

Outcomes of Living-Learning Programs for First-Generation College Students

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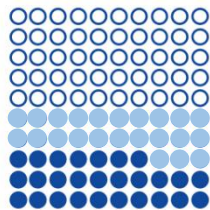


The Problem.



First-generation college students face a number of unique challenges in college. They are at risk of **premature college dropout** and **academic underperformance**^{1, 2}. They also tend to have **less social and family support**³.

The Odds⁴.

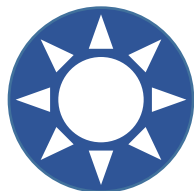


Only **27%** of all first-generation college students **graduate in four years**.

This means roughly **50%** as many first-generation students graduate in four years when compared to their continuing generation peers.

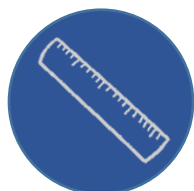
This gap remains after six years.

The Hope.



Research suggests that first-generation college students benefit from **participating in living-learning programs (LLPs)**³. LLPs formally group students of similar academic interests or identities into learning communities⁵. Living-learning programs have been shown to **boost students' academic motivation and school involvement**⁶ as well as their **retention in college**⁷.

The Project.



Using institutional data from a public, land-grant university in the southeastern U.S., we **evaluated the effectiveness of an LLP for first-generation college students** at improving student grades and retention rates. Specifically, we compared the academic outcomes of **students enrolled in an LLP especially designed for first-generation students** ("First-Gen LLP") to those of similar peers who **lived in other LLPs** ("Other LLP") and to those of similar peers who **did not live in any LLP** ("No LLP").

Method.

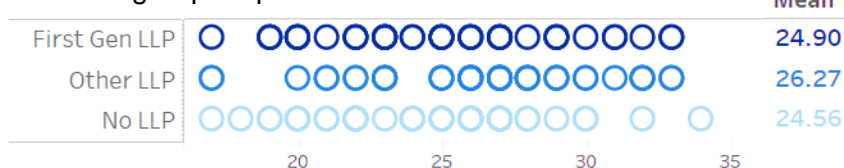


We used a **matched-control sampling procedure**⁸ to ensure that both comparison groups were similar to the First-Gen LLP students in terms of demographic background and key academic preparation variables. **Each group consisted of 41 first-generation students, 11 of whom were considered underrepresented minorities.** There were **no statistically significant differences** in high school GPA or ACT/SAT equivalent scores.

All three groups reported similar **high school GPAs.**

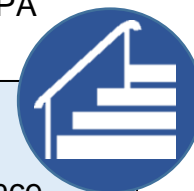


All three groups reported similar **ACT/SAT scores.**



So what?

This study offers preliminary evidence that LLPs tailored to first-generation college students can help facilitate persistence and success in college. These LLPs could be a first step towards reducing the achievement gap between continuing and first-generation students.



Academic Outcomes.



Even though all three groups had similar academic background characteristics, **students in the First-Gen LLP had better academic outcomes across their first year compared to the other groups.**

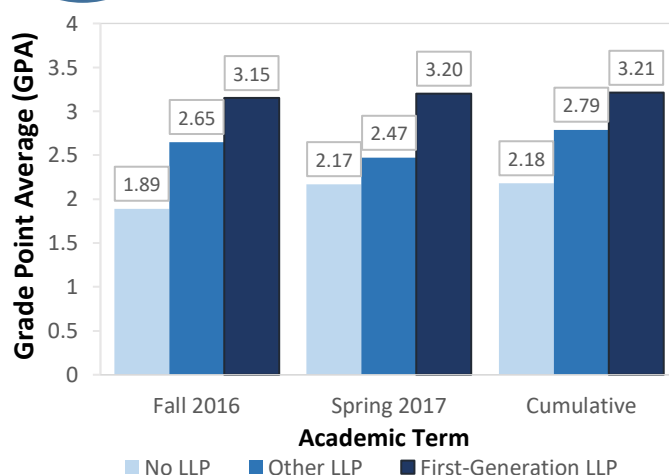


Figure 1. Mean GPA comparison of first-gen students by LLP enrollment. All between-groups means are significantly different at the $p < .05$ level with the exception of Other LLP and No LLP in Spring 2017.

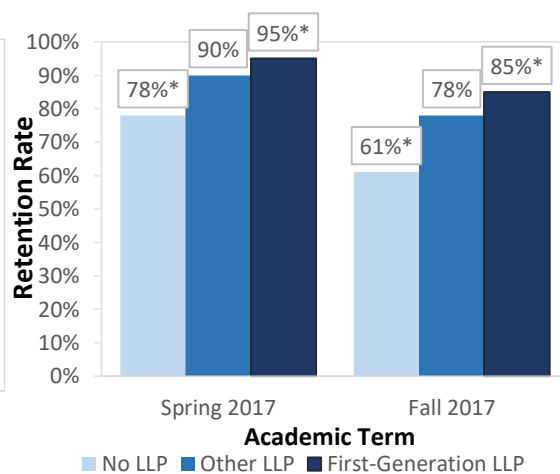


Figure 2. Comparison of mean retention rates of first-generation students by LLP enrollment. Groups marked with * are significantly different at the $p < .05$ level.

¹Harackiewicz et al., 2014; ²Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014; ³Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007; ⁴DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, & Tran, 2011; ⁵Tinto, 2003; ⁶Inkelas et al., 2007b; ⁷Purdie & Rosser, 2011; ⁸Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1985
For a complete list of references, please visit the research tab at www.p20motivationlab.org
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References

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- ⁵Tinto, V. (2003). Learning better together: The impact of learning communities on student success. *Higher Education monograph series, 1*(8), 1-8.
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- ⁷Purdie, J. R., & Rosser, V. J. (2011). Examining the academic performance and retention of first-year students in living-learning communities and first-year experience courses. *College Student Affairs Journal, 29*(2), 95.
- ⁸Rosenbaum, P., & Rubin, D. (1985). Constructing a Control Group Using Multivariate Matched Sampling Methods That Incorporate the Propensity Score. *The American Statistician, 39*(1), 33-38