

# Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on First Gen College Students

Victoria G. Black, Ph.D., Gloria P. Martinez-Ramos, Ph.D., Sylvia T. Gonzales, M.Ed.

First Gen Proud Committee, University College – Student Services, Department of Sociology, Center for Diversity and Gender Studies, University College – DHSI Programs



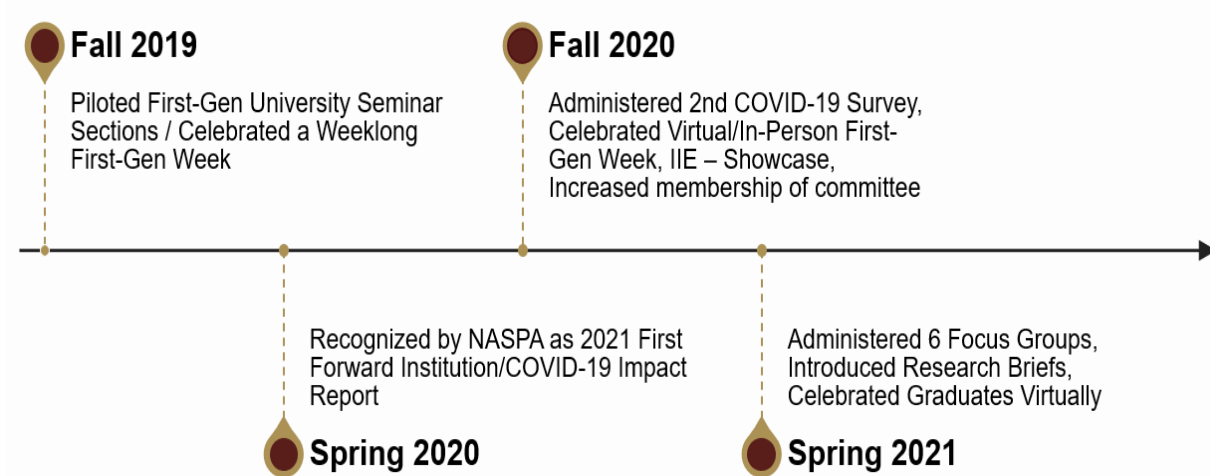
## First Gen Proud

Texas State's first gen population is 45%, compared to the national average of 24%, (NASPA, RTI International, 2019). First gen students face significant challenges in accessing, persisting, and completing a college degree. In response, the First Gen Proud committee sought to understand the experiences and identify immediate and long-term solutions for first gen students and created a research and data sub-committee to expand partnerships of among, faculty, staff, and students. In the summer of 2020, a survey was implemented to assess and evaluate how undergraduate first-gen students were experiencing the unanticipated and rapid move to remote learning and understand the COVID-19 pandemic impact on their learning to find solutions to support them.

## Guiding priorities of the First Gen Proud Committee:

1. Host events that welcome, celebrate, provide resources, and develop relationships with First Gen students at the undergraduate and graduate level
2. Generate and implement training and professional development for faculty, staff and students regarding First Gen student experience.
3. Increase academic and social engagement for First Gen students
4. Expand university wide partnerships to seek transformative solutions to share information and support retention and graduation.

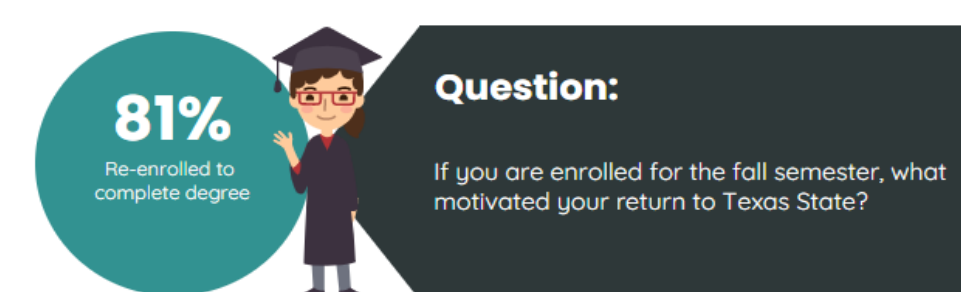
## Road to First-Gen Proud



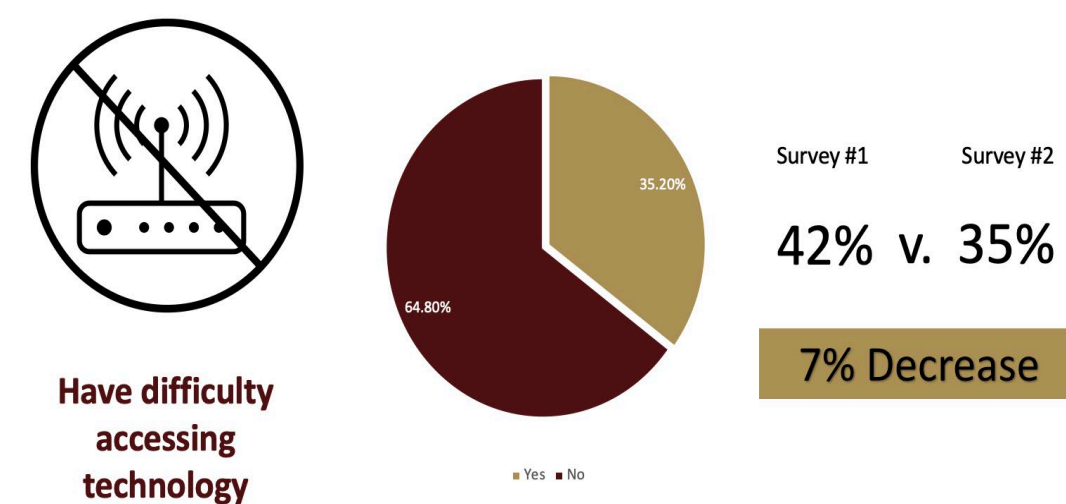
## Research Methodologies and Results

First Gen Proud surveys were adapted from the Georgetown University Covid-19 Survey and with input from the First Gen Proud Committee. Surveys were approved by TXSTIRB and conducted using Qualtrics. The first survey garnered a response rate of 12% (n=1,318) and the second survey had a 6% response rate (n=602). In the spring of 2021, 7 virtual focus groups were conducted with 50 participants.

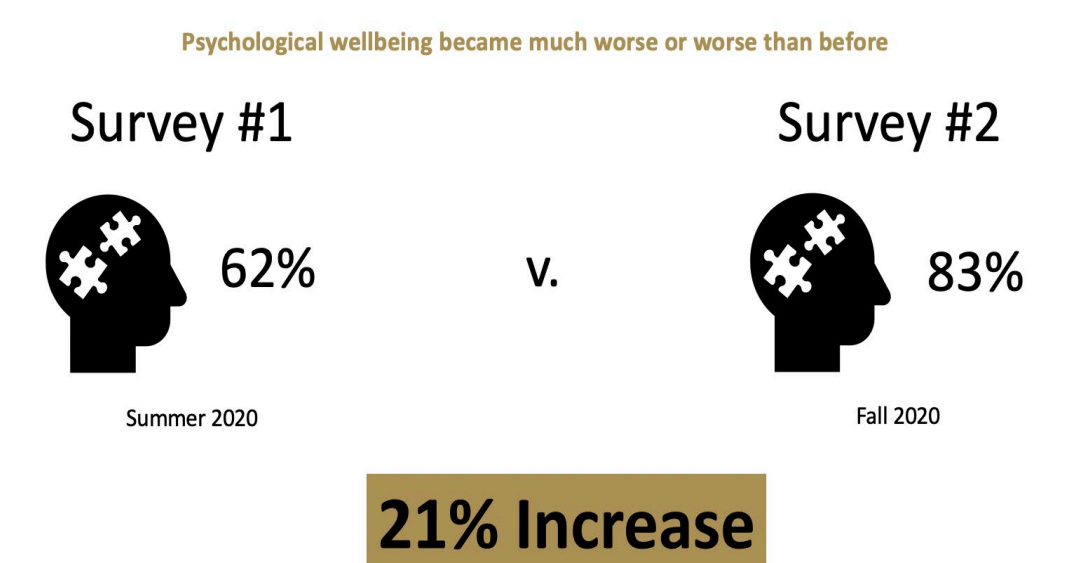
### First-Gen Are Persevering



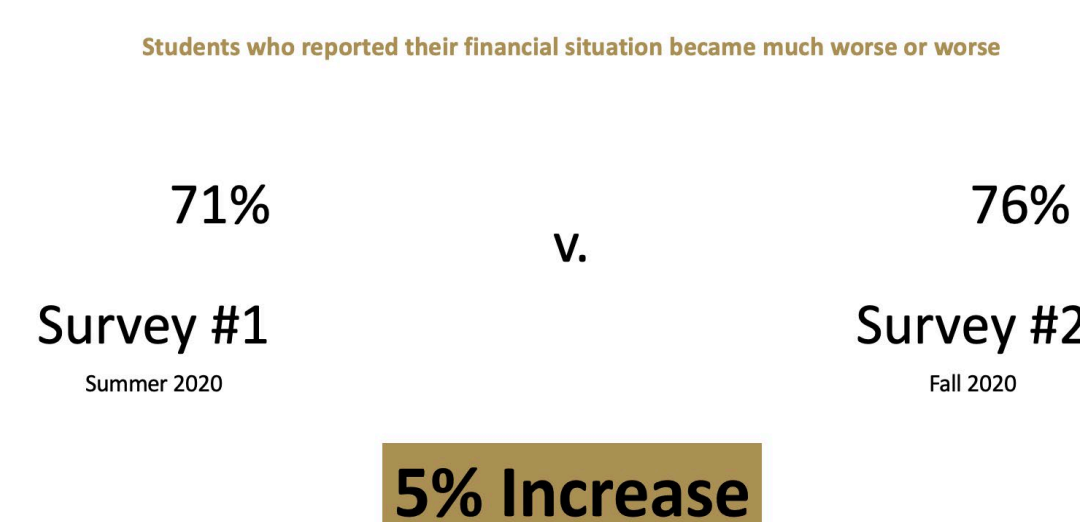
Did you have difficulties accessing technology for learning and communicating with your professors?



How has your condition and feelings changed with respect to your psychological wellness? (n=580)



How has your condition and feelings changed with respect to your financial situation? (n=580)



## Qualitative Themes

### Seeking Social Engagement

- Seeking opportunity to meet new people and connect with a community of people.
- Students want to have more high impact learning experiences with other students and faculty.
- Dissatisfied in not having the full college experience.

*"There's not much I can change due to COVID. I just wish I would be able to get the full experience considering I am paying so much to attend Texas State and having that college experience was something I was really looking forward to."*

### Finances and Financial Assistance

- Financial constraints have a negative impact on well-being.
- Needing more financial aid and scholarships and lower the cost of attending college.
- Added out of pocket costs related to pay for technology and internet service.

*"Many of the university's students are starting to struggle if they haven't already fallen into financial trouble. If the needs of these people are ignored, then their mental health is at stake. Financial trouble can make or break a person's mental health. This pandemic has introduced new and greater amounts of stress into everyone's lives. Mental health is important for student to be successful."*

### Flexibility in Learning and Classroom

- Provide an instructive seminar for both professor and students to assist with the structure of teaching and communication.
- Improve communication of assignments, provide clear information and handouts, and announcements. Online learning has limitations.
- More support from professors as students are learning during the pandemic.
- Be more accommodating to the students as they face COVID challenges.
- Online learning- let students do work at their own pace (give more flexibility to time completion of assignment)

*"I want there to be an easier way for me to keep up with assignments and maybe notifications when I need to do the assignments"*

### Preferences Towards In Classroom Learning Modality

- For better mental health
- Quality of online learning is subpar to face to face learning
- Not fair for students to have to pay for an education and must teach themselves
- More engaged learning experiences

*"I wish I could have the ability to return back to the normal routine of being able to in-person classes. The educational environment and social opportunities in-person classes provide are indispensable and necessary for strong mental health."*

### Increase Student Support Resources

- Counseling and Mental Health Resources
- Access to Better Technology
- Social and Community Building

*"It's not so much that the homework is an issue but combined with the loneliness of being away from family for the first time, it makes even smaller assignments unapproachable. This, along with the stress of current pandemic and the effects of it - it's tough to focus on 3 different assignments when you are worried about how your family back at home is going to pay bills this month."*

## First Gen Proud Recommendations

### Increase Financial Support

- Provide a weekly email on information and opportunities for financial aid, scholarships, grants, emergency funds, and federal assistance funding opportunities.
- Provide additional technology resources and information for students to engage in online learning.

### Improve Psychosocial Support

- Increase individual and group counseling sessions prioritizing first-gen students' mental health and well-being.
- Within the PAWS, early alert system, identify first-gen students' needs as "critical," as well as the need to address every concern for students' well-being in a timely manner.

### Encouragement and Understanding from Faculty

- Promote strength and empowerment during a time of change by providing students with information about how to manage stress, health and well-being in the classroom.
- Allow time for community building within the classroom space by encouraging student engagement.
- Empathy and understanding

### Future Research on First Gen Experiences

- Understand First Gen adjustment, belonging, and connectedness.

**First Gen Research Sub-Committee:** Victoria G. Black, Gloria P. Martinez-Ramos, Sylvia T. Gonzales, Agustin Garcia, Isaac Torres, Kristen Lew, Nick Weimer, Sonya Armstrong, Carolyn Chang, Gail Zank, Bob E. Vasquez, and Graduate students: Destinee, Leyva, Alexandra Lopez, and Nathaniel Williams.

### Contact information:

Victoria G. Black, PhD.  
[Victoriablack@txstate.com](mailto:Victoriablack@txstate.com)

Gloria P. Martinez-Ramos, PhD.  
[Gm21@txstate.edu](mailto:Gm21@txstate.edu)

Sylvia T. Gonzales, M.Ed.  
[Sylviatgonzales@txstate.com](mailto:Sylviatgonzales@txstate.com)

First Gen Proud  
<https://www.ucollege.txstate.edu/first-gen-pr>

For more research details scan the QR code:



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