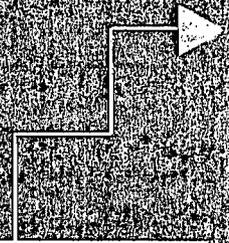


THE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

POLICY STEPS



In the past few years, issues ranging from immigration to affirmative action have dominated public policy discussions regarding the evolving student body in American higher education. However, one issue that has not received significant attention is the status of first-generation students. These students, who are the first in their families to participate in education beyond high school, have increased their presence on campuses throughout the nation.

Studies have shown that first-generation students often face distinctive challenges in their pursuit of a college degree; conflicting obligations and lack of preparation or support are only a few of the reasons they may find it difficult to be successful at the postsecondary level. As the number of first-generation students in higher education continues to grow, institutions are compelled to familiarize themselves with the unique characteristics of these students. The federal government has also responded, as many of these students face financial hardships and look to federal student aid and opportunity programs for support.

In this brief, The Institute for Higher Education Policy examines the status of first-generation students in postsecondary education by identifying their common characteristics and circumstances, as well as exploring the current challenges they face. Additionally, the programs and services institutions and the government have implemented to respond to their specific needs are reviewed.

Defining the First-

Generation Student

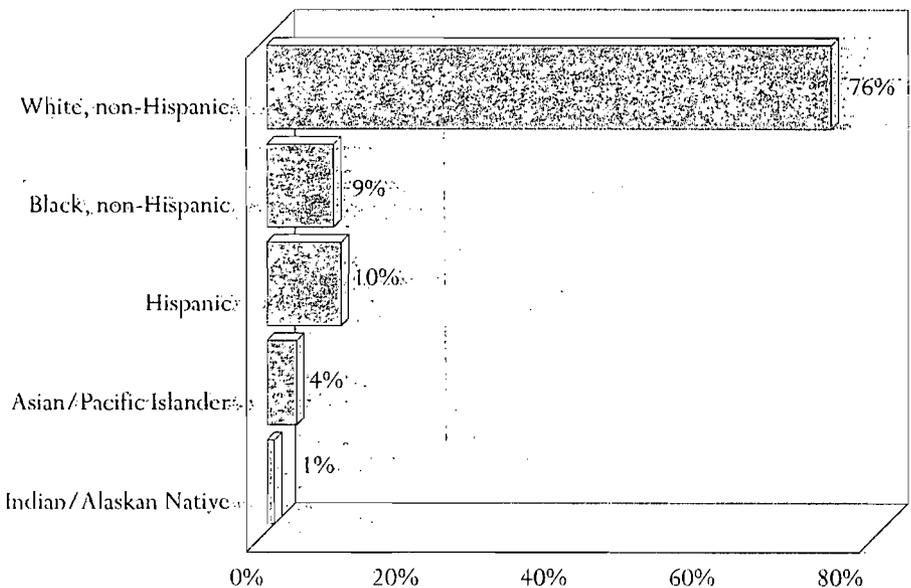
First-generation students are the first in their families to attend a postsecondary institution. Ac-

First-Generation College Students

A Rising Force in American Higher Education

ording to the 1992-93 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, approximately 45% of all students are first-generation. Precise statistics on the number of such students enrolled are rarely maintained by colleges in the U.S., but many analysts agree that the number is increasing as the need for a college degree becomes more essential to get a job.

First-Generation Students by Ethnicity, 1994



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