - Table 1** shows how implementing support services into the classroom help promote relationships between faculty and students as well as more classroom engagement and academic success.

### Social Engagement

- FYE seminars help promote social engagement among first-generation students by placing them in small classroom settings with other first-year students.
  - FYE provides collaboration with different departments within the institution to help promote resources for support, cultural awareness, and transferable skills that will benefit their education overall.
    - Table 1** explains how using “culturally relevant material” in the classroom helps to promote inclusivity and engage students both in and out of the classroom.
  - Faculty and/or staff members should be the one’s to instruct the seminar. This provides an opportunity to network/connect with peers, faculty members, and departments on campus.

### Support & Retention

- Data shows that there’s a significant relationship between the number of meetings a student attends with their academic advisor and retention rates (Swecker et al., 2013, p. 1).
  - “Programs that encompass initiatives aimed at developing preparatory academic skills and building strong social and academic support networks to retain first generation students increase the likelihood they will graduate” (Schelbe et al., 2019, p. 63)

## Conclusion

By creating a curriculum that includes transitional resources within it, the students will have an opportunity to work directly with peers and faculty alike to firsthand experience these programs/skills that will help them to succeed in college.

## References

1. Arends, D., & Petersen, N. F. (2018). The role of first-year experience excursion in promoting social integration at university: Student teachers' views. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v8i1.543>
2. Schelbe, L., Swanbrow Becker, M., Spinelli, C., & McCray, D. (2019). First Generation College Students' Perceptions of an Academic Retention Program. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 19(5). <https://doi.org/10.14434/josott.v19i5.24300>
3. Swecker, H. K., Fifolt, M., Searby, L. (2013). Academic advising and first-generation college students: A quantitative study on student retention. *NACADA Journal*, 33 (1), 46–53.
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