



# Caring More for Our First-Year, First-Generation, and Low-Income Students: Perceptions of Barriers and Transitional Success



Bryanna Velez & Barbora Melichova, Joshua Burns

Florida State University, College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences (CEHHS)

## Abstract

The experiences of first-generation and low-income (FGLI) college students during their first year are unique to every student. FGLI students are bound to deal with societal and institutional barriers that affect their daily lives. Although there is extensive literature on FGLI students, they focus mostly on whether programs offered at these universities effectively aid student's success. This literature lacks comparison between the population of FGLI students that are receiving services to the population of FGLI students who are not. By putting a focus on this comparison, this study will be able to contribute to the research gap in this topic and identify what kind of obstacles explain why some students are not able to utilize these services to the fullest. This study is focused on specifically using the voices of Florida State University FGLI students to answer three questions. First, what support systems do CARE students utilize outside of Florida State University compared to non-CARE students? Second, how do the perceptions of CARE students differ from non-CARE students about transitioning to college? Lastly, how does the perception of CARE students differ from non-CARE students on which obstacles are in the way of accessing transitional support services? This study uses a phenomenological qualitative method that focuses on comparison groups in individual interviews that reveal specific themes in each FGLI student's experience as they transitioned to college. This research is valuable as it can assist universities in developing effective programs to overcome the obstacles that FGLI students often encounter.

## Introduction

- Many higher education institutions have programs that are meant to support this population, but the literature theorizes that not all students are able to adequately access them.
- The purpose of the project is to get a sufficient sample of the first-generation, low-income population at Florida State University to understand how academic institutions can better support them in academics, professional development, and personal life.
- The information gathered in this project will help educate and potentially expand various support networks for FGLI students at all higher education institutions.
- This project is reliant on forming themes of what FGLI students share about their needs of support types rather than having a specified theory going into the project.
- The interviews done offer flexibility on getting a full profile on the perceptions of these FGLI students.

## Methods

### Participants

- The participants of this study all consisted of FGLI students at Florida State University.
  - ✦ Group A: Composed of FGLI students who received support from the CARE Summer Bridge Program and/or Quest Scholars Program.
  - ✦ Group B: Composed of FGLI students who did not receive support from the CARE Summer Bridge Program or The Quest Scholars Program.

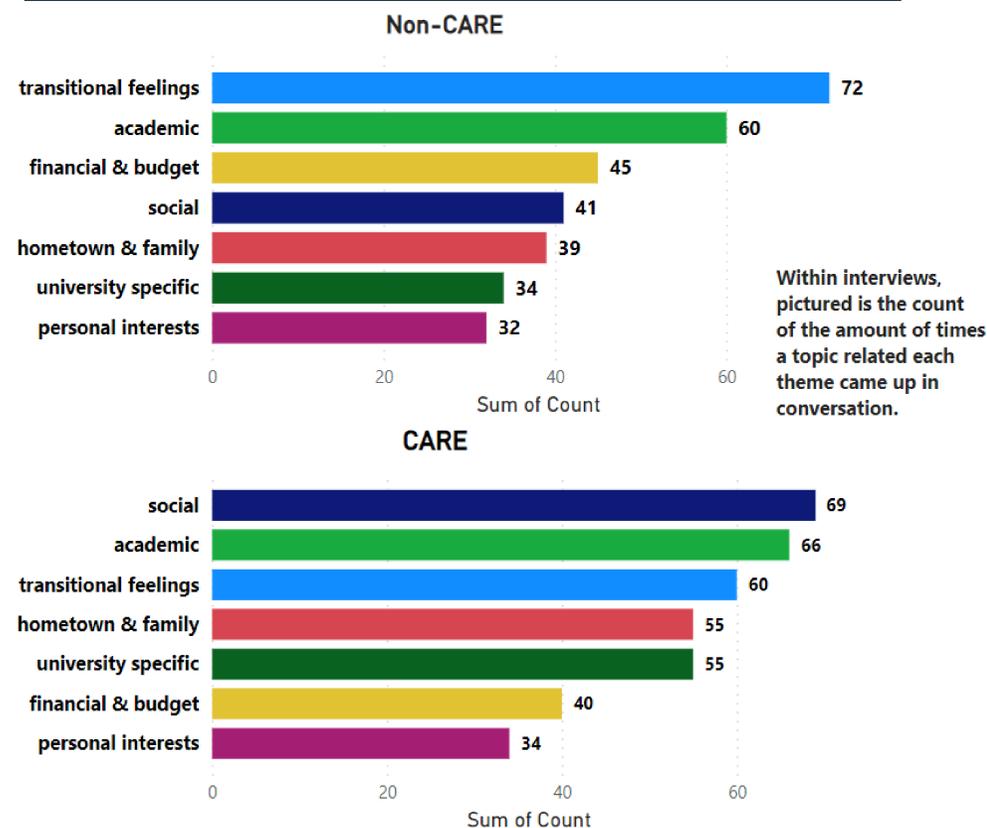
### Materials

- Semi Structured Interview Script: Allowed the researchers to keep structure while being able to be flexible with emphasized themes in certain interviews.

### Procedure

- The meetings are held via zoom or in person.
- The questions are asked to the participant during the meeting between the researcher and the participant.
- The interviews are then transcribed, thematically coded, and analyzed to find common themes that are insightful about the comparisons between the two groups.

## Figures



Figures by Barbora Melichova

## Results

- There is a multifaceted nature of the experiences FGLI students encounter during their first year that shows the need for greater support by higher education institutions in a variety of different categories.
- When comparing the themes most mentioned between our Non-Care and Care populations, we noticed **transitional feelings** and **academics** came out in the top three for both groups. However, the other topic that was most mentioned for our Non-CARE students included our **financial & budget** theme that ranked much lower for CARE students, who overall mentioned **social aspects** of their transition as the number one theme overall.
- Every FGLI student mentioned an instance of **social challenges** they faced that came from either not having prior connections to the university, difficulty making friends, or struggles finding their fitting community. These barriers hindered our participants in mentions of not being able to connect with students in the non-first-generation demographic as easily.
- Every student spoke about a **financial challenge** they faced, and though they ranged from minor to heavily prevalent in their everyday decisions, there was a uniformity in the ways they viewed their ability to come to university as being **limited** by their scholarships, grants, or jobs held to maintain this.
- The **academic** barriers that came up most often surrounded using tutoring resources, uncertainty regarding attending office hours, and academic credit & advising challenges.

## Discussion

This study serves to highlight the experiences first-generation and low-income (FGLI) students have and the barriers they face in transition into higher education institutions. We focus on understanding the extent of impact that resources and programs dedicated to FGLI students have in aiding their support and aid within their transition to college. By recognizing the common themes among students in this demographic, we can address this challenge and work towards tailoring support initiatives accordingly. Using this data and understanding the gaps in current research, we can work towards enhancement of academic, professional, and personal support systems for FGLI students.

## References



More on CARE:

