

BOILER SUCCESS TEAM

FIRST-GENERATION LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

REPORT OVERVIEW

This report summarizes current student affairs efforts for supporting First-Generation Purdue students. In addition to these findings, the report includes suggestions on ways to strengthen and expand institutional efforts to **maximize first-generation student success at Purdue.**

DEFINING 'FIRST-GEN'

First-generation students are defined as undergraduate students whose parent or guardian has not earned a four-year college degree. (Purdue Data Cookbook, 2022).

AIM: 90-DAY SPRINT

Building on results from the **January 2020 First-Gen Symposium**, team members focused on identifying opportunities for improving structural and programmatic efforts for enhancing the overall success and experience of first-generation Boilermakers. This group set out to accomplish the following in **90 days**:

- Data refresh regarding first-generation student outcomes
- Summarize current and aspirational first-generation efforts across campus
- Inquire about the lived experiences of current first-generation Boilermakers
- Explore how comparable institutions organize for first-generation student success

KEY FINDINGS

FROM LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Various initiatives across campus serve first-gen populations; however, there is no clear story about how Purdue is organized to support first-gen students despite being a First-Gen Forward institution

*Commitment from central administration is **vital** to the success of campus-wide effort to organize around first-generation success.*

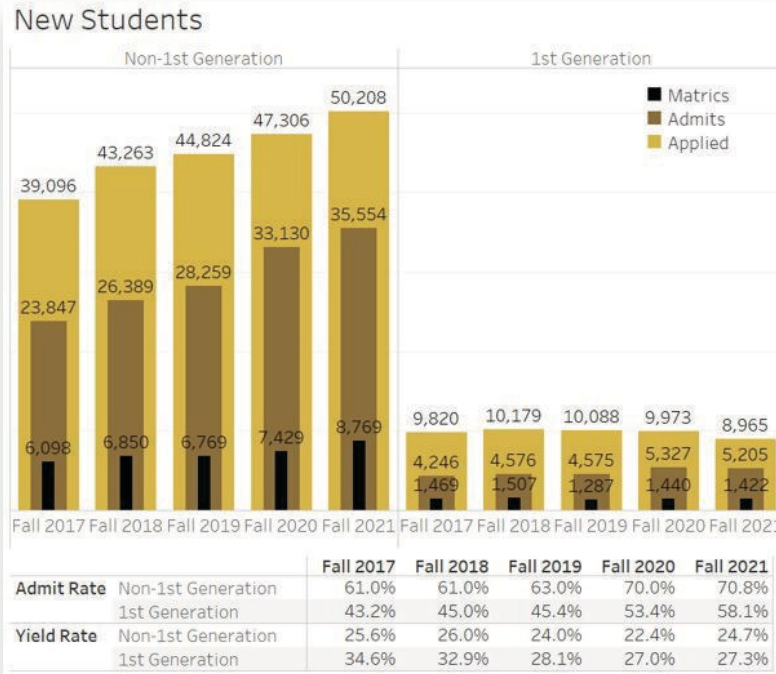
First-generation enrollments have declined over the past three years, and yet the gap between first-gen and non-first gen students' 2-year retention rates has widened

First-gen focus group participants frequently expressed concerns about not exploring enough during their initial transition to college. Many felt unable to take risks/ explore under the auspice "there is no room for error."

Campus partners desire greater access to, discussion about, and cross-campus coordination related to evidence-based practices for supporting the success of first-generation populations

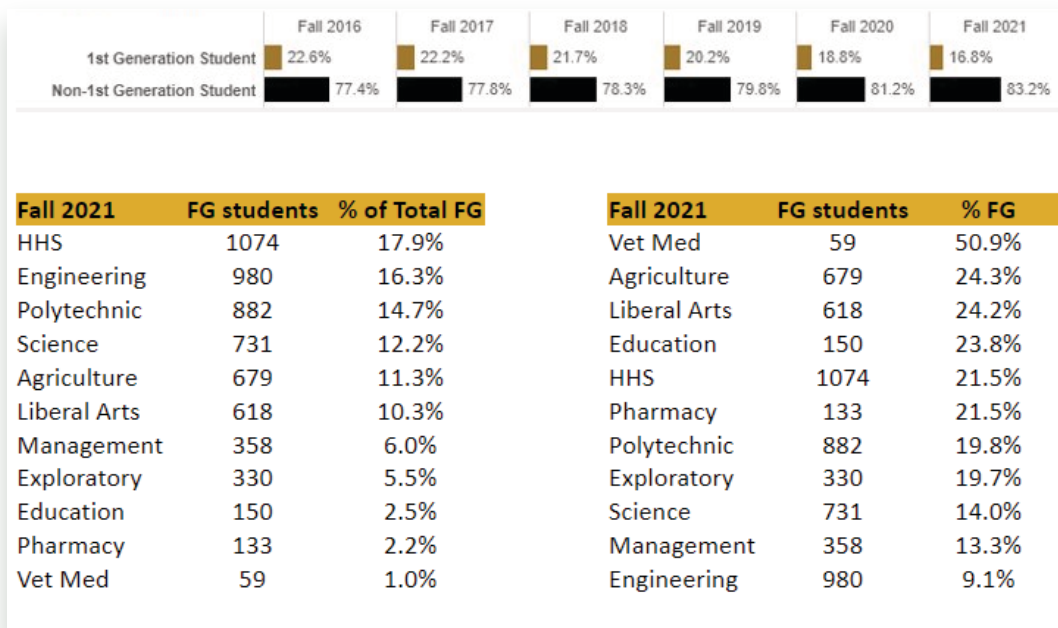


FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT DATA



New Students (left): This table depicts the numbers and percentages of new Purdue students by first-generation and non-first-generation status. First-generation admits have been trending upward. Further exploration is needed to identify strategies and practices that can help bolster first-generation yield rates.

FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT ENROLLMENT

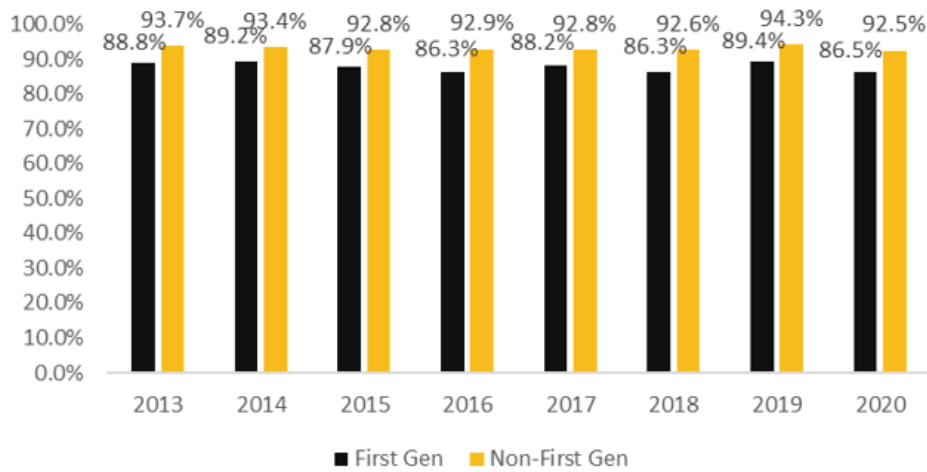


The images above show **how many** first-generation students we have and **where they are** at Purdue. While first-generation admit rates are trending up, first-generation student enrollment at Purdue has declined.

The side-by-side tables show the number of first-gen students in each college, with the left sorted by raw number and percentage of students within each college, while the right focuses on the share of Purdue's total undergraduate students in each college who are first-gen.

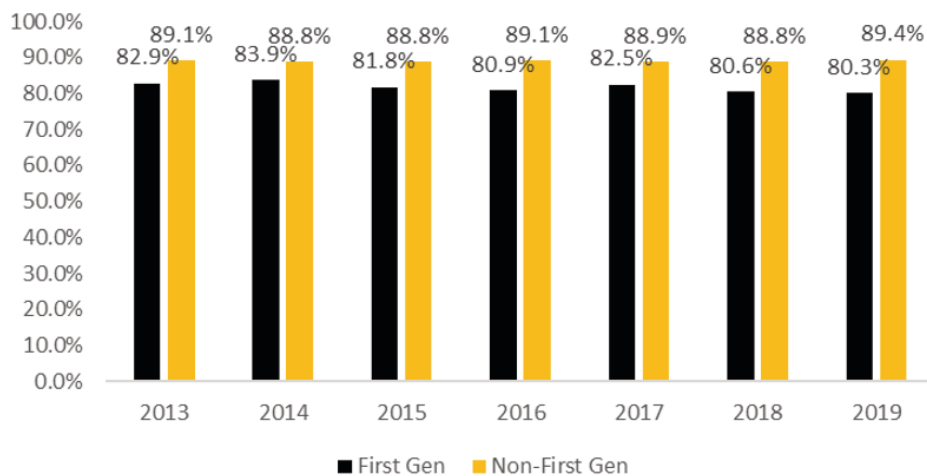
FIRST-GENERATION RETENTION DATA

One-Year Retention Rate Comparison



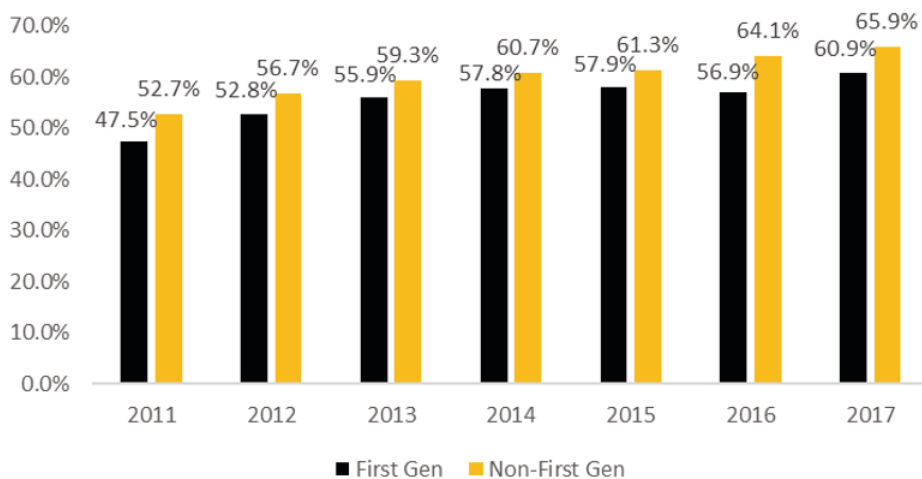
Opportunities exist for improving overall student retention rates in their first year at Purdue, particularly for first-generation students.

Two-Year Retention Rate Comparison



The gap between first-generation and non-first-generation students seems to be widening for two-year retention in recent years. Future efforts should include exploring how to improve first-gen retention beyond the first year.

Four-Year Graduate Rate Comparison



Noticeably, first-gen four-year graduation rates are increasing, rising to over 60 percent for the most recent cohort. Still, staff and departments at Purdue may benefit from additional guidance, strategies and practices to support first-generation graduation outcomes.

FIRST-GENERATION SERU DATA

Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) seeks students' thoughts on topics related to engagement, personal development, campus climate, and satisfaction with the campus and their program of study. One area for future exploration relates to how Purdue can demonstrate to first-generation students that we value them as individuals.

	First Gen		Not First Gen	
	n	%	n	%
I feel that I belong at Purdue	759	58.0%	3266	64.5%
I am satisfied with my life	731	56.4%	3073	60.9%
I feel valued as an individual on this campus	759	42.6%	3267	47.5%

CAMPUS EFFORTS WORK-STREAM

Goals: Learn about and document current efforts across campus for supporting first-generation student populations; understand campus partners' aspirational goals for supporting first-generation students; devise preliminary recommendation and considerations for coordination of future campus wide first-generation initiatives and programming

PROCESS

INTERVIEWS

Gathered information from across 15 campus units (including academic colleges and administrative units); conducted website scans as well as email and virtual interviews; committee members contributed personal knowledge during info-gathering phase.

Committee members inquired about prospective first-generation initiatives and asked department representatives to reflect on their aspirations for first-gen student support, as well as what additional central structures might be needed to continue and improve support for first-generation students.

Master log: Committee members documented current efforts to support first-generation students in a "Master Log," which is intended to serve as a running list as new initiatives are developed. Current efforts include, but are not limited to, emails, podcasts, events, and dedicated advising.



DISCOVERIES

While there are many first-generation initiatives scattered across campus, there is limited to no coordination among them. **There is no clear story about what Purdue is doing for its first-generation Boilermakers.** Most units on campus have no efforts that target first-generation populations specifically; however, many are interested in adopting practices to support this population (e.g., cultural centers). Staff desire more access to **evidence-based practices** (related to their areas) for supporting first-generation student success.

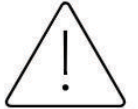
Despite Purdue's recognition as a First Forward institution, previous attempts to create synergy among and across first-generation efforts such as National First-Gen Celebration Week and the First Gen Symposium have not been sustained. **Reestablishing our commitment to first-gen student success via campus-wide coordination will be crucial to promoting and sustaining the success of first-generation Boilermakers.**

FOCUS GROUP WORK-STREAM

The Focus Group work-stream resulted in a semi-structured interview protocol focused on better understanding how first-generation students internalize the first-gen identity and intersecting identities. The group also explored academic resources students find most helpful, as well as policies and practices that create barriers to their success.

- Focus group participants frequently expressed concerns about not exploring enough during their initial transition to college. Some felt unable to take risks or explore due to concerns that “there is no room for error.” One respondent shared their heavy focus on academics resulted in them neglecting to give adequate attention to the social development aspects of their college experience (e.g., making connections with other Boilermakers)
- Respondents agreed that the first-gen identity was salient to them
- Focus group participants had diverse expectations of college life. However, many focused on the expectation for themselves rather than expectation of Purdue experience.
- Financial concerns resonated across all focus group participants
- There is some avoidance on this topic due to lack of knowledge or getting stuck in the financial aid process
- Participants perceived communication (tone and delivery) from some campus units as not friendly and unwelcoming
- Emotional labor of having difficult and confusing conversations with parents about financial situation

1



Generally, what works for first-gen students works for other students, too; however, not necessarily vice versa. Thus, **the commitment of resources to support first-generation students is vital to first gen success.**

WHAT DOES BEING 'FIRST-GEN' MEAN TO STUDENTS?

- "Paving the way"
- "Knocking down barriers for younger siblings and future family"
- "Self-discovery and building character"

"Being first-gen and first-gen American, I've had to do a lot of things that normally non-first-gen students wouldn't have to do. Paperwork ... FAFSA, for example; I had no idea of what to do, and parents knew three times less than I did. It was just between me and my siblings to figure out what was going on."



"Being first-gen, I wanted to solely go to college for the academics. Succeed, graduate with a degree and then be able to multiply what I've been given. My main goal is to receive the best education. Looking back, I wish I would have focused more on social aspect of college like joining clubs."

PEER REVIEW WORK-STREAM

Goal: The Peer Review work-stream gathered information about how peer and aspirational institutions have organized to support undergraduate first-generation student success.

PROCESS

IDENTIFYING PEERS

Identified institutions of interest based on Purdue's peer/aspirational institution list, NASPA First Forward designation, and University Innovation Alliance partnership.

INTERVIEWING

Conducted 60-minute virtual interviews with five institutions: University of Michigan, Ohio State University, University of Nebraska, Arizona State University, and Penn State.

FINDINGS

VARIOUS APPROACHES

The team identified three distinct approaches: 1) First-gen campus-wide committee (Nebraska); 2) First-gen project manager/director (Michigan and Penn State); 3) Targeted first-generation comprehensive college transition programs (Ohio State, Arizona State).

COMMON CAMPUS-WIDE PEER INITIATIVES AND DISCOVERIES

- **First-generation symposium** (Penn State, Arizona State)
- **Advising first-generation organizations** (Michigan, Ohio State, Penn State, Nebraska, Arizona State)
- **First-generation initiatives and efforts are relatively new** (less than five years) and are most successful when aligned with respective institutional strategic plans or broader student success goals and commitments
- Communication and involvement of senior leadership is vital for mobilizing first-generation student initiatives
- Respondents shared that serving first-generation students involves assessing campus climate and culture; requires collaboration

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR SUPPORTING FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT SUCCESS

1

Strengthen commitment to First-Gen Forward designation; share resources throughout current newsletters and listservs; reengage senior leaders

2

Establish a First-Gen Action Committee sponsored by the Boiler Success Team including campus partners from Provost administrative units, colleges, and FG students and alumni

3

Draft two-year strategic roadmap for FG success that aligns with TE2.0, Maximizing Student Potential, and Steps to Leaps; **organize** annual First-Generation Celebration Week

FUTURE PROJECT GOALS

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**Special thanks to the Boiler Success Team
Student Advisory Board members**