



Addressing the Needs of First-Generation College Students

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Introduction

To be a first-generation college student implies that neither parent has attended a four-year college or earned a university-level degree, regardless of the levels of education of other relatives. While this is an accomplishment, it can potentially come with a set of limitations and setbacks. These students may struggle obtaining skills necessary for college success such as gaining resource accessibility, communicating when seeking assistance, timekeeping, prioritizing, planning, and critical thinking. For this reason, it is essential for these students to learn in a society with equal opportunities. Factors such as learning environments, financial hardship, and family support are potential setbacks in this case. Another factor would be the relationships and interaction this population has with faculty members as well as traditional (not first-generation) students.

Research Question: What factors can we improve to build a more supportive society for first-generation college students? Which areas need the most improvement?

Methods

Purpose: provide an opportunity for first-generation college students to disclose their experiences in their respective programs and whether they feel fully supported in these areas.

Design: An interview consisting of open-ended questions will be conducted amongst 10 first-generation college students. The sampling approach will be availability sampling.

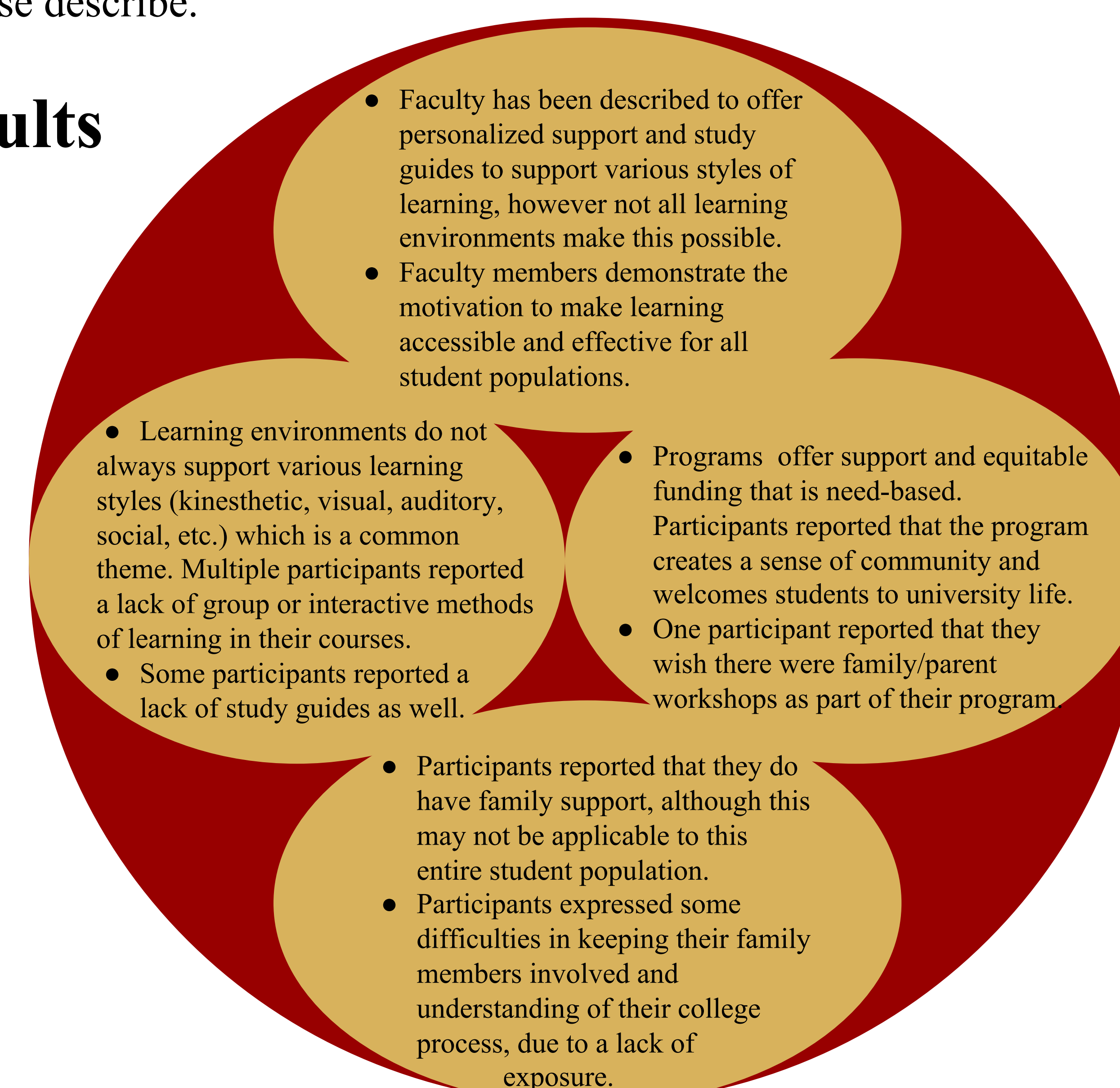
Population: The population will be first-generation students. These questions will all be answered in person and collected at the same time.

Materials: clipboard, printed questions, consent forms, and a writing utensil.

Interview Questions

- How would you describe the learning environments you've experienced?
- Do these environments offer resources that support first-generation students and different learning styles?
- Do the learning environments offer personalized support for scholarships, fellowships, grants, graduate school applications, etc?
- What are some characteristics of a learning environment that would best support your needs? Which of these characteristics do you wish were stronger? Please describe.
- Do you think the financial aid you have received is equitable?
- Do you think the requirements are reasonable for funding?
- How would you describe your relationships with your faculty members? Do you feel supported and encouraged by faculty members as a first-generation student?
- Do you feel that faculty members are motivated offer support in areas such as practicing study habits, adjusting to college life, FAFSA, etc.?
- Have you had family members support your academic career? How is your family impacting your successes in college?
- Do your family members have resources to keep them up-to-date with your college progress?
- How would you describe your university experiences compared to traditional (non-first-generation) students? Do you think you experience similar struggles? Please describe.

Results



Discussion

The findings of this research imply an additional need for resources to support first-generation college students. The results also imply a need for community building and faculty-student relationship development. Previously published research suggests a disparity between traditional and first-generation college students. In terms of financial aid offered to first-generation students, there seems to be an equitable distribution of funds to low-income students, according to the interview results.

Family support and learning environments were also covered. According to the interview results, family support was the topic with the least obstacles, meaning that first-generation students typically do not struggle with family encouragement and contribution. Learning environments show the greatest need for improvement in the sense that not all learning styles are implemented for students and resources for low-income or first-generation students aren't consistently being provided.

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References

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