

The Effects of Precollege Programs on First-Generation Undergraduate Success

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Introduction:

- Higher education serves as a gateway to economic mobility and personal development, yet first-generation college students often face unique barriers that hinder their access. To address these challenges, numerous precollege programs have been established to provide support for these students. College preparatory programs commonly focus on STEM, music, standardized test preparation, and early college experiences. However, initiatives for first-generation students are just as important for the future of higher education.
- Precollege programs for first-generation students aim to bridge educational gaps by offering academic preparation, mentorship, college exposure, and essential skill-building. These initiatives work to increase college enrollment rates, boost retention, and enhance long-term student success by equipping participants with the knowledge and confidence needed to navigate the complexities of higher education.
- This research project explores specific precollege programs and the undergraduate success of the students that go through them. Specifically, the study examines the instructional methods employed in these programs, highlighting the strategies that students found most beneficial. Additionally, it explores the academic achievements, campus involvement, and overall experiences of students who have participated in such initiatives. The findings presented in this study provide compelling evidence of the positive impact of these programs while also addressing their limitations and areas for improvement. By identifying the most effective approaches to supporting first-generation students, this research contributes to the broader goal of expanding educational access and equity.

Insights of the Effectiveness of a First-Gen Precollege Program:

| Scales | N | Mean RCI | Magnitude |
|-----------------------------|----|----------|-----------|
| Total Group IMI | 27 | 1.46 | NE |
| Perceived Competence | 32 | 2.86 | CPE |
| Effort-Importance | 32 | -0.35 | NE |
| Pressure-Tension | 32 | 1.29 | NE |
| Perceived Choice | 32 | 0.34 | NE |
| Value-Usefulness | 28 | 0.09 | NE |
| Total Group SCI-2 | 29 | 1.76 | MPE |
| Reinforcement of Needs | 29 | 0.52 | NE |
| Membership | 30 | 1.2 | NE |
| Influence | 30 | 0.97 | NE |
| Shared Emotional Connection | 30 | 0.59 | NE |

Note: CPE = Clinical Positive Effect; MPE = Moderate Positive Effect; NE = No Effect; MNE = Moderate Negative Effect; CNE = Clinical Negative Effect.

The article "The Effects of a Holistic College Access Camp on First-Gen Students" discusses a College Access Program (CAP) designed for first-generation students of color from low-income urban areas. This results section shows the magnitude of the positive effects of the program.



Conclusion:

- The findings of this research highlight the significant impact of precollege programs on first-generation college students. These programs play a crucial role in increasing college enrollment rates, improving degree attainment, and enhancing overall academic preparedness. By providing early exposure to college coursework, mentorship, and structured support systems, students can be equipped with the necessary skills to succeed in higher education.
- Additionally, precollege programs foster social integration by creating supportive peer networks and mentorship opportunities. This reduces the sense of isolation often experienced by first-generation students.
- Despite these positive outcomes, areas for improvement remain. Some programs may benefit from increased funding, expanded outreach efforts, and tailored support structures to better meet the diverse needs of first-generation students. Future research should explore long-term career outcomes of program participants and identify best practices for scaling these initiatives.
- Overall, this study underscores the importance of precollege programs as a critical tool in promoting educational equity and student success. Expanding and refining these programs can help ensure that more first-generation students not only access higher education but thrive throughout their academic journeys.

Resources:

Beard, Lauren M, Kristen Schilt, and Patrick Jagoda. “Divergent Pathways: How Pre-Orientation Programs Can Shape the Transition to College for First-Generation, Low-Income Students1.” *Sociological forum (Randolph, N.J.)* 38.3 (2023): 660–683. Web.

Castro, Katherine. “Pre-College Preparedness: First-Generation Students and STEM Focused Pre-College Programs.” ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2024. Print.

Inkelas, Karen Kurotsuchi, et al. “LIVING—LEARNING PROGRAMS AND FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL TRANSITION TO COLLEGE.” *Research in Higher Education*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2007, pp. 403–34. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25704510>. Accessed 2 Mar. 2025.

Koo, Sarai, Helen Chiu, and R. T Busse. “The Effects of a Holistic College Access Camp on First-Gen Students: A Small Group Program Evaluation Using the Reliable Change Index.” *Journal of first-generation student success* 2.3 (2022): 179–194. Web.

Methods:

- Identified and analyzed multiple precollege programs specifically designed for first-generation college students. Programs were selected based on their focus areas, which include academic preparation, mentorship, financial literacy, and college transition support.
- Examined publicly available data from university records, educational research databases, and national reports. Focused on metrics such as retention rates, college enrollment statistics, first-year GPA, and graduation rates of program participants.
- Assessed which aspects of different precollege programs had the most significant impact on student success. Compared outcomes across various programs to determine best practices and areas needing enhancement.
- Measured program effectiveness through increased college enrollment and persistence rates, higher academic achievement, student confidence in navigating higher education, and long-term success indicators.

Results:

- Increased College Enrollment:**
Precollege programs significantly improve college enrollment rates for first-generation students. A study on early college high school programs found that 84% of participants enrolled in higher education within six years of high school graduation, compared to 77% of non-participants. These programs provide early exposure to college mentorship, increasing students' confidence and preparedness for higher education.
- Higher Degree Attainment:**
Not only do precollege programs help students enroll in college, but they also increase degree completion rates. Research indicates that 45% of early college students earned a college degree within six years, compared to only 34% of the control group. This higher attainment rate suggests that precollege exposure reduces the risk of dropout by equipping students with academic skills, financial literacy, and a strong support network before they even step onto a college campus.
- Enhanced Academic Preparedness:**
Precollege programs help bridge the gap between high school and college academics. Participants in summer bridge programs reported feeling more prepared for college-level coursework and more comfortable accessing academic resources than their non-participating peers. These programs offer tutoring, study skills workshops, and exposure to rigorous coursework, which helps students build confidence in their ability to succeed academically.
- Improved Social Integration:**
Social belonging plays a crucial role in college persistence, and precollege programs help first-generation students feel more integrated into campus life. Studies show that students who participated in living–learning communities as part of precollege initiatives reported a smoother academic and social transition to college. Through mentorship, peer support, and structured engagement activities, these programs foster a sense of belonging, reducing the feelings of isolation that many first-generation students experience.
- Increased Financial Aid Utilization:**
Financial barriers are one of the most significant challenges for first-generation college students. Research indicates that students who participate in structured precollege programs are more likely to complete FAFSA and apply for scholarships, leading to increased access to financial aid and reduced financial strain. By educating students about available resources, these programs empower them to secure funding that makes higher education more accessible and affordable.