

# Texas State University First-Gen



## COVID-19 Impact on First-Gen Students



*Findings from the COVID-19 First-Gen Survey*

*Summer 2020*

*Report Prepared by Victoria G. Black, Dr. Gloria P. Martinez, & Sylvia T. Gonzales*

# Table of Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....                | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>PURPOSE &amp; MISSION</b> .....            | <b>3</b>  |
| TIMELINE.....                                 | 3         |
| <b>METHODOLOGY</b> .....                      | <b>4</b>  |
| PURPOSE.....                                  | 4         |
| SAMPLE OF PARTICIPANTS.....                   | 4         |
| DATA COLLECTION .....                         | 4         |
| <b>FINDINGS</b> .....                         | <b>5</b>  |
| LIVING ENVIRONMENT .....                      | 5         |
| PRIMARY SOURCES OF SUPPORT.....               | 6         |
| FINANCIAL SITUATION.....                      | 7         |
| PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLNESS .....                  | 9         |
| <b>QUALITATIVE RESPONSES</b> .....            | <b>10</b> |
| IMPACT ON ACADEMIC LEARNING ENVIRONMENT ..... | 10        |
| ONLINE VS REMOTE VS FACE-TO-FACE.....         | 11        |
| HEALTH & SAFETY CONCERN .....                 | 12        |
| PERSERVERANCE.....                            | 12        |
| <b>LIMITATIONS</b> .....                      | <b>13</b> |
| <b>CONCLUSIONS</b> .....                      | <b>13</b> |
| <b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....                  | <b>13</b> |
| <b>REFERENCES</b> .....                       | <b>15</b> |
| <b>APPENDICES</b> .....                       | <b>16</b> |

*Key portions of the data analysis and suggestions for this report were provided by faculty & staff on campus who are part of the first-gen committee.*

*Dr. Gloria P. Martinez, Ms. Victoria G. Black, Ms. Sylvia T. Gonzales, Dr. Valerie Ballesteros, Dr. Toni Moreno, Dr. Kristen Lew, and Dr. Jaime Armin Mejía*

For more information regarding the First Gen Proud Initiative: [firstgen@txstate.edu](mailto:firstgen@txstate.edu)

<https://www.ucollege.txstate.edu/first-gen-proud/>

# COVID-19 Impact on First-Gen Students

## Executive Summary

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic which began in the Spring of 2020, the entire TXST community needed to transition to remote learning. As a result, first-gen students faced many challenges in their academic and personal lives. In response, the First-Gen Proud committee sought to understand those obstacles to identify immediate and long-term solutions for first-gen students. The committee decided to conduct an assessment to evaluate how our undergraduate first-gen students were experiencing the unanticipated and rapid move to remote learning. The purpose of this assessment survey is to understand the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has on first-gen students remote learning needs and experiences at Texas State University.

The fourteen-question survey was adopted and modified from the [Georgetown University](#) COVID-19 survey and reviewed by the First-Gen Proud committee who prioritized key important issues facing students. The First- Gen COVID-19 Survey was comprised of thirteen close-ended questions measuring students' attitudes, perceptions, experiences, and their demographic background information plus one open-ended qualitative question. The survey (Appendix A) was exempted by Texas State IRB #7299 on June 10, 2020 by co-investigators Victoria Black, Director, Peer Mentoring, Sylvia T. Gonzales, Director, Developing Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Dr. Gloria P. Martinez, Professor of Sociology, Director of the Center for Diversity and Gender Studies, Director of Latino/a Studies. The survey was administered between June 10, 2020 to July 16, 2020 using Qualtrics. Students were sent three emails encouraging them to complete the survey on June 11, June 23, and July 8, and reminded to complete on social media. In total 1,318 (12% response rate) of students completed the survey.

Questions asked on the survey pertained to how the students' experience of transitioning to remote learning impacted them. The survey results include significant findings pertaining to first-gen students' 1) Academic Learning Environment; 2) Financial Instabilities; and 3) Psychological well-being. In response to these findings, the First-Gen Proud committee provides a suggested action plan to further assist in supporting first-gen students at Texas State University.

## Purpose & Mission

Texas State University is a public, four-year, doctoral granting institution located in San Marcos, Texas. It is classified as a Doctoral Institution: High Research Activity by the Carnegie Classification. Texas State University also was designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution in 2011. Forty-six percent of students at Texas State University are first in their family to attend college. The significant growth in this population demonstrates a priority in providing intentional services, programming, and awareness to limit some of the challenges and obstacles first-gen students experience as they navigate their college environment. To better support this population, The First-Gen Proud committee consists of faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate students from across divisions on campus (see Appendix B for current members). The committee is focused on bringing awareness, support, and shared resources to the campus community and on providing an inclusive learning environment for first-gen students.

The working group began as a small committee within University College in October 2018 to discuss how to celebrate National Celebrate First-Gen Day. Since then, it has evolved by increasing representation from across units who are committed to focusing on first-gen student success. In spring 2019, additional campus partners from student affairs, academic advising, academic affairs, and first-gen undergraduate and graduate students joined the committee. The committee meets bi-monthly every Friday to discuss first-gen student success at Texas State University. In Spring 2020, Texas State University was recognized by NASPA as a 2020-2021 [First-Forward Institution](#).

In Spring 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Texas State University community transitioned to remote learning. Recognizing that first-gen students were facing additional challenges, the First-Gen Proud committee decided to conduct a survey to identify how our first-gen students were experiencing the unanticipated and rapid move to remote learning. The purpose of this assessment survey was to understand the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on first-gen students' remote learning needs and experiences at Texas State University. The First-Gen COVID-19 Survey was comprised of thirteen close-ended questions measuring students' attitudes, perceptions, experiences, and demographic background information as well as one open-ended qualitative question administered through Qualtrics.

## TIMELINE

### *September 2018*

46% of Texas State University Students are identified as First-Gen

### *October 2018*

Established a First-Gen Committee to Explore the Needs of Students at Texas State

### *November 2018*

TXST first celebrated National First-Gen Day with free t-shirts and pictures

### *November 2019*

The First-Gen Proud committee organizes a weeklong celebration for National First-Gen Day including civic engagement, health and wellness, and academic enrichment.

### *January 2020*

Texas State is recognized by NASPA as a 2020-2021 First-Forward Institution

### *March 2020*

COVID-19 pandemic

# Methodology

## Purpose of the Assessment

Currently, there is very little research examining the impact that COVID-19 has on first-gen students. There are a few universities in the U.S, such as [Georgetown University](#) and [University of California, Irvine](#), and a larger multi-university impact survey from [Columbia University](#) which have developed surveys to understand the impact COVID-19 has had on higher education students. At this time there are limited surveys that have focused specifically on first-gen students. The questions of this survey were generated and reviewed by the First-Gen Proud committee. The study received IRB-exempt approval (#7299) on June 10, 2020.

## Sample of Participants

First-gen students for the study were identified using Institutional Research (IR) data. The first-gen student indicator was determined by parental educational level self-reported through Apply Texas and FAFSA. The first-gen data were then cross-referenced to determine students enrolled during the spring 2020 semester. Spring 2020 graduates were excluded from the study. In total, there were 10,890 students (see Table 1) who were sent the study via their Texas State email account.

## Data Collection

The Qualtrics survey was open from June 10 – July 16, 2020. Students were sent three emails reminding them to complete the survey on June 11, June 23, and July 8. A reminder about completing the survey was also sent out on social media. In total 1,318 (12% response rate) of students completed the survey.

*Table 1 – Demographics of First-Gen Students Enrolled Spring 2020*

|                                  | Survey n=1,318 | N=10,890 sample |
|----------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| <b>Educational Journey</b>       |                |                 |
| First-Year                       | 8%             | 9%              |
| Second-Year                      | 16%            | 24%             |
| Third-Year                       | 34%            | 29%             |
| Fourth-Year                      | 41%            | 38%             |
| <b>Gender</b>                    |                |                 |
| Female                           | 73%            | 62%             |
| Male                             | 26%            | 38%             |
| Gender Variant/Non-conforming    | .6%            | -               |
| Not Listed                       | .2%            | -               |
| Prefer Not to Answer             | .6%            | -               |
| <b>Race and Ethnicity</b>        |                |                 |
| Hispanic                         | 51%            | 54%             |
| White (non-Hispanic)             | 32%            | 28%             |
| Black /African American          | 12%            | 12%             |
| Asian American/ Pacific Islander | 4%             | .03%            |
| Native American/American Indian  | 1%             | .002%           |

*Note: Percentages are rounded up.*

Table 2 – First-Gen Sample Pool by College

| College                        | Count         | Percentage |
|--------------------------------|---------------|------------|
| AA - Applied Arts              | 1,515         | 14%        |
| BA - Business Administration   | 1,299         | 12%        |
| ED - Education                 | 1,376         | 13%        |
| FA - Fine Arts & Communication | 1,464         | 13%        |
| HP - Health Professions        | 1,013         | 9%         |
| LA - Liberal Arts              | 1,686         | 15%        |
| SC - Science & Engineering     | 1,883         | 17%        |
| UC - University College        | 654           | 6%         |
| <b>Grand Total</b>             | <b>10,890</b> |            |

Note: Percentages are rounded up.

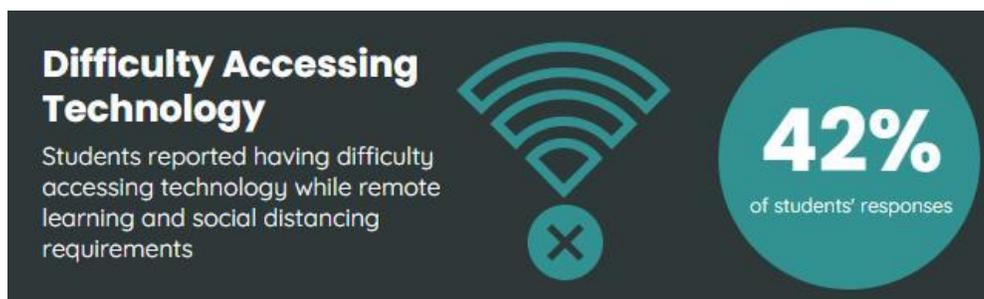
### Demographics of First-Gen Students

The sample demographics of participants who completed the survey (N=1,318) were comparable to the original sample pool (N=10,890) (Table 1). Participants were mostly Hispanic (51%), a third were White (non-Hispanic) (32%), and 12% were Black/ African American, and 4% were Asian American. Most of the respondents were female, 73% compared to males 26%. Most respondents were fourth- and third-year students compared to second- and first-year students, 41%, 34%, 16% and 8%, respectively. Most of the respondents did not drop their courses during the spring semester, 94%. When asked about fall registration, 93% said that they were registered for the fall of 2020.

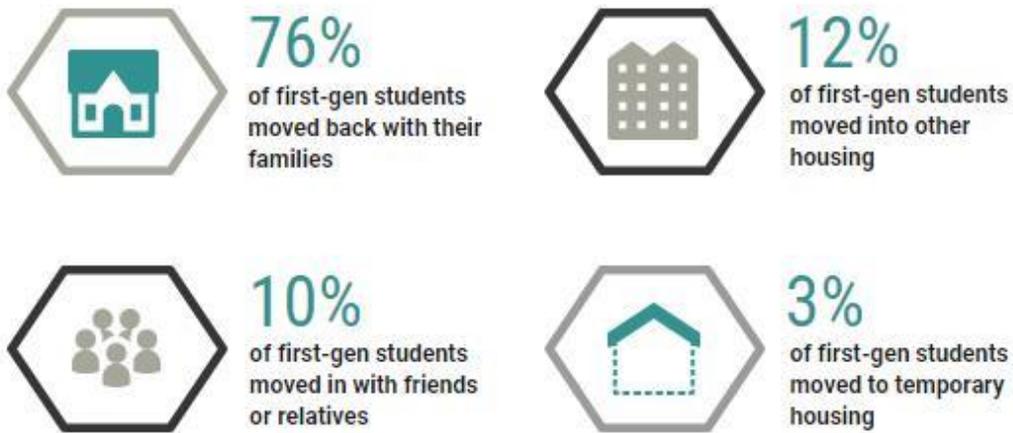
## Findings

### *Living Situation Changed*

Since moving to remote or online learning, 57% of the students' living situation changed. More than two thirds of students, or 76%, moved back with their families, compared to 12% who moved into other housing, 10% moved with friends or other relatives, and 3% moved to temporary housing. Overall, most students moved back with their families; this includes 65% of fourth- year students. A large proportion, 42%, reported having difficulty accessing technology compared to 58% who did not.



Since moving to remote learning, 57% of the students' living situation changed.



### *Primary Sources of Support*

A little over a third, or 33%, of students reported having [No One](#) as a source of support (see Table 3), and those who did have support reported that the primary source of support came from other students and friends, 44%, professors, 19%, advisors, 4%, and staff, 1%.

### **Primary Sources of Support**

---



Table 3 – Demographics by Primary Support

| Demographics by Primary Support      | No One | Student/Friends | Professor | Advisors | Staff |
|--------------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------|----------|-------|
| <b>Educational Journey n=1,278</b>   |        |                 |           |          |       |
| First Year n=108                     | 32%    | 44%             | 18%       | 6%       | 1%    |
| Second Year n=203                    | 34%    | 45%             | 15%       | 5%       | 1%    |
| Third Year n=437                     | 33%    | 42%             | 19%       | 4%       | 1%    |
| Fourth Year n=530                    | 32%    | 45%             | 20%       | 3%       | 1%    |
| <b>Gender n=1,227</b>                |        |                 |           |          |       |
| Female n= 902                        | 30%    | 47%             | 19%       | 3%       | 1%    |
| Male n=317                           | 40%    | 34%             | 19%       | 6%       | 1%    |
| Gender Variant/Non-conforming n=8    | 38%    | 38%             | 13%       | 0        | 13%   |
| <b>Race and Ethnicity n=1,311</b>    |        |                 |           |          |       |
| Hispanic/Latinx n=672                | 33%    | 44%             | 17%       | 5%       | 1%    |
| White (non-Hispanic) n=421           | 32%    | 45%             | 21%       | 2%       | 0.2%  |
| Black/African American n=153         | 32%    | 40%             | 18%       | 7%       | 3%    |
| Asian American/Pacific Islander n=47 | 6%     | 6%              | 2%        | 0        | 2%    |
| Native American n=18                 | 28%    | 39%             | 33%       | 0        | 0     |

Note: Percentages are rounded up.

### Financial Situation



Overall, most of our sample reported that their financial situation became worse. Seventy-one percent of students reported their financial situation became “worse” and “much worse” (see Table 4). Since social distancing, 21% students reported their financial situation became much worse than before, and 50% reported their financial situation became worse, 22% reported no change, and 7% reported better than before. Native Americans/American Indian and Black/African Americans reported a greater impact on their financial situation becoming “worse” or “much worse,” with both reporting 83%.

Students reported that their financial situation became worse for various reasons, including that they or their family members lost their jobs, and that of the added costs of moving and accessing the technology they needed to stay engaged in remote learning. Students also reported that they needed more financial

aid and less campus fees for services that they were not using because of social distancing requirements.

A Pew Research study indicated that 61% of Hispanic and 44% of Black/African Americans have been hardest hit financially during COVID-19 from job losses, wage reductions, and lack of savings (Lopez, Raine, & Budman, 2020). In contrast, only 38% of White Americans surveyed by the Pew Center said they experienced financial fallout due to COVID-19. Similarly, this study found that the pandemic has exacerbated these racial/ethnic inequities in financial resources for our first-gen students.

Table 4 – Financial Situation

|                                       | <b>Much Worse</b> | <b>Worse Than Before</b> | <b>Not Changed</b> | <b>Better Than Before</b> | <b>Much Better Than Before</b> |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Financial Situation</b>            |                   |                          |                    |                           |                                |
| <b>Educational Journey n=1,266</b>    |                   |                          |                    |                           |                                |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Year n=108            | 28%               | 24%                      | 17%                | 10%                       | 1%                             |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year n=201            | 15%               | 54%                      | 20%                | 8%                        | 3%                             |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> Year n=432            | 22%               | 55%                      | 19%                | 4%                        | 1%                             |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> Year n=525            | 22%               | 47%                      | 26%                | 5%                        | 1%                             |
| <b>Gender n=1216</b>                  |                   |                          |                    |                           |                                |
| Female n=895                          | 20%               | 53%                      | 21%                | 5%                        | 1%                             |
| Male n=313                            | 24%               | 44%                      | 25%                | 6%                        | 2%                             |
| Gender Variant/Non-Conforming n=8     | 25%               | 50%                      | 25%                | 0                         | 0                              |
| <b>Race and Ethnicity n=1,300</b>     |                   |                          |                    |                           |                                |
| Hispanic/Latinx n=668                 | 21%               | 51%                      | 21%                | 6%                        | 1%                             |
| White (non-Hispanic) n=418            | 19%               | 51%                      | 24%                | 5%                        | 2%                             |
| Black/African American n=150          | 30%               | 53%                      | 13%                | 4%                        | 2%                             |
| Asian American/Pacific Islander n=46  | 22%               | 48%                      | 22%                | 4%                        | 7%                             |
| Native American/ American Indian n=18 | 39%               | 44%                      | 11%                | 6%                        | 0                              |

Note: Percentages are rounded up.

When students were asked “What Can Improve Your Experience?” many suggested their financial situation, for example:

*“More financial aid during these times, or less on campus fees.”*

*“Lower tuition for remote learning because we are still being charged for computer labs, and athletic events & other things we aren’t using at the moment, & we cannot even attend sporting events. A lot of the students can use that extra money in tuition for other things like food or even hospitalization due to COVID if needed, and financial issues are rising in students due to the fact that we are getting laid off from our jobs or getting sick & stopped working if they work in the food/customer service industry.”*

*“Reduced tuition would be nice, with the pandemic I cannot work and my parents are putting themselves at risk to provide for our family and my degree.”*

*“My lack of income took away my ability to stay near campus and its resources. Office hours were a place of comfort in many ways, without them I’ve felt really uninspired.”*

### *Psychological Wellness*

Students were asked “Since the beginning of social distancing, how has your condition and feeling changed with respect to your psychological wellness?” Overall, seventy-two percent of student reported that their psychological well-being became **much worse** and **worse than before**, 30% reported no change, and 9% reported better or much better than before (see Table 5). These findings are similar to the national trends that show that as a result of the effects of the pandemic, social distancing has had a negative effect on psychological well-being (Daniels, Jishnu, Ali, & Béatrice, 2020). According to a recent survey by the Census Bureau of young adults and adults ages 25 to 39, 32% of respondents reported feeling “down, depressed, or hopeless more than half of the days” or “nearly every day” (Mendez-Smith & Klee, 2020).

*Table 5 – Psychological Well-Being*

|                                       | <b>Much Worse</b> | <b>Worse Than Before</b> | <b>Not Changed</b> | <b>Better Than Before</b> | <b>Much Better Than Before</b> |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Psychological Well-being</b>       |                   |                          |                    |                           |                                |
| <b>Educational Journey n=1,267</b>    |                   |                          |                    |                           |                                |
| 1st Year n=108                        | 16%               | 51%                      | 24%                | 9%                        | 0                              |
| 2nd Year n=201                        | 20%               | 44%                      | 27%                | 6%                        | 3%                             |
| 3rd Year n=433                        | 16%               | 44%                      | 30%                | 7%                        | 3%                             |
| 4th Year n=525                        | 16%               | 44%                      | 31%                | 8%                        | 1%                             |
| <b>Gender n=1,209</b>                 |                   |                          |                    |                           |                                |
| Female n=896                          | 17%               | 48%                      | 28%                | 7%                        | 2%                             |
| Male n=313                            | 15%               | 37%                      | 37%                | 9%                        | 2%                             |
| Gender Variant/Non-Conforming n=8     | 38%               | 63%                      | 0                  | 0                         | 0                              |
| <b>Race and Ethnicity n=1300</b>      |                   |                          |                    |                           |                                |
| Hispanic/Latinx n=668                 | 17%               | 46%                      | 31%                | 6%                        | 1%                             |
| White (non-Hispanic) n=418            | 15%               | 47%                      | 28%                | 8%                        | 2%                             |
| Black/African American n=150          | 13%               | 5%                       | 33%                | 11%                       | 2%                             |
| Asian American/Pacific Islander n=46  | 33%               | 33%                      | 26%                | 4%                        | 4                              |
| Native American/ American Indian n=18 | 11%               | 33%                      | 33%                | 11%                       | 11%                            |

*Note: Percentages are rounded up.*



**17%**  
psychological well-being became much worse



**45%**  
psychological well-being reported worse than before

## First-Gen Student Response

"I would have preferred to have seen ways to help and understand student's mental health during these hard times being made. It felt as if we were only protecting our physical health by social distancing and other precautions, which is good, but we needed help with our mental health too, especially vulnerable students like first-gen students. We don't generally get a lot of support from our parents in regards to our enthusiasm for schooling, and I know I've felt my own parents pressure me to stop going to school, which I almost want to give in to sometimes, especially now. I think it would be helpful and meaningful to see the university recognize this somehow and to give us the support and encouragement we're lacking."

### *Responses to Qualitative Question: What Can Improve Your College Experience?*

#### *Impact on Academic Learning Environment*

Whether students are learning remotely or in person, out of 704 responses to the qualitative question, 87 occurrences specifically mentioned the importance of having more support, empathy, and better communication, and information about course changes from faculty. The most important finding was that students stated that no matter what type of course delivery, they want equitable academic learning environments. This includes consistent and frequent communication from administration/faculty, and reliable resources, such as the access to a high speed Wi-Fi internet connection and technology to use video conference and communication applications such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Canvas. Many students reported that their ability to learn and their success depended on high quality and uninterrupted remote learning, for example, not losing their Zoom connection and continuity of instruction.

Below are some quotations obtained from the qualitative response question from the survey sent to first-gen students:

*"Really the transition to different platform and miscommunication from professor is what ultimately led to me to not have a good experience with the spring online courses due to pandemic-unfamiliar learning platforms and professor miscommunication."*

*"Professors agreeing on what vocabulary to use for the syllabus. I have one professor that uses the word online to signify that we will be watching online videos and another professor who uses*

*the word online meaning we have a zoom meeting. This caused me to miss a chapter the professor lectured over.”*

*“The change to remote learning has been very difficult and it seems that most professors are not prepared for this type of environment. It’s understandable but it absolutely dampens the quality of information we are learning.”*

*“Professors are adding more tedious task and requirements due to COVID-19. For summer, I have to take my exam within a certain time period. While in Spring, there was a 24 [hour] window with a time limit once started. The mandatory time periods make it harder for us to continue to work during the pandemic.”*

*“I would change going to online learning. Online learning is not beneficial to every student, that is why there are less students that take online or hybrid courses. The switch to online learning caused me to fall behind in classes because it is difficult for me to learn in remote learning environments.”*

*“I wish the school was better at informing and supporting their students.”*

### *Online vs. Remote vs. Face-to-Face*

Although this study’s purpose was not to assess fall 2020 preferred learning modalities, the qualitative feedback led us to believe there is no strong indication for online versus face-to-face learning. More students felt moving to online learning would support their health and wellness; however, some students did request the need for face-to-face learning to support their academic goals.

*“That the school made smarter and wiser choices with putting our classes online, such as putting our health first and not still enforcing face-to-face learning the next coming semester. Also, to have us pay for what we need in our tuition and not for the full accessibilities such as library, athletic fees, things that are only accessible when on campus, etc. The way the school has ran things involving COVID-19 just makes them look like they just want our money, and not worried about the spread of cases and worried about our health.”*

*“Make all lectures held online. Lectures that were held online in spring 2020 were fine. Also, if a student or instructor becomes sick, instruction will not be interrupted if it is already online. This will preserve the quality of education. If a class is a lecture with a lab, at least make the lecture all online.”*

*“I would like to return to in person courses in whatever way possible. I understand that precautions will need to be made for safety, security, and liability reasons. I will follow whatever precautions are put forward (within reason) by the University. However, I am fine with returning up to, and including, without any precautions at all.”*

*“Get back to campus, seeing other students and going to class face to face made learning so much more fun and I was able to absorb a lot more information when I was face to face as opposed to remote learning.”*

*“I wish I would have chosen to stay on campus for the remainder of my spring semester. I did not have the same resources, or stable internet connections to do my schoolwork properly. Some of my professors understood and some did not.”*

*“To have support from online professors. Online professors don’t care about the amount of work they give and don’t care if we understand or not. It is not the same as face-to-face. Professors should be more considerate.”*

### *Health and Safety*

Students’ perspective on health and safety concerns on returning to campus aligns with the faculty perspective as shared through survey results in the *University Star* on July 22, 2020 (Weeks, 2020). Students are worried about the risk of contracting COVID-19, even with the current health and safety guidelines put in place.

*“I don't want anyone to have to worry about falling ill and infecting others-classmates or their families. The risk is too great. COVID-19 is far too unpredictable.”*

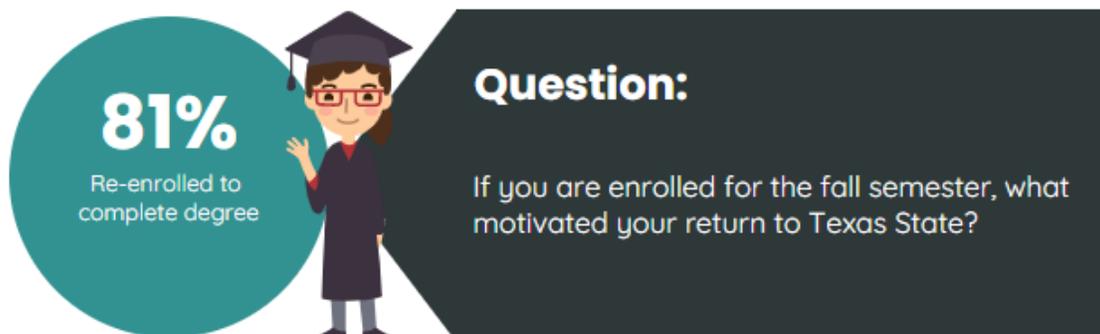
*“If I could make COVID-19 go away, I would. If I could make everything return to "normal," I would. I would like to return to campus; however I am scared. One thing I would change is to have classes moved remotely, via Zoom. I do not want to have to go through the traumatizing experience of communicating with professors/peers while using face masks, having to sit/talk 6 feet away from everybody, and I do not want to constantly be fearful of the risks I am taking by going back to campus.”*

*“Every student has potential underlying medical conditions as well as their family members and I do not believe it would be wise to forcing students to come back to campus if they fear they will be infected. We are the ones paying for tuition after all, I firmly believe we should have a say in the matter of how we proceed in school under these circumstances.”*

### *Persevering to Complete Their Degree During in an Uncertain Time*

In the face of adversity and uncertainty, first-gen students are persevering. When asked what motivated them to re-enroll at TXST, 81% said to complete their degree, followed by 10% who said having financial aid, 4% said having parental or family support, 3% said having strong social support, and 3% said TXST is ensuring my safety. A small number of students, 7%, reported not enrolling for several reasons: 2% financial instability, 1% did not plan to return, 1% fear or anxiety of COVID 19, and 1% reported uncertainty.

## **First-Gen Are Persevering**



## Limitations

Limitations of this study consisted of a sample of slightly more third- and fourth-year first-gen students compared to first- and second-year students at Texas State. The study was conducted during the summer of 2020, a time when most students were not enrolled at Texas State University and when the course semester is shorter, which yielded a low response rate of 12%. Additionally, this study only sampled undergraduate students, and further research is needed to include graduate students. This study is not a comprehensive needs assessment; however, First-Gen Proud will plan to provide a follow-up survey. This follow-up survey will focus on understanding first-gen students' help-seeking behaviors, their experiences around how they access and utilize support services, and to identify some important unmet needs. Further research is needed on the impact that remote learning has on academic learning, students' financial situation and psychological well-being, and the gaps between needs and available services. Further studies could identify important communication channels as well as possible barriers to the use and allocation of impactful resources for first-gen student success.

## Conclusion

The initial goal of the COVID-19 First-Gen Survey was to understand the impact of moving to remote learning and to improve support for first-gen students at Texas State University. Texas State has a greater share of first-gen students, 46%, compared to the national average of 24%, listed by NASPA (RTI International, 2019). First-gen students face significant challenges in accessing, persisting, and completing a college degree since they are financially vulnerable and face many barriers. First-Gen Proud decided to conduct a short survey to further understand the impact that COVID-19 has on students' transition to remote learning. The results of the COVID-19 Impact Survey on first-gen students show that students have been negatively impacted by the pandemic. Students' academic learning environment was negatively affected, such as by not having access to technology and facing communication or miscommunication problems with faculty when transitioning to remote learning. Additionally, first-gen students' financial situation and psychological well-being became worse. First-gen students are a valuable but vulnerable population at Texas State and have few contingent resources to rely on. As a result of this survey, there is a need to prioritize resources to support and ensure their academic success at Texas State University. In response to the survey, we have recommended action items to consider as we prepare for fall 2020.

## Recommendations

### *Increase Financial Support*

1. Provide a weekly email on information and opportunities for financial aid, scholarships, grants, emergency funds, and federal assistance funding opportunities.
2. Provide additional technology resources and information for students to engage in online learning. It is four clicks from the homepage to learn about available internet essentials.
3. Review fees associated with the move to online course work and the inability to access in-person services. Students expressed not wanting to pay for services while learning remotely and social distancing.

### *Improve Psychosocial Support*

1. Increase individual and group counseling sessions prioritizing first-gen students' mental health and well-being.
2. Establish a "warm-line" for emotional support for those who need it most. See referenced [example](#) offered at another Texas institution.
3. Provide additional online resource support by keeping websites updated and listing resources first-gen students, faculty, and staff can reference during this time of elevated support.
4. Within the PAWS alert system, identify first-gen students' needs as "critical" and the need to address every concern for student's well-being in a timely manner.

### *Encouragement and Understanding from Faculty*

1. Promote strength and empowerment during a time of change by providing students with information about how to manage stress and develop resiliency. Ask faculty to include mental health resources and incorporating curriculum focused on Dweck's Growth Mindset and Garmezy's Resiliency theory.
2. Encourage faculty to send emails to their students checking in on them. Create an email template that suggests faculty concern and empathy to be sent out on a regular basis.
3. Include syllabus information that suggests that the health and well-being of our Bobcat Community is a priority to everyone.
4. Inspire strength during a pandemic and practice mindfulness by incorporating time for reflection and introspection through journaling, class discussion, or group chats in Canvas.
5. Allow time for community building within the classroom space by encouraging student engagement.
6. Implement initial academic feedback (mid-term grade reports) for all courses and develop a comprehensive "Support Team" to address students who are impacted by external factors impeding their course completion.
7. Host a webinar, Zoom meeting, or podcast on topics related to career development in their area of profession or specialization so students can stay connected and engaged in the subject they are learning.

### *Consistent Communication and Resources from Staff/Administrators*

1. Send bi-monthly emails from advising centers to remind students of the support available to them in these times of transition and constant change.
2. Create an interactive website with a virtual assistant to encourage simulated and in-person engagement opportunities.
3. Student-facing offices should adopt a one-stop referral policy. Students' needs and concerns should be met at the initial disclosure, or they should be referred to the office where their questions or concerns can be satisfactorily resolved.
4. Provide the First-Gen Proud committee with resources to assist and elevate first-gen student success. Refer students to additional resources specific to the first-gen experience:

<https://www.ucollege.txstate.edu/first-gen-proud/>

## References

- Daniels, B., Jishnu D., Ali H., & Béatrice L. (2020). "COVID-19 Student Impact Survey."  
Georgetown University Initiative on Innovation, Development and Evaluation.
- Kochar, R. (2020). Hispanic women, immigrants, young adults, those with less education hit hardest by COVID-19 job losses. Pew Research Center.
- Lopez, H.L., Raine, L. and Budman, A. (2020). Financial and health impacts of COVID-19 vary widely by race and ethnicity. Pew Research Center.
- Mendez-Smith, B. & Klee, M. (2020). Census Bureau's New Household Pulse Survey Shows Who Is Hardest Hit During COVID-19 Pandemic. Census Bureau.
- RTI International. (2019). *First-generation College Student's Employment*. Washington, DC: NASPA.
- Weeks, D. (2020). Poll shows faculty discontent with return to face-to-face instruction. *University Star*.  
<https://universitystar.com/40754/news/poll-shows-faculty-discontent-wish-return-to-face-to-face-instruction/>.

# Appendices

## *Appendix A- COVID-19 Impact on TXState Students*

Q1 We hope you are doing well in these difficult times. We are seeking to understand how COVID 19 is impacting first-generation students at Texas State. We are asking you to complete this very short survey and help us learn how our program can better serve you. Your response will be completely anonymous and confidential. All the information that is collected from this survey will be aggregated into a final report. Thank you for your participation.

Q2 Where are you in your educational journey?

- First Year (1)
- Second Year (2)
- Third Year (3)
- Fourth Year (4)
- Graduate Masters (5)
- Graduate PhD (6)

Q3 Did you drop any of your courses as a result of going to remote learning during the spring semester?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q4 Did your living situation change since moving to remote learning?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q5 How did your living situation change once you transitioned to remote learning?

- Moved back with family (1)
- Moved in with friends/other relatives (2)
- Moved to temporary housing/non-student housing (3)
- Other (4)

Q6 Did you have difficulties with accessing technology (internet, software, hardware etc.) for you to learn remotely?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q7 Who was your primary source of support during this transition to remote learning?

- Advisor (1)
- Professor (2)
- Staff (3)
- Other students and friends (4)
- No One (5)

Q8 Since the beginning of social distancing, how has your condition and feelings changed in the following areas?

|                            | Much worse than before (1) | Worst than before (2) | Not changed (3) | Better than before (4) | Much better than before (5) |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Financial situation (1)    | •                          | •                     | •               | •                      | •                           |
| Psychological wellness (2) | •                          | •                     | •               | •                      | •                           |

Q9 Have you registered for the Fall 2020 semester?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q10 If you are not enrolling in the fall semester, why not?

1. Fear/anxiety of COVID 19 (1)
2. Financial instability/loss (job loss, lost home) (2)
3. Prefer to not to enroll due to uncertainty about remote learning (3)
4. Did not plan to return anyways (4)

Q11 If you are enrolled in the fall, what motivated your return to Texas State University?

- To complete degree (1)
- I have parental/family support (2)
- I have financial aid (3)
- I have a strong social support system at TXST (4)
- I feel TXST is ensuring my safety and providing a healthy learning environment (5)

Q12 If you could change one thing to improve your college experience during the Covid-19 pandemic, what would it be?

Q13 What ethnicity/race do you primarily identify with? (Check all that apply.)

5. White (Non-Hispanic) (1)
6. Black/African American (2)
7. Asian American/Pacific Islander (3)
8. Native American/American Indian (4)
9. Hispanic/Latinx (5)
10. Other (6)

Q14 What gender do you primarily identify with? (Check all that apply)

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Gender Variant/Non-Conforming (3)
- Not listed (4)
- Prefer not to answer (5)

*Appendix B – List of Working Group Members*

|                           |   |   |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Dr. Valerie Ballesteros   | Senior Lecturer   | School of Family and Consumer Science                         |
| Victoria Black, Chair     | Director, Peer Mentoring                                  | University College – Academic Programs                        |
| Melissa Garza             | Enrollment Assistant                                      | Round Rock Campus   |
| Michelle Bohn             | Senior Administrative Assistant                           | University College – Dean's Office                            |
| Dr. Nancy Chavkin         | Regent’s Professor - Emerita                              | School of Social Work   |
| DeeDee Cooper             | Undergraduate Student                                     | F1rst Gen Proud Student Org                                   |
| Ray Cordero               | Senior Director, TRiO Programs                            | Institutional Inclusive Excellence - Student Division         |
| David Eller               | Graduate Student  | PACE Peer Mentoring   |
| Agustin Garcia            | Academic Advisor I  | College of Education Advising Center                          |
| Sylvia Gonzales, Co-Chair | Director, DHSI  | University College – Developing Hispanic Serving Institutions |
| Julia Gros                | Academic Advisor I  | University College Advising Center                            |
| Victor Hernandez          | Assistant Director  | Campus Recreation   |
| Kristopher Infante        | Academic Advisor II                                       | University College – PACE Academic Advising                   |
| Dr. Kristen Lew           | Assistant Professor                                       | Math  |
| Ramces Luna               | Student Development Specialist II                         | Dean of Students  |
| Dr. Jaime Armin Mejía     | Associate Professor                                       | English   |
| Dr. Gloria Martinez       | Professor   | Sociology   |
| Dr. Toni Moreno           | Assistant Director, Latinx and First Generation Retention | Institutional Inclusive Excellence - Student Division         |
| Dr. Brenda Rodriguez      | Associate Director - Student Involvement                  | Student Affairs   |
| Jaime Saucedo             | Undergraduate Student                                     | Co-President, F1rst Gen Proud Student Org                     |
| Michelle Sotolongo        | Student Development Specialist                            | Honors College  |
| Jill Trujillo             | Grant Coordinator   | Student Support Services                                      |
| Catherine Wood            | Undergraduate Student                                     | Co-President, F1rst Gen Proud Student Org                     |
| Kristine Wright           | Student Development Specialist                            | University College – CAFE                                     |

**Bibliography**

- Bassett, Becca S. 2020. “Better Positioned to Teach the Rules than to Change them: University Actors in Two Low-Income, First-Generation Student Support Programs.” *Journal of Higher Education* 91(3):353-377.
- Chang, Janet, Wang, Shu-wen, Mancini, Colin, McGrath-Mahrer, Brianna, and Sujey Orama de Jesus. 2020. “The Complexity of Cultural Mismatch in Higher Education: Norms Affecting First-Generation College Students’ Coping and Help-Seeking Behaviors.” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 26(3):280-294.
- Convertino, Christina, and Erika Mein. 2020. “Latinx Students’ Transition to College: When Readiness Meets Barriers.” *Journal of Latinos & Education* 19(3):313-321
- Elfman, Lois. 2020. “A Completion Agenda: Community College Stakeholders Implement Supports to Guide Students to Graduation.” *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*(3):20.
- Fennie, Thelma, Mayman, Yolanda, van Louw, Chanel, Useh, Ebruphiyo, and Matapelo Kombora. 2020. “Psychosocial Factors Impacting the College Adjustment of Undergraduate Students: A Scoping Review.” *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 30(2):96-105
- Gopalan, Maithreyi, and Shannon T. Brady. 2020. “College Students’ Sense of Belonging: A National Perspective.” *Educational Researcher* 49(2):134-137.
- Garriott, Patton O. 2020. “A Critical Cultural Wealth Model of First-Generation and Economically Marginalized College Students’ Academic and Career Development.” *Journal of Career Development* 47(1):80-95.
- House, Lisa A., Neal, Chelsea, and Jason Kolb. 2020. *Supporting the Mental Health Needs of First Generation College Students*. Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- Ives, J., and Castillo-Montoya, M. 2020. “First-Generation College Students as Academic Learners: A Systematic Review.” *Review of Educational Research* 90(2):139-178
- Kezar, Adrianna<sup>1</sup>, Kitchen, Joseph, A., and Elizabeth Holcombe. 2020. “Ensuring Success among First-

- Generation, Low-Income, and Underserved Minority Students: Developing a Unified Community of Support.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 64(3):349-369.
- Kezar, Adrianna. 2020. Joseph A. Kitchen, and Elizabeth Holcombe. “The Role of Collaboration in Integrated Programs Aimed at Supporting Underrepresented Student Success in STEM.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 64(3):325-348.
- McCallen, Leigh S., and Helen L. Johnson. 2019. “The Role of Institutional Agents in Promoting Higher Education Success among First-Generation College Students at a Public Urban University.” *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. September 2019.
- Quinn, Dory E., Cornelius-White, Jeffrey, MacGregor, Cynthia, and Ximena Uribe-Zarain. 2019. “The Success of First-Generation College Students in a TRIO Student Support Services Program: Application of the Theory of Margin.” *Critical Questions in Education* 10(1):44-64.
- Raposa, Elizabeth B., Matthew Hagler, Diana Liu, and Jean E. Rhodes. 2020. “Predictors of Close Faculty-Student Relationships and Mentorship in Higher Education: Findings from the Gallup-Purdue Index.” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*.
- Reynolds, Jessica, and Susan Cruise. 2020. “Factors that Influence Persistence among Undergraduate Students: An Analysis of the Impact of Socioeconomic Status and First-Generation Students.” *Interchange (0826-4805)* 51(2):199.
- Schelbe, Lisa, Becker, Martin S., Spinelli, Carmella, and Denesha McCray. 2019. “First Generation College Students’ Perceptions of an Academic Retention Program.” *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 19(5):61-76.
- Schrivver, Jennifer, and Nicole Teske. 2020. “Anticipating College Graduation: The Concerns and Coping Methods of College Seniors.” *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition* 32(1):79-95.
- Thomas, Tracey, Williams, Jamie, Peaslee, Lilliokanaio, Call, Livvy, and Jeremy Hawkins. 2020. “P65 Navigating Food Insecurity at College: Examining Student Experiences and Perspectives on Solutions.” *Journal of Nutrition Education & Behavior* 52(7):S46-S47.

- Tobolowsky, Barbara F., Cox, Bradley, E., and Chunoo S. Vivechkanand. 2020. "Bridging the Cultural Gap: Relationships between Programmatic Offerings and First-Generation Student Benchmarks." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 22(2):273-297.
- Tucker, Kathryn, Sharp, Gwen, Shi, Qingmin, Scinta, Tony, and Sandip Thanki. 2020. "Fostering Historically Underserved Students' Success: An Embedded Peer Support Model that Merges Non- Cognitive Principles with Proven Academic Support Practices." *Review of Higher Education* 43(3):861-885.