



# EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING FIRST IN FAMILY AT UNIVERSITY

A 2014 Student Equity in Higher Education Research Grants Project

Associate Professor Sharron King, Dr Ann Luzeckyj,

Associate Professor Ben McCann and Ms Charmaine Graham

## Table of Contents

List of Tables.....	6
List of Figures.....	6
Acronyms .....	7
Acknowledgements.....	7
Executive Summary .....	8
Recommendations .....	11
Recommendations for Institutions.....	11
Recommendations for Teaching and Professional Staff .....	12
Recommendations for Future FiF Students.....	13
Recommendations for Future Research.....	13
1. Background and Context .....	14
2. Project Aims, Outcomes and Demographics .....	16
2.1 Areas of Investigation.....	16
2.1.1 Research Sites .....	16
2.1.2 Methodological Approaches.....	17
2.1.3 Annotated Bibliography .....	17
2.1.4 Survey Research .....	17
2.1.5 The Interviews .....	18
2.2 Participant Demographics.....	19
2.3 Key Research Questions .....	21
2.4 Outcomes Achieved .....	22
3. Project Outputs .....	23
3.1 Annotated Bibliography.....	23
3.2 SSEE Survey Report.....	25
3.2.1 Respondent Demographics.....	26
3.2.2 Demographic Analysis.....	27
3.2.3 Program Area Analysis.....	27
3.2.4 Reasons for Choosing Degree Program.....	29
3.2.5 Commencing Students Expectations of University.....	29
3.2.6 Expected Study Time .....	30
3.2.7 Having Friends Attending the Same University .....	30
3.2.8 Expected Performance of the Commencing Respondents .....	31
3.2.9 Reported Performance of the Continuing Respondents.....	31

3.2.10 Enthusiastic Teachers .....	31
3.3 Narrative Case Studies and Cameo Development.....	32
3.4 Key Findings Information Brochures.....	33
3.5 First in Family Website.....	34
3.6 Project Dissemination Activities .....	34
3.6.1 Seminar presentations .....	35
3.6.2 Conference Presentations and Publications.....	35
3.6.3 Future Planned Dissemination Activities .....	36
4. Findings.....	37
4.1 Motivations and Ambitions .....	37
4.1.1 Catalyst for a Better Life.....	38
4.1.2 Overcoming Challenges of Competing Demands .....	39
4.1.3 Influence of Life’s Events .....	39
4.1.4 Proximity of Campus .....	40
4.1.5 Different Perceptions on Costs of Studying .....	41
4.1.6 Influence of Friends, Family and Peers .....	41
4.2 Costs and Constraints.....	43
4.2.1 Cost of Living: Rural FiF Students .....	43
4.2.2 Cost of Living: Metropolitan FiF Students.....	44
4.2.3 Balancing Study and Work: FiF School Leavers .....	44
4.2.4 Balancing Study and Work: FiF Mature Age.....	44
4.2.5 Financial Cost of Study .....	45
4.2.6 Summary .....	45
4.3 Health and Wellbeing .....	46
4.3.1 What We Know From Previous Research .....	46
4.3.2 First Year is Hardest on Health and Wellbeing.....	46
4.3.3 Social Networks Key to Success.....	48
4.3.4 Maintaining Health and Wellbeing .....	48
4.3.5 Health and Wellbeing Not a High Priority .....	49
4.3.6 Achieving Health and Wellbeing is Complex .....	49
4.4 Managing Transitions.....	50
4.4.1 Introduction – A Heterogeneous Cohort will Manage Points of Transition in Diverse Ways	50
4.4.2 School Leavers’ Experience of Transition .....	51
4.4.3 Transitioning from a Rural or Interstate Location .....	52
4.4.4 Mature Age Experience of Transition.....	54

4.4.5 The First Few Weeks .....	55
4.4.6 Support and Help Seeking Strategies.....	55
4.4.7 Transitioning Across the Academic Program to Graduation and Beyond.....	56
4.4.8 Transition in Summary .....	56
4.5 Identities .....	57
4.5.1 FiF Background Shaping Student Experience.....	57
4.5.2 Multiple Identities / Dual Identities .....	59
4.5.3 Not a ‘Real’ Student / Imagined Reality .....	62
4.5.4 Sense of Belonging .....	63
4.5.5 Social Incongruity .....	63
4.5.6 Transformation of Self .....	64
4.5.7 Opening up Horizons.....	65
4.5.8 Moving Away From Family Culture.....	65
4.5.9 Raising Aspirations for Others .....	67
4.5.10 Developing Student Identity .....	67
4.6 Support and Impediments.....	68
4.6.1 A Wide Range of Supports.....	68
4.6.2 Impediments .....	70
4.6.3 Support and Impediments in Conclusion .....	71
4.7 Purposes of Higher Education (HE).....	72
4.7.1 Personal Growth.....	72
4.7.2 Social Experiences .....	73
4.7.3 Transformation of Perspectives .....	73
5. Overarching Themes .....	75
5.1 Lack of Access to ‘Hot Knowledge’.....	75
5.2 Cultural Capital and Habitus .....	75
5.3 Luck.....	76
6. Future Directions.....	77
6.1 Limitations and Future Research.....	77
7. Conclusion .....	78
Appendix A: Annotated Bibliography.....	80
Introduction.....	81
Australia (AUST) .....	81
United States (US) .....	81
United Kingdom (UK) .....	81

Key Themes .....	82
Methodology .....	84
Structure .....	84
Australian Perspective .....	85
International Perspective.....	108
Appendix B: Literature Sources.....	155
Journals.....	155
Reports .....	156
Research Groups / Organisations.....	157
About the Authors.....	158
Appendix C: Executive Summary of SSEE Survey Report.....	159
Executive Summary .....	159
Analysis of the Non-Likert Scale Survey Questions .....	160
Analysis of the 5-point Likert Scale Survey Questions.....	160
Survey Instruments .....	160
Key Results from the Analysis of Respondent Demographics.....	161
Key Results from Program Area Analysis.....	161
Key Results from Program Area Analysis for the Commencing Respondents.....	162
Key Results from Program Area Analysis for the Continuing Respondents .....	162
Key Results from the Differences in Expected Study Times.....	163
Key Results from Reasons for Continuing in a Program Area .....	163
Key Results from Analysis of the Length of Time Considered Reasonable for Assignment Marking and Return.....	163
Key Results from the Average Length of Time for Assignments to be Marked and Returned to the Continuing Students.....	163
Key Results from Analysis of Whether the Continuing Respondents Have Friends Attending the Same University .....	163
Key Results from Program Area Analysis.....	164
Key Results from Analysis of Expected Performance of the Commencing Respondents .....	164
Key Results from Reported University Performance of the Continuing Respondents .....	164
Appendix D: Interview Questions .....	165
Appendix E: Narrative Case Study Cameos .....	167
Alison’s Story.....	167
Brendon’s Story.....	168
Brian’s Story .....	170

Denise’s Story .....	171
Jen’s Story .....	173
Marg’s Story .....	175
Roxie’s Story .....	176
Sue’s Story .....	178
Todd’s Story .....	180
Appendix F: Key Findings Brochures .....	182
References .....	193

## List of Tables

Table 1: Demographic details of the survey participants .....	19
Table 2: Demographic details of 18 interview participants .....	20
Table 3: Survey respondents’ demographics, comparing school leaver and mature age FiF and non-FiF students .....	26
Table 4: Commencing students’ reasons for selecting their degree program .....	29
Table 5: Demographics of the nine cameo participants .....	33
Table 6: Seminar presentations on the FiF project .....	35

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Emergent key themes from ‘first in family’ international literature .....	23
Figure 2: Conceptual framework of the four key themes .....	24
Figure 3: What shaped mature age and school leaver commencing students’ expectations of university .....	30
Figure 4: FiF continuing students’ agreement that they learned more in classes taught by enthusiastic teachers .....	32
Figure 5: Factors shaping commencing school leaver and mature age FiF students’ expectations of what university would be like .....	42
Figure 6: Conceptual framework of the key themes within ‘first in family’ literature .....	83
Figure 7: Data categories in the analysis design .....	159

## Acronyms

ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
ATN	Australian Technology Network
FiF	First in Family
Flinders	Flinders University of South Australia
FT	Full Time
Go8	Group of Eight
GPA	Grade Point Average
IRN	Innovative Research Universities
Low SES	Low Socio-economic Status
MA	Mature Age
Non-FiF	Non-First in Family
PT	Part Time
SATAC	South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre
SL	School Leaver
SSEE	Staff and Student Experience and Expectations
TER	Tertiary Entrance Rank
UniSA	University of South Australia
UoA	University of Adelaide

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) at Curtin University for funding the broader research project from which this report was produced. In particular, we would like to thank the reviewers and Professor John Phillimore and Professor Sue Trinidad for their invaluable input and advice.

The project greatly benefited from the input of the Reference Group, including:

Associate Professor Rachael Field, Queensland University of Technology

Dr Di Bills, Adjunct University of South Australia

Dr Deborah Tranter, Adjunct Flinders University

Dr Grant Banfield, Flinders University

Ms Audrey Stratton, Adelaide University

Mr Lee Pope, Flinders University

We would also like to thank Dr Belinda Chiera and Lisa Schultz for their detailed analysis of the first in family data from the Staff and Student Experience and Expectations (SSEE) dataset and our research assistants, Charmaine Graham and Jacqui McCann for their invaluable contribution to the project, Dr Lalita McHenry for her review of the final draft report, as well as David Alston for his fine editing work on the report. Finally, we would like to express our appreciation to the 18 participants for sharing both their experiences and insights during the research interviews.

## Executive Summary

This collaborative research project was conducted by academics across the three major universities in South Australia, i.e. University of South Australia, Flinders University and the University of Adelaide. The project was funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) at Curtin University and explores the experiences of first in family students in higher education.

There are a number of definitions and terminologies used within the research literature to refer to students who are the first member of their family to attend university. In the US, the term 'first generation' student is generally used to define the cohort whose parents have either not attended university or have not earned a degree (Engle, 2007; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). In the UK and Australian literature the term 'first in family' is more commonly used (Crozier & Reay, 2008). For the purposes of this project we have chosen to use the following definition to categorise first in family students: **Students who are the first member of their immediate family, including siblings, to attend university.**

First in family (FiF) is an under-recognised cohort who are not included as part of any official equity groupings. FiF students may encompass low SES, mature age, regional and remote, and Indigenous students. Research indicates that these cohorts are highly capable when given opportunities to participate and support to succeed (Devlin, Kift, Nelson, Smith & McKay 2012). However, our previous research showed that FiF students experience educational disadvantage because their cultural and social capital does not readily align with that of the university (Luzeckyj, King, Scutter & Brinkworth, 2011). Building on this work, this project used a narrative inquiry approach to enrich our understanding of the FiF student experience, thereby providing FiF students with advice on how to navigate university life successfully and recommendations to university staff and policymakers on how to improve FiF outcomes.

Through the project, the key areas of focus were:

- The factors that influence FiF students' decisions to enrol, attend and continue at university, including their realisation of initial aspirations and ambitions.
- How FiF students experienced university, including the incumbent costs and related constraints of attending university, such as living costs, transport, housing, sacrifices made.
- The impact studying at university had on FiF students' physical, social and mental health and wellbeing.
- How FiF students managed points of transition; e.g. how they managed their first few weeks at university or the transition to final years of study, including how they dealt with differences between their expectations and experiences, what support and help seeking strategies they implemented.
- In what ways their self-image or identity was transformed as a result of their attendance at university, including how these transformative experiences impacted upon their day-to-day lives as well as their impact on relationships with significant others (e.g. partners, children, parents, close friends).
- How universities supported or hindered their experiences and/or progress in terms of provision of particular kinds of learning spaces and places and access to teaching and support staff.

- And finally, as these FiF students transitioned out of university, what they considered were the benefits of their university experiences and qualifications for themselves as individuals, for the university and society more broadly.

Our research adopted a mixed methods approach and included: a literature review and the development of an Annotated Bibliography of 155 Australian and International publications on first in family students' experiences in higher education; an examination of survey data from over 5,300 first in family students' expectations and experiences of university study, and in-depth interviews with 18 first in family students who had successfully navigated at least three years of university study.

The key findings can be summarised as follows:

- It is important to recognise the diversity of the first in family cohort. The survey data and participant interviews demonstrated that these first in family students were incredibly diverse both in terms of their age and previous life experience but also in terms of their expectations of what they wanted to achieve at university. We do the students a great disservice if we try to categorise them simply as 'mature age' or 'school leaver' first in family students and do not try to understand the heterogeneous nature of their background and lived experience at university.
- The key motivating factor for these FiF students to attend university was that they all wanted a better life for themselves. A number of students specifically mentioned gaining financial freedom from parental or other income sources, older students in particular chose to come to university for career betterment or advancement. However the main reason, as cited by all FiF students, for choosing their degree program was interest.
- There are significant financial and personal costs associated with university study for first in family students. All of the FiF students that were interviewed in this study had to work in order to support themselves whilst at university. The costs associated with day-to-day living were most acute for students who had to relocate to the city in order to undertake their study or students who had family support commitments. Additional costs associated with travel, textbooks, printing assignments, and costs for childcare or loss of income whilst on placement added to this burden. There were also significant personal costs associated with study at university; these included loss of social interactions with friends and family and reduced health and wellbeing, particularly during peak assessment periods.
- FiF students lacked the 'hot knowledge' that non-FiF students generally acquire from parents or older siblings who have previously attended university. As such, they lacked information on how to navigate various university systems and procedures and were often unaware of the support services available to them. Their main source of information on what university would be like was derived from university websites and recruiting information.
- The cultural capital that these FiF students brought with them to university was often not recognised or valued and as a consequence the FiF students struggled with the 'mismatch' between their habitus (what students bring with them as an embodiment of: their family histories; previous learning environments and not only what they have experienced but how this has been encapsulated in how they behave and who they are) and the new field of university.
- Managing the transition to and across university was different for each student, but they did have things in common. For many of the students transitioning involved needing to overcome the sense that university was an alien place and gain confidence in both their abilities to succeed but also in

relation to belonging. The transition for many of the mature age students also involved wanting to demonstrate that they were intelligent enough to be at university which was linked to a sense that they had not performed well at high school.

- Across both the survey and interview data it was apparent that first in family students have realistic expectations of what it takes to succeed at university and they work hard to achieve their goals.
- For each of these students their sense of becoming a student was shaped by their previous life experience as well as their experience of being the first member in their family to attend university. For some this previous life experience was one of 'not belonging', that is they believed that university was not for 'people like us'. For others there was self-doubt that they were capable of succeeding at university. Some students did not readily identify with the label of 'being a student' as they felt that it did not reflect their whole identity, whilst others were proud of the label and felt that it added a significant dimension to their sense of self.
- All students spoke of being transformed by their university experience, noting increased skills and abilities such as improved confidence, ability to critically analyse and articulate their opinions and perspectives more effectively. In addition, many spoke of how their university experience had increased 'their ambition for life' and opened up their ideas of what was now possible in their future careers.
- The FiF students all discussed the range of supports they utilised to help them succeed in their studies. Families and friends, including new friends they made while at university, were very important forms of support. However, many also spoke highly of lecturing staff and support services which they utilised, including academic and personal (medical or financial) services. Although they all spoke highly of the services, students also discussed the impediments to their studies. These impediments ranged from personal, family and/or health issues to difficulties navigating the academic landscape of higher education, for example, not understanding the language used by staff or not realising what was required of them.
- The FiF students all identified a range of benefits associated with higher education, with three core themes emerging: personal growth; social experiences; and increased understanding of broader society. The benefit of broadening social horizons and academic experiences was not only recognised as beneficial to participants themselves, but also identified as being beneficial to other members of their immediate family. It is important to recognise the role that first in family students have in paving the way and facilitating other family members such as children and siblings to participate in higher education. Participants also identified that their sense of global citizenry, understanding, and inter-cultural competence had increased and believed that more people having access to higher education would be of value to Australian society more broadly.
- A number of the students expressed gratitude for being allowed to attend university and often used the expression of feeling 'lucky' to have this opportunity. They did not necessarily attribute their personal qualities or hard work as the reasons for this 'luck' and ongoing success.

The major outputs from this project are:

- an annotated bibliography of 155 articles of national and international research on the FiF student experience

- data analysis of over 5,300 school leaver and mature age FiF students' expectations and experiences of university study
- nine cameos developed from the 18 narrative inquiry case studies conducted with successful FiF students
- a series of key findings brochures for FiF students, university teaching and professional staff and family and friends of FiF students
- a project website and seminars for university staff as well as ongoing conference papers and publications.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in order to provide long-term benefits to widening the participation and success of first in family students. A number of the recommendations that stem from our research support what others have said in relation to addressing the needs of diverse student groups (Kift, 2008a) and supporting low SES students (Devlin et al., 2012). Our findings also support the work funded through the Office of Learning and Teaching which also researched the experience of FiF students (<http://firstinfamily.com.au/>). A comparison of the recommendations across these areas and the apparent repetition of some of the suggestions speak to an urgent necessity of implementation to ensure the needs of these cohorts are met.

### Recommendations for Institutions

- **Data collection and reporting:** Universities develop a consistent data definition of first in family student status and collect and report on FiF student access, participation, retention and success data so that targeted support can be offered and progress monitored.
- **Expand outreach into the community:** Universities expand their outreach into the community and schools and include sessions to specifically inform potential first in family students of the breadth of programs and career pathways available to them.
- **Information is explicit:** Ensure that information is made explicit to all commencing students so that first in family students who do not have the benefit of intergenerational knowledge of university systems and procedures are provided with advice and support about how to navigate these systems and structures successfully.
- **Website for FiF students:** Universities provide an easily accessible section of their website specifically for first in family resources. FiF students rely on university websites and promotional material more than non-FiF students to shape their expectations of what university will be like.
- **Family involvement:** Universities recognise and encourage the involvement of family members in FiF students' transition to university; this may include ensuring that orientation activities are inclusive and welcoming to parents or children.
- **Recognise and value the diversity of the FiF cohort:** Ensure that university marketing includes images that reflect students' diverse backgrounds and experiences to encourage FiF students' sense of belonging and understanding that university is a viable option for 'people like us'.
- **Provide financial support for FiF students:** Promote financial services and support such as

scholarships, particularly for FiF students who need to relocate in order to attend university or who have significant additional expenses associated with work integrated learning during their undergraduate degree. Make sure that additional costs relating to course work expenses such as textbooks or preparation of final assignments are explicitly communicated to students at the commencement of their degree. Provide ready access to government payment options, loans of computers and placement support.

## Recommendations for Teaching and Professional Staff

- **Higher education is a transformative experience:** Encourage academics and professional staff to recognise the transformative potential of higher education and that for many FiF students developing a student identity requires a shift away from previous cultural norms. FiF students often see themselves as having dual or multiple identities and their student role needs to fit in with their other commitments and priorities.
- **Know your student cohort:** Get to know the diversity of your student cohort and understand their diverse backgrounds. Discuss their motivations for attending university, their aspirations and ambitions. Recognise the competing demands that many FiF students grapple with and enable contributions from first in family students so that this knowledge and experience can be valued and shared.
- **Build a sense of community on campus:** Build structures into orientation programs and the first year curriculum that encourages collaborative learning opportunities and social engagement with peers so that FiF students build a sense of belonging and friendships with peers. Provide opportunities for friends and family members of FiF students to participate in university events so that it bridges the gap in their understanding of what university is like.
- **Make expectations clear:** Embed explicit expectations and support strategies into the first year curriculum so that students are aware of what is required to be a successful student.
- **Use accessible language:** Speak and write in plain language where possible to ensure that students understand concepts. Clearly explain discipline specific terminology so that all students learn the common discourse of their subject area.
- **Be approachable and enthusiastic about your teaching:** FiF students found it easier to approach staff who make themselves available after teaching sessions or at specific consultation times. They also found that they learned more from staff who were enthusiastic about their teaching.
- **Promote health and wellbeing:** Promote awareness of behaviours that maintain health and wellbeing. Review policies and procedures that may inadvertently encourage students to neglect their health and wellbeing, e.g. scheduling of assessments across programs and submission times for assignments. Provide access to affordable healthy food options and encourage physical activity on campus.
- **Encourage help-seeking:** Promote student support services and normalise 'help-seeking' behaviour for all students. Embed study skills sessions and promote development of academic literacies (which include learning to research, read and write appropriately for your specific discipline) into the first year curriculum. Provide infrastructure and resources to allow the monitoring and management of at-risk students in first year.

## Recommendations for Future FiF Students

- **Inform yourself:** Find out as much as you can about university before you start by attending Open Days, Orientation Week and information sessions as well as by reviewing university websites and recruitment material.
- **Plan ahead:** Think about the potential costs of your course (textbooks etc.) and plan how you will cover these costs.
- **Give yourself time:** Most FiF students find the first year the hardest, but once settled in go on to be highly successful students. Recognise that full-time study takes the same time commitment as a full-time job and plan your schedule so that you have sufficient time to devote to your study.
- **Be realistic:** FiF students generally have more realistic expectations of how different university will be from school than non-FiF students. Having realistic expectations of what is required to be a successful student will help you to make a smooth transition.
- **Make new friends and develop peer support networks:** Students found having the support of fellow students and friends crucial. Participate in student unions, clubs, and activities as it will enable you to meet a wide range of people. Make the effort to get to know and make friends with fellow students in your courses.
- **Find a balance:** Students often find it hard to manage the balance between study and other responsibilities. Prepare yourself for university life by working out in advance how you will achieve a balance and focus on planning your studies to succeed.
- **Seek help:** Don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it. There are numerous university services available to help with things like time management and study skills, student accommodation and financial support, health and disability support. Find out where you can access these support services and participate in the courses that are available.
- **Maintain your health and wellbeing:** Take time out of your studies to maintain your health and wellbeing. Make sure that you eat well, continue with some form of physical activity and maintain a regular sleep cycle. Spend time with friends and family doing things that you enjoy.
- **Let your interest drive you to success:** Being interested and/or passionate about your subject area will help you to maintain your focus during more stressful periods. Having a sense of direction and purpose also provides motivation to keep on going with your study.
- **Have achievable goals:** There's nothing wrong with reaching for the stars but try to develop goals that are reasonable and achievable. Don't be too hard on yourself if your performance does not always meet your own high expectations.
- **Focus on the positives:** Remember that university will be worth it in the long run. The benefits you will gain through the new knowledge and skills you develop are worth the hard slog.

## Recommendations for Future Research

- **Choice of program:** Further research needs to be conducted on why first in family students select particular programs and institutions.
- **Attrition:** Further research needs to be conducted on the factors that influence some first in family students to leave university without completing their degree.

## 1. Background and Context

This collaborative project undertaken across the University of South Australia (UniSA), the University of Adelaide and Flinders University aims to articulate the transformative possibilities of entering higher education and provide practical advice for first in family (FiF) students on how to negotiate university life successfully as well as offer guidelines for academics, university managers and policymakers on how to improve outcomes for this previously under-recognised equity group.

As our own and other previous research has shown, FiF students, whether from low socioeconomic status areas, rural or remote locations, school leavers or mature age students, are more likely to be in a position of educational disadvantage over students who have other family members available to share the experience of university life and discuss aspirations (Karimshah et al., 2013; King, Garrett, Wrench & Richardson, 2013; James, Krause & Jennings, 2010; Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Luzeckyj et al., 2011; Simmons, 2013; Thomas, 2002). Too often the burden of navigating the uncertainty and complexity of university is placed on the student to adjust rather than the institution to provide more effective teaching and support strategies that better accommodate non-traditional students' needs (Bamber & Tett 2001).

Previous literature has also shown that FiF students experience a greater mismatch between their initial expectations and actual experiences of university life, with many commenting that university felt like a foreign place where they did not readily belong (Luzeckyj et al., 2011).

Another project undertaken by the project leader investigated first year students' conceptions of thriving, health and wellbeing (King et al., 2013). This research found that FiF students more readily self-identified as 'just surviving' rather than 'thriving' or 'coping OK' when compared to the overall student cohort surveyed (n = 459) and struggled with a sense of belonging in the university environment (King, et al., 2013).

Our previous research (SSEE project 2010-2012) investigating over 16,800 first year students' expectations and experiences conducted across the three publicly funded South Australian universities revealed that in comparison to the rest of the student population, students who were the first member in their family to attend university experienced significant educational disadvantage in terms of unfamiliarity with academic practices and expectations. Our previous research shows that FiF students experience educational disadvantage because their cultural and social capital does not readily align with that of the university (Luzeckyj et al., 2011). The literature indicates that FiF students lack the benefits gained from possessing an understanding of university processes, academic practices and a general awareness of the university environment (Bowl, 2001; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; O'Shea & Stone, 2014). Bowl (2001) further suggests that this lack of information is not compensated for by higher education institutions, leaving FiF students to navigate educational pathways on their own.

Moreover, the proportion of FiF students from a rural background was higher (30%) than non-FiF students from rural backgrounds (22%). FiF students were more likely to have attended a public school (59%) than an Independent or Catholic school (49%) and were less likely to be living with their parents or family members (48%) than non-FiF students (59%). Having to relocate and live independently whilst at university increases the associated costs and constraints of attending university for FiF students and was one of the key areas of investigation in the proposed project. FiF students generally had a 5% lower university entrance (ATAR) score and were more frequently

enrolled into courses such as education, nursing, arts, and humanities, whereas non-FiF students were more often enrolled in engineering, law, medicine and health science degrees which have a higher cut off score and are generally regarded as more 'prestigious' degrees as they have greater job security and higher earning potential after graduation (Simmons, 2013).

When asked what had shaped their expectations of what university would be like, FiF students were more likely to base their expectations on advice from school counsellors and teachers, media and university recruiting material, compared with other students. Students who were not the first member of their family to attend university relied significantly more on parents and siblings to inform their expectations. Overall, FiF students experienced a greater mismatch between their initial expectations and actual experiences of university life, with many commenting that university felt like a foreign place where they did not readily belong (Luzeckyj et al., 2011).

Although our previous research has provided extensive quantitative data on FiF students' expectations and experiences of university study, we did not know a great deal about these students' day-to-day experience of attending university. We did not know what constraints FiF students face or the related living, housing or transport costs associated with attending university. Furthermore, we did not know what shaped their aspirations to attend university, what factors impacted on them most significantly whilst at university, and what hopes and aspirations they had post-graduation. And finally, we did not know how university life impacted upon FiF students' self-identity or their extended relationships with family and friends.

These previous findings led to the development of this project to further explore the experience of being the first member in family to attend university. The following section highlights the project aims and outcomes.

## 2. Project Aims, Outcomes and Demographics

### 2.1 Areas of Investigation

Throughout the project, we investigated:

- The factors that influenced FiF students' decisions to enrol, attend and continue at university, including their realisation of initial aspirations and ambitions.
- How FiF students experienced university, including the incumbent costs and related constraints of attending university, such as living costs, transport, housing, sacrifices made.
- The impact studying at university had on FiF students' physical, social and mental health and wellbeing.
- How FiF students managed points of transition, e.g. how they managed their first few weeks at university or the transition to final years of study, including how they dealt with differences between the expectations and experiences, what support and help seeking strategies they implemented.
- In what ways their self-image or identity was transformed as a result of their attendance at university, including how these transformative experiences impacted upon their day-to-day lives as well as the impact on relationships with significant others (e.g. partners, children, parents, close friends).
- How universities supported or hindered their experiences and/or progress in terms of provision of particular kinds of learning spaces and places and access to teaching and support staff.
- And finally, as these FiF students transitioned out of university, what they considered were the benefits of their university experiences and qualifications for themselves as individuals, for the university and society more broadly.

#### 2.1.1 Research Sites

This research was conducted across the three main government funded universities in South Australia. Each institution claims that it is of a high standing and works to support equity in different ways. The University of Adelaide (UoA) whose main campus is located near the centre of Adelaide is the oldest of the three institutions, established in 1874. The University of Adelaide promotes itself as a world-class institution which “constitutes a vibrant and diverse community” (<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/about/profile/>). The Flinders University (Flinders) was established in 1966 to meet the needs of the then expanding university education sector. Its main campus is located on the fringes of the city. The university website states that the institution “enjoys a well-justified reputation for excellence in teaching and research, have a long-standing commitment to enhancing educational opportunities for all” (<http://www.flinders.edu.au/>). The University of South Australia (UniSA) is the youngest of these three universities, established in 1991 as an amalgamation of a number of other, older tertiary institutions and as a result of a further expansion of the sector. With five campuses including two in the city, UniSA, states that it was “established on the dual principles of equity and excellence” (<http://www.unisa.edu.au/About-UniSA/University-profile/>).

As discussed by Luzeckyj (2009), Australian higher education institutions have formed various alliances according to their visions and histories. These alliances allow universities to increase

reputation through membership and via marketing opportunities as well as allowing groups of universities to achieve advantages for constituents by lobbying government in relation to particular issues and policy decisions. The universities which formed the sites for this research belong to three of the four Australian university alliances where the University of Adelaide belongs to the Group of Eight (Go8), that Flinders University is an Innovative Research Universities (IRU) and the University of South Australia is part of the Australian Technology Network (ATN).

### **2.1.2 Methodological Approaches**

The methodological approaches deployed in the FiF research involved three separate but inter-related activities. Firstly, we developed an annotated bibliography by systematically reviewing national and international literature related to FiF students. Secondly, we built on the SSEE study that identified FiF students as a cohort experiencing educational disadvantage and further explored the data set acquired through the surveys by cross-matching categories so that we could determine unique elements of FiF cohorts including details related to other equity cohorts (low SES, mature age, regional and remote, and where possible, Indigenous students) (Brinkworth et al., 2013). Developing the bibliography and revisiting the data from the previous research allowed us to identify themes on which to base our interview questions. The third and final component of the research involved interviewing a small number of the students (18) who had self-identified as FiF in our original study.

### **2.1.3 Annotated Bibliography**

The annotated bibliography was developed to allow us to determine what is already known about the FiF student experience in higher education. We aimed to focus on the Australian context but intended to also determine whether the Australian context differed from the international one. One example of differences between the national and global contexts was terminology. The terms 'first in family' and 'first generation' are often used interchangeably within the literature, but the meaning can vary depending on the geographical location of the group of students being researched.

A total of 155 sources comprising books, journal articles, reports and websites of conferences and both government and research organisations were explored. Searches were limited to the period 2000 to 2014 and the geographical locations Australia, United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada, as these were considered to have higher education systems with features in common. Only the literature pertaining to FiF student experiences was selected for inclusion.

Research which focused on aspirations or the experiences of high school students (or other material discussing experiences prior to commencing university) was determined to be outside the scope of the annotated bibliography. Literature which discussed intervention strategies and programs specially developed to improve transition and retention of FiF students was also excluded. These broader areas were not excluded because they were considered less important but rather as a way of narrowly defining the areas we intended exploring. 155 texts (comprising 39 Australian and 112 International texts) had been included in the annotated bibliography; a copy of the annotated bibliography is included in Appendix A.

### **2.1.4 Survey Research**

Between 2010 and 2012 all commencing and continuing students at three South Australian universities were invited to participate in a series of surveys designed to identify the differences between their expectations and experiences of being in first year at university (Luzecy et al, 2011). The surveys included a series of Likert-style questions, ranking questions and three open-ended

questions. These were designed to identify participants' demographics, enrolment data and whether their expectations of attending university aligned with their experiences. Over 16,800 students responded to the survey indicating a response rate of 25% were provided to these surveys with 5,301 answering yes to the question "Are you the first member of your immediate family (parents/ care givers and siblings) to attend university?". A number of statistical tests were performed on this data (including Chi-square, ANOVA,  $\chi^2$  test and Mann Whitney test, according to the nature of the data and for verification of results). These were conducted by statisticians employed through the grant specifically for this purpose. Further details regarding the survey analysis and findings can be found in Appendix C.

### 2.1.5 The Interviews

We conducted semi-structured open-ended interviews with 18 self-identified FiF students who had successfully completed at least three years of study at university. Our interview questions were based on themes we identified as we developed the annotated bibliography and as a result of questions that we raised as we considered the statistical findings related to the survey responses. According to Heywood and Stronach (2005) starting with the literature in order to identify the themes for exploration is a well-known approach used by many in the social sciences.

Through interviewing FiF students we have gained insight into their day-to-day experience of attending university. We have uncovered some of the constraints these students face and the various living and personal costs associated with attending university. Furthermore, we have begun to discover how their aspirations to attend university are shaped and the factors that impact on them most significantly whilst at university. Our interviews have helped reveal how university life has influenced FiF students' self-identity and their extended relationships with family and friends. According to Stone and O'Shea (2012) "[o]ne of the best ways to understand the actions of individuals is to be allowed to hear their personal stories" (p. 2). Through the semi-structured interviews our participants have provided insight into their experiences as university students. We conducted these interviews in a conversational manner, allowing participants to lead as much as possible and direct what they wanted to say, rather than being strictly focused on the questions. We attempted to give up control of the interviews and pass that control to the participants so their stories could more naturally unfold (Barbour & Schostak, 2005; Riessman, 2008).

In 2014 six FiF students from each institution who had in 2010 or 2011 participated in surveys related to student experience and expectations of university (Brinkworth et al., 2013) were approached to share their experience of attending university through participation in semi-structured open-ended interviews. Students from several different faculties at each of the three universities were invited and selected to participate. Questions asked in the interviews were related to the themes identified from the literature and through the survey work. We were aware that our selections were limited to interviewing students who had remained at university (so did not include those who had left through graduation or attrition) but we felt that in choosing candidates for interview that were still at university three or four years after participating in the survey we would gain insight into what had compelled them to stay.

All 18 interviews were recorded and transcribed, and then as a first stage of analysing the transcripts a table was developed which reflected the specific themes identified through the development of the annotated bibliography (this table included similar themes to the interview questions). The interviews were initially analysed through a careful line-by-line reading and coded in relation to themes within the

table. We then conducted a second exploration of the interviews without reference to the questions that were asked to determine what other themes and ideas were raised by the participants.

## 2.2 Participant Demographics

The demographical details of the survey and interview participants are outlined in the tables below.

*Table 1: Demographic details of the survey participants*

<b>Respondent category</b>	<b>FiF n = 5301</b>	<b>Proportion of FiF respondents</b>	<b>Non-FiF n = 11569</b>	<b>Proportion of non-FiF respondents</b>
All	5301	100.0%	11569	100.0%
Commencing	3425	64.6%	6650	57.5%
Continuing	1831	34.5%	4838	41.8%
School leaver	3592	67.8%	8777	75.9%
Mature age	1651	31.1%	2680	23.2%
Commencing, School Leaver	2423	45.7%	5216	45.1%
Commencing, Mature Age	995	18.8%	1419	12.3%
Continuing, School Leaver	1169	22.1%	3561	30.8%
Continuing, Mature Age	656	12.4%	1261	10.9%

Note that, for example, the sum of respondent numbers for Commencing School Leaver and Mature Age students do not exactly equal the number of respondents for Commencing students as not all respondents provided age information. As such, they would not be present in the Commencing School Leaver / Mature Age analysis.

Table 2: Demographic details of 18 interview participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	University	Discipline area Degree completion	Full time Part time	Pathway to university	Living arrangements whilst studying
Gail	F	<25	Adelaide	Animal Sciences Graduated from honours	FT	School leaver	Lived at home with parents
Denise	F	36-45	Adelaide	Psychology	FT	Mature age entry	Lives alone in a one-bedroom unit
Brian	M	<25	Adelaide	Mathematics, now Masters in Mathematics	FT	School leaver	Lives in university college Relocated from rural area
Cory	M	<25	Adelaide	Engineering	FT	School leaver	Living with parents
Rowan	M	26-35	Adelaide	Psychology	PT	Mature age entry	Lives alone
Jen	F	26-35	Adelaide	Arts	FT	Mature age entry	Lives with husband
Pete	M	>46	Flinders	Arts	PT	Mature age entry	Lives with wife
Sue	F	<25	Flinders	Tourism, now Masters of Teaching	FT	School leaver	Lives in house share with friends. Relocated from interstate Rural area
Nina	F	26-35	Flinders	Midwifery	PT	Mature age entry	Lives with husband and 6 children – youngest approx. 6 month
Marg	F	36-45	Flinders	Politics	PT	Mature age entry	Lives with 2 sons – eldest finishing school
Roxie	F	26-35	Flinders	Speech Pathology now Honours	FT	Mature age entry	Lives with partner
Carol	F	<25	Flinders	Audiology now Masters in Audiology	FT	International Fee paying	Lives with other International students – off campus

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	University	Discipline area Degree completion	Full time Part time	Pathway to university	Living arrangements whilst studying
Carl	M	<25	UniSA	Podiatry	FT	School leaver gap year	Lives in share house with friend. Relocated from rural area
Todd	M	<25	UniSA	Double degree Journalism and International Relations (IR), now completing Honours in IR	FT	School leaver	Lives with parents and younger siblings
Kerry	F	> 46	UniSA	Commerce	PT	Mature age entry	Lives with husband and 2 primary school aged children
Brendon	M	<25	UniSA	Double degree in Law management Completing 3rd year of 5 year degree	FT	School leaver	Lives with parents and younger sister
Travis	M	<25	UniSA	Media Arts	FT	School leaver, 2 gap years	Caring for father with disability
Alison	F	<25	UniSA	Graphic Design	FT	School leaver	Lives in share house with partner. Relocated from rural area

Pseudonyms and age ranges rather than precise age were specified to help maintain participant anonymity.

## 2.3 Key Research Questions

The three key research questions that underpinned this project were:

1. What do we currently know about the FiF student experience?

This question was addressed through the systematic review of existing literature, annotated bibliography and extended analysis of the previous FiF SSEE student data.

2. How do FiF students negotiate university?

This question was addressed through the narrative inquiry case studies conducted with FiF students who had completed at least three years of study (on either a part- or full-time basis) from the three partner institutions.

### 3. How can these understandings be used to improve FiF student outcomes?

This question built on the outcomes of the previous stages of the project and in consultation with key stakeholders (e.g. partner institutions, FiF students, reference panel members and NCSEHE) a series of key findings brochures, seminars and workshops were developed for university staff, policy makers and FiF students.

## 2.4 Outcomes Achieved

The intended purpose of this research was to build on the previously collected quantitative data to provide a greater narrative richness and 'voice' to the lived experiences of FiF students. This project achieved the following outcomes:

- An extended review of the literature was conducted and an annotated bibliography of 155 articles was developed to show what is known about the FiF student experience both in Australia and internationally.
- Data of over 5,300 school leaver and mature age FiF students expectations and experiences of university study were analysed to identify common patterns and themes.
- A series of narrative inquiry case studies were developed through interviews with 18 FiF students who had completed at least three years of study at one of the three South Australian universities and had previously participated in the first year student expectations and experiences (SSEE) project. A set of cameos based on nine of these narrative case studies have been created; these provide a compelling collection of stories which properly reflect the cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional nature of the FiF student experience.
- A key findings series of brochures were developed for FiF students, teaching and professional staff as well as family and friends of FiF Students in order to provide practical advice on ways to successfully negotiate university life.
- In addition, a project website, seminars for university staff, conference papers and publications were developed to provide in-depth information on how to better support this equity cohort.
- The outcomes of this project will enable institutional staff and policymakers to see how their actions and practices may be viewed through the students' eyes. Potential students may also access these resources so that they are better prepared to manage their university experiences.

### 3. Project Outputs

#### 3.1 Annotated Bibliography

The aim of the annotated bibliography was to determine what is currently known about the FiF student experience in higher education, predominantly from an Australian context but within the broader global context. An examination of international literature for the period 2000 to 2014 and for the geographical locations of Australia, United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada identified four key themes presented in Figure 1.

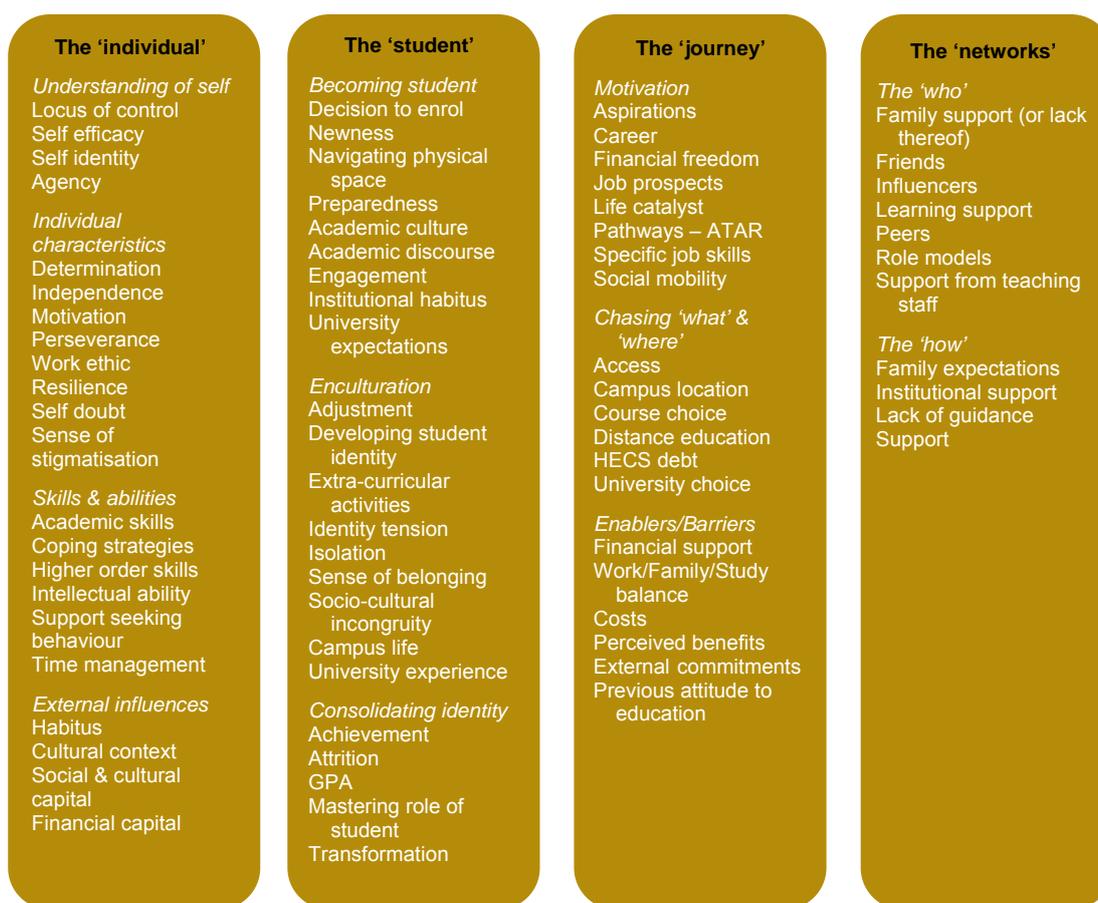


Figure 1: Emergent key themes from 'first in family' international literature

The four key themes which provide a broad understanding of the FiF student experience are:

1. **The 'Individual':** A review of the literature confirms that the differences within FiF students are as diverse as the differences identified between FiF students and traditional students. Key sub themes that emerge under the collective term of the 'individual' emphasise the role that internal characteristics, abilities and personal agency contribute to the experiences of FiF students. Furthermore, the theoretical concepts of social and cultural capital, and habitus arise repeatedly as significant factors.
2. **The 'Student':** The decision to return to study is a significant life changing event for FiF students,

however it is an event that does not stop once the enrolment process is finalised. What follows is a process of adjustment and tension as the FiF student takes on the ‘learner identity’ and attempts to master the role of student. The reviewed literature highlights that FiF students are less likely to be involved in extra-curricular activities and campus life, and the omission of these activities may contribute towards a sense of isolation and early attrition.

3. **The ‘Journey’:** For FiF students, the pathway into university and the journey once there, are as diverse as the students themselves. Significant topics highlighted by students regarding their journey emphasise the motivation(s) that lead them to attend higher education. The literature identifies that for a significant number of FiF students it is necessary to combine employment and study as there are often prohibitive costs associated with attending university.
4. **The ‘Networks’:** A common theme evident in the literature is the importance that support networks provide to FiF students. These networks not only support FiF students to initially consider tertiary studies as a viable option, but they also provide the necessary support for the successful attainment of the degree qualification. Due to the heterogeneous nature of the FiF cohort a range of support networks, both external and internal to the higher education system, are identified.

Figure 2 provides a conceptual framework that demonstrates the interaction between the four key themes. The framework depicts the ‘student’ and their individual characteristics as being central and interconnected, whilst remaining distinct throughout a significant proportion of the university journey. The overarching theme encompasses literature pertaining to the ‘journey’, connected by two key but different aspects of an individual’s support networks, being ‘who’ (i.e. family, friends and the university) and ‘how’ (i.e. support or lack thereof). These networks are inextricably linked to the student, depicting the ways in which they are utilised by an individual within a university context.

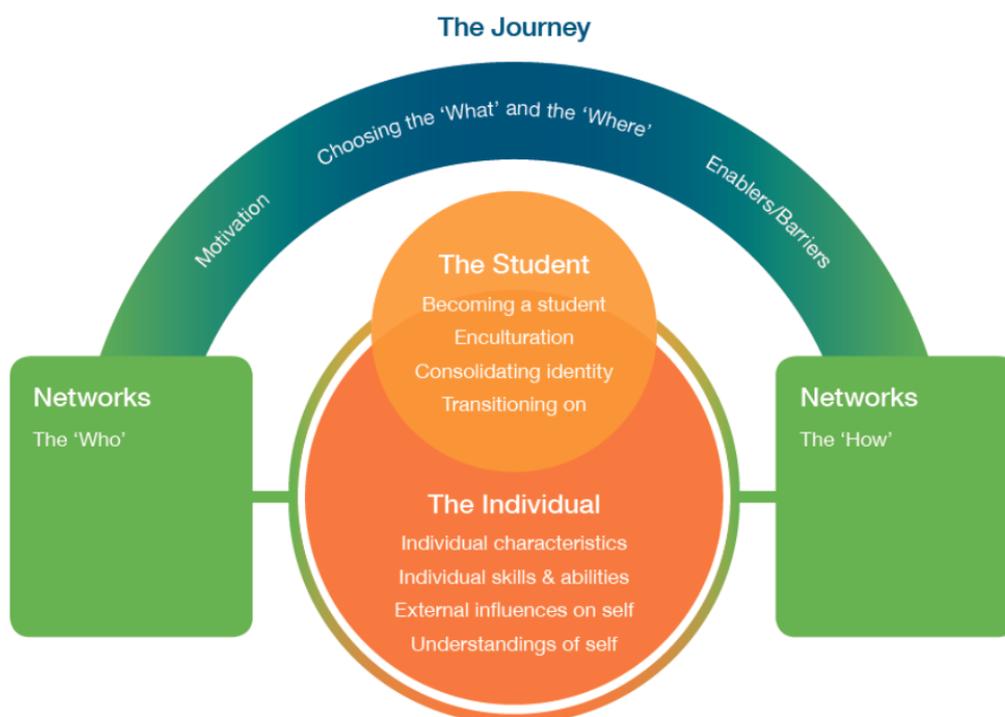


Figure 2: Conceptual framework of the four key themes

A copy of the annotated bibliography can be found in Appendix A.

### 3.2 SSEE Survey Report

The data presented in this report was taken from further statistical analysis of data originally collected for the Staff and Student Experience and Expectations (SSEE) project. As mentioned previously the SSEE project consisted of two surveys; the first survey was given to commencing students in order to measure their expectations. The second survey, of equal length and similar construction, was provided to students in the middle of the academic year and was intended to measure their actual student experience. The surveys were administered to students across the three major universities in South Australia (i.e. the University of Adelaide, Flinders University and the University of South Australia) at the beginning of the 2010, 2011 and 2012 academic years, for commencing students. A slightly modified version of the survey was given in the middle of Semester 2 of 2010 and 2011 for continuing students in the same institutions. Not all students in the continuing students group were first years and not all had undertaken the commencing student survey; however all students completing the commencing student survey indicated they had only just started their university studies. Only undergraduate student responses were analysed in this work. Over 16,800 students responded to the survey indicating a response rate of 25%. Of this total cohort 5,301 were first in family students and it is this cohort's expectations and experiences of university that we have further analysed.

The survey consisted of four sections. The first section included demographic questions such as the students' path to university, their type of secondary schooling and their field of study. Student responses were matched to expected performance, as measured by Australian tertiary admission rank (ATAR) (where available) and learning outcomes, as measured by grade point average (GPA).

Section two of the survey had multiple choice questions examining students' understanding of university such as the number of hours they needed to study per week, how quickly they expected to receive assignments back after submission and how much time university academics devoted to teaching. The third section consisted of 5-point Likert style questions examining students' conceptions of university life, influences on their decision to attend university and perceived differences between secondary school and university. The final section asked three open-ended questions regarding the reasons the student wanted to study, factors that made them feel better prepared, and key factors that made their university experience successful.

An analysis of student responses from the earlier survey has been conducted using a number of statistical tests (including Chi-square, ANOVA,  $\chi^2$  test and Mann Whitney test, according to the nature of the data and for verification of results) for the purpose of identifying differences between FiF and non-FiF expectations and experiences in their first year at university as well as differences between school leaver and mature age FiF students' responses.

### 3.2.1 Respondent Demographics

Table 3: Survey respondents' demographics, comparing school leaver and mature age FiF and non-FiF students

Variable updated	Response rate (%)			
	Non-FiF		FiF	
	School leaver	Mature age	School leaver	Mature age
<b>Background characteristics</b>				
• Gender – female	65.8%	66.0%	69.0%	70.7%
• Mature Age > 21 years		23.4%**		15.3%**
<b>Distribution across three Universities</b>				
• UniSA	27.7%	39.4%	33.8%	39.8%
• Adelaide	48.2%	25.6%	36.1%	19.8%
• Flinders	24.1%	35.0%	30.2%	40.4%
<b>Current living arrangements</b>				
With my parents	71.4%	23.7%	64.6%	15.9%
<b>Pre-university background</b>				
<b>Completed high school</b>				
• in South Australia	87.0%	72.9%	88.5%	73.6%
• Interstate	5.8%	12.4%	5.8%	11.6%
• Overseas	6.0%	14.8%	5.7%	14.8%
<b>High School type</b>				
• Rural	23.4%	22.2%	32.0%	26.4%
• Catholic	23.3%	14.2%	23.9%	14.7%
• Independent	31.2%	17.8%	21.9%	9.8%
• Public	43.5%	66.1%	51.8%	73.4%
Made decision to attend university before Year 11	76.4%	17.0%	69.1%	10.4%
Enrolled in first preference degree	78.3%	82.4%	77.1%	83.8%
Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR Score out of 100) (median)	<b>89.45</b> (IQR: 79.15 – 96.2)	<b>75.5</b> (IQR: 60.0 – 87.5)	<b>84.4</b> (IQR: 73.75 – 93.05)	<b>72.0</b> (IQR: 60.0 – 85.0)
Grade Point Average (GPA) (median)	<b>5.25</b> (IQR: 4.63 – 5.88)	<b>5.29</b> (IQR: 4.70 – 6.00)	<b>5.00</b> (IQR: 4.44 – 5.63)	<b>5.2</b> (IQR: 4.50 – 5.88)

An example of some of the key results that arose from the analysis includes:

### 3.2.2 Demographic Analysis

- Survey respondents were predominantly school leaver students, with only 23% of non-FiF respondents and 15% of FiF respondents considered as mature age.
- More FiF students attended Flinders University (36%) and the University of South Australia (35%) than the University of Adelaide (24%). Conversely, the University of Adelaide had the highest proportion of non-FiF school leavers (48.2%).
- School leaver FiF respondents were less likely to live with their parents (64.6%) than non-FiF students (74.1%).
- Generally, mature age respondents were less likely to live with parents than school leaver students but FiF mature age students were still less likely (15.9%) than mature age non-FiF students (23.7%).
- More FiF respondents attended a public high school than non-FiF respondents (School leaver non-FiF 43.5% vs. FiF 51.8%); the mature age FiF respondents were the most likely (73.4%) to attend a public school.
- More FiF respondents (30%) attended a rural high school than non-FiF respondents (22%).
- Non-FiF school leavers were most likely (76%) to make the decision to attend university before Year 11. Conversely, the FiF mature age respondents were least likely (10%) to make this decision to attend university before Year 11.
- The non-FiF respondents typically had higher ATARs and GPAs than the FiF respondents.
- For both the FiF and non-FiF respondents, school leaver students had higher ATAR and GPA scores than the mature age students.
- However, it is notable that the difference in GPA for both FiF and non-FiF respondents were smaller than the differences in their initial ATAR which suggests that if FiF students are given the opportunity and support they can succeed as well as non-FiF students. This analysis also supports recent national discussions that suggest ATAR is not a good indicator of university success (Cervini, 2013; Messinis, 2015).

**Recommendation:** that first in family students are provided with specific resources that provide ‘just-in-time and ‘just-for-me’ transition support. These resources should include information on time management and study skills as well as information on how to access the support services available at university.

### 3.2.3 Program Area Analysis

- The majority of students were enrolled into their first preference degree, with mature age students more likely to be enrolled into their first preference than school leavers (school leaver FiF 71.1% vs. mature age FiF 83.8%).

- However there was a difference in the type of degree that FiF students enrolled into in comparison to non-FiF students.
  - Significantly more FiF students than non-FiF students enrolled in:
    - Nursing
    - Education
    - Management and Commerce, and
    - Society and Culture.
  - Significantly more non-FiF students than FiF students enrolled in:
    - Mathematics
    - Science (for the continuing and mature age respondents)
    - Engineering
    - Medicine
    - Health Science, and
    - Law and Legal Studies.
- These patterns persisted for the different data category breakdowns by age.
- There were significant differences in all data category breakdowns as well as in the school leaver vs. mature age analysis and Commencing vs. Continuing analysis.

**Recommendation:** Further research could be conducted on why first in family students select particular programs and institutions.

**Recommendation:** Universities expand their outreach into the community and schools to inform potential first in family students of the breadth of programs and career pathways available to them.

### 3.2.4 Reasons for Choosing Degree Program

Table 4: Commencing students' reasons for selecting their degree program

Reason (Note: students could select more than one reason)	FiF		Non-FiF	
	School leaver	Mature age	School leaver	Mature age
Continue in an area already started	15.5%	27.9%	18.0%	27.5%
Did not get first preference	10.5%	6.1%	10.2%	5.9%
Develop talent and creativity	24.0%	19.8%	23.5%	19.2%
Expectations of family and/or friends	10.5%	4.0%	12.2%	4.5%
Gain entry to another degree program	13.9%	13.6%	13.9%	11.7%
Get specific job training	28.8%	28.6%	28.1%	30.5%
Improve job prospects/earning potential	38.0%	53.1%	38.9%	52.0%
Interest	80.7%	62.0%	78.9%	63.9%
Recommendations of teachers	13.4%	4.9%	12.3%	3.8%

- The main reason that all respondents selected their degree program was interest. For school leaver FiF respondents, interest was 80.7%, with improving job prospects/ earning potential second highest at 38%. For mature age respondents interest was at 62% with improving job prospects/ earning potential a close second at 53.1%. These trends were similar across the non-FiF respondents.
- Expectations of family or friends were highest for the school leaver non-FiF respondents.

### 3.2.5 Commencing Students' Expectations of University

First in family respondents generally relied more on friends, university websites and university recruiting material to shape their expectations of what university would be like. They relied significantly less on parents and primary caregivers and older siblings than non-FiF respondents.

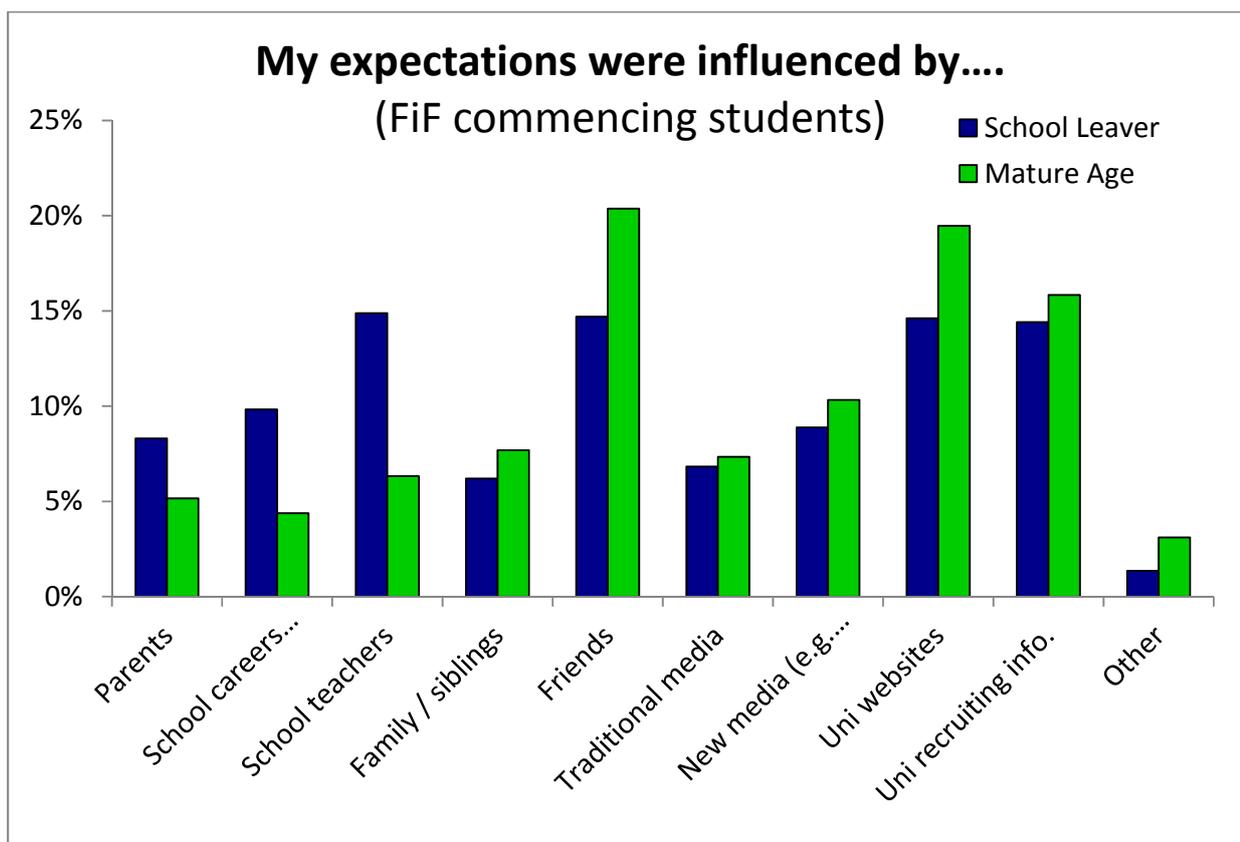


Figure 3: What shaped mature age and school leaver commencing students' expectations of university

**Recommendation:** That universities and academic staff ensure that information regarding university systems and structures is made explicit to all commencing students so that first in family students who do not have the benefit of intergenerational knowledge of university systems and structures are provided with advice and support about how to navigate these systems and structures.

### 3.2.6 Expected Study Time

- Typically Commencing FiF respondents expected to study more than the Commencing non-FiF respondents. This trend persisted when the data was broken down by age.
- The greatest proportion of respondents expecting to study the most per week (i.e. 20+ hours) were the mature age FiF students.
- Conversely, the greatest proportion of respondents expecting to study 1 to 3 hours per week belonged to the non-FiF school leaver students.

These patterns suggest that FiF students have a more realistic expectation of the amount of study required to be successful at university. However, it is **recommended** that the additional time required for self-directed study is made explicit to all students in their first few weeks of their program of study with some guidance as to how to use that time productively.

### 3.2.7 Having Friends Attending the Same University

- There were significant differences between the Continuing FiF and non-FiF respondents as well as between the FiF and non-FiF Commencing school leavers and the Commencing mature age

respondents.

- For the Continuing FiF vs. non-FiF analysis:
  - Significantly more of the Continuing FiF students do not have friends attending the same university.
  - Significantly more of the Continuing non-FiF respondents have friends attending the same university and enrolled in the same program or attending the same university but enrolled in a different degree/program.

**Recommendation:** That opportunities to build friendships and social networks are embedded within orientation programs and the first year curriculum to encourage FiF students to make friends and build peer relationships.

### 3.2.8 Expected Performance of the Commencing Respondents

- Significantly more Commencing FiF respondents expected to perform much better or better at university.
- Conversely, a significantly greater proportion of Commencing Non-FiF respondents expected to perform about the same at university.

### 3.2.9 Reported Performance of the Continuing Respondents

- There were differences in overall distributions of reported performances for the Continuing FiF and non-FiF students. In particular:
  - More Continuing FiF respondents reported their university performance as
    - much better, or better.
  - More Continuing Non-FiF respondents reported their university performance as about the same as at High School.

First in family students expected their performance at university to be better than in high school and this was borne out in their actual experience.

### 3.2.10 Enthusiastic Teachers

Both school leaver and mature age FiF continuing respondents reported learning more in classes taught by enthusiastic teachers.

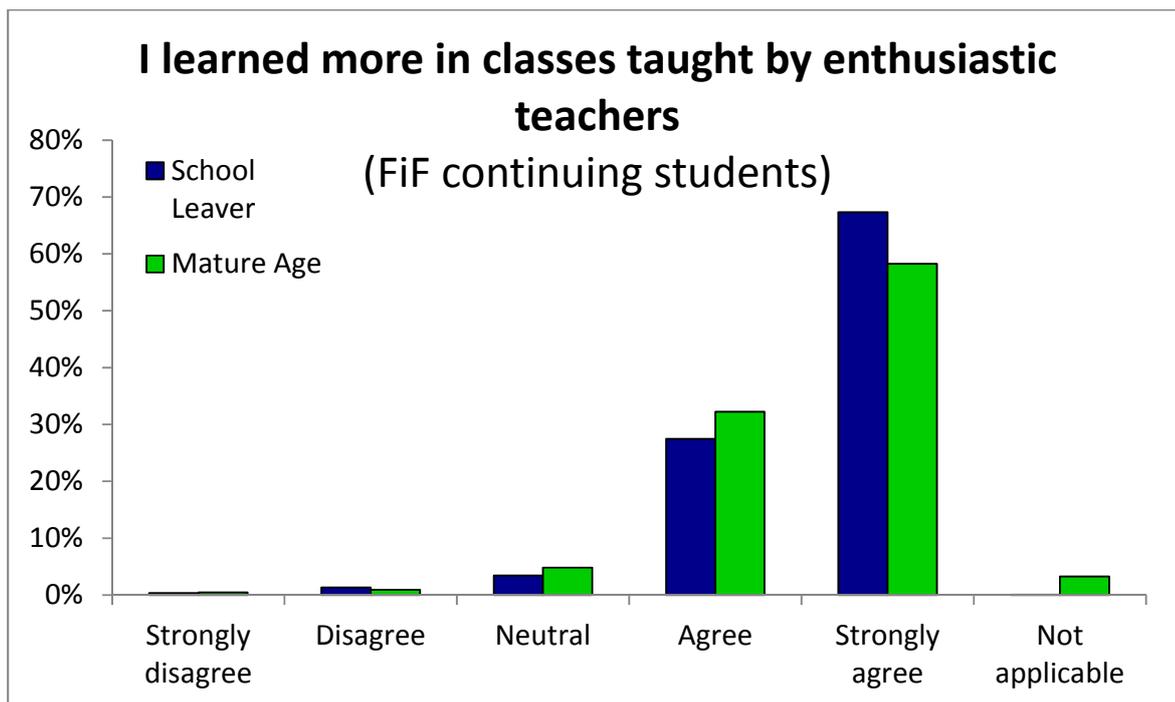


Figure 4: FiF continuing students’ agreement that they learned more in classes taught by enthusiastic teachers

**Recommendation:** That academic staff approach their teaching with enthusiasm as this strongly influences both students’ enjoyment and their learning outcomes.

An extended summary of the school leaver and mature age Survey Report can be found in Appendix C.

### 3.3 Narrative Case Studies and Cameo Development

Eighteen FiF students from each of the participating institutions who had participated in the surveys in 2010-2012 were approached to share their experience of attending university through participation in semi-structured interviews. Questions asked in the interviews were related to the themes identified through the development of the annotated bibliography.

A copy of the interview questions can be found in Appendix D.

Of the 18 participants selected for interview, nine were identified (three each from a different program across each of the participating universities) for the purpose of constructing narrative cameos that would provide a rich and in-depth exploration of their experiences. Selection of the nine cameos was conducted on the basis of those with characteristics that were in common with those indicated in the literature and who had characteristics in common with one another and therefore were representative of factors the researchers believed were relevant to first in family students. The nine participants who were not included for cameo representation had characteristics that were more unusual, for example one began university in their late sixties; another had seven children and yet another was an international student. The researchers felt that these characteristics, while interesting and valuable to the project overall, would add a degree of complexity to the cameos that would tend to represent the unique aspects of these individual students rather than enable a composite of common traits across

the nine cameos to be developed.

The table below identifies the demographics of the nine narrative cameos.

*Table 5: Demographics of the nine cameo participants*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	University	School Leaver (SL) or Mature Age (MA)	Discipline
Brian	M	<25	Adelaide	SL	Mathematics
Denise	F	36-45	Adelaide	MA	Psychology
Jen	F	26-35	Adelaide	MA	Arts (Advanced)
Sue	F	<25	Flinders	SL	Tourism
Roxie	F	26-35	Flinders	MA	Speech Pathology
Marg	F	36-45	Flinders	MA	Government Policy
Todd	M	<25	UniSA	SL	Journalism/ International Relations
Brendon	M	<25	UniSA	SL	Law/ Management
Alison	F	<25	UniSA	SL	Graphic Design

### 3.4 Key Findings Information Brochures

A series of ‘key findings’ have been developed as products of this project for the purposes of:

- enhancing and disseminating practical knowledge and advice for FiF students contemplating and/or undertaking university study; and
- disseminating and promoting guidelines and recommendations for university staff and policy makers on how best to support FiF students at university.

The key findings series (see Appendix F) consists of the following:

- **Key findings 1:** First in Family – School Leavers
- **Key findings 2:** First in Family – Mature Age Students
- **Key findings 3:** Advice to Educators of FiF Students

- **Key findings 4:** Advice to Professional Staff
- **Key findings 5:** Advice to Family and Friends of FiF Students

### 3.5 First in Family Website

The project website (<http://exploringfif.weebly.com/>) was developed to support dissemination of the project's outputs. It includes information about the project team and the reference panel; the project details (its aims and purpose); the various milestones of the project; and the resources. The resources include the annotated bibliography; PowerPoint slides from presentations; the key findings brochures; the cameos; and other publications that the project team has authored as a result of the research. The website also provides links to other research websites so that visitors may refer to a range of valuable resources related to FiF students.

### 3.6 Project Dissemination Activities

The dissemination activities that the project team has engaged in throughout the life of the project to engage with key stakeholders are listed below, together with a list of projected outcomes to demonstrate how the project team plans to carry forward the outcomes and deliverables.

### 3.6.1 Seminar Presentations

Table 6: Seminar presentations on the FiF project

Date	Title of presentation	Where	Audience and purpose	Number of participants
23 Sept 2014	Exploring the experience of being 'first in family'	UniSA	School of Health Sciences Research week. Purpose: to inform key researchers of project aims	85
23 October 2014	A qualitative lens – exploring first in family students' stories	Flinders	School of Education Post Graduate Student Seminars Purpose: to provide an insight into the project and its methodology	25
18 May 2015	'I always wanted to be at university but I wasn't sure it was for me': First in family students' experience of success at university.	UoA	Academics and Professional Staff from the three major Universities in SA. Purpose: to share key findings and gain stakeholder feedback on project outcomes.	20
18 May 2015	Celebration event: Outcomes of the First in Family Project:	UniSA	Interview participants and family and friends. Purpose: to thank participants for their input and to share key findings and gain participant feedback on project outcomes.	14
25 May 2015	'I always wanted to be at university but I wasn't sure it was for me.' First in family students' experience of success at university.	Flinders	Academics and Professional Staff from the three major Universities in SA. Purpose: to share key findings and gain stakeholder feedback on project outcomes.	18
11 June 2015	Outcomes of the First in Family Project	Flinders	First Year Teaching and Transition Advisory Group – staff with an advisory role in teaching first year students. Purpose: To inform key staff of the project and our findings – and to alert them that the report is forthcoming.	18

### 3.6.2 Conference Presentations and Publications

The following conference papers and publications have been submitted:

- 'Beyond the economics, benefit and cost of higher education: First in family student perspectives' Peer reviewed accepted for the Students, Transitions, Achievement, Retention & Success (STARS) conference 1-4 July 2015. Crown Convention Centre, Melbourne.
- 'One ambition I've always had is for when I have a family not to have to be 'stretched' like my

mum was: Being First in Family: Motivations and Metaphors' Peer reviewed abstract accepted for the 39th HERDSA International conference Learning for life and work in a complex world 6-9 July 2015, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre.

- 'First in family students – what they say about being at university' Peer reviewed paper accepted for the Students, Transitions, Achievement, Retention & Success (STARS) conference 1-4 July 2015. Crown Convention Centre, Melbourne.
- Participation in panel titled 'Bridging the Gap – From Secondary Schools and other pathways to Higher Education' at the STARS conference (see above), will use this opportunity to distribute Key Findings.
- 'Exploring the experience of being first in family in higher education: contemporary findings from literature between 2000 and 2014'. Journal paper submitted to Higher education Research and Development (HERD) Journal, May 2014.
- 'Transforming the self: first in family students' experiences of success'. Peer reviewed abstract accepted for the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) conference 29 Nov–3 Dec 2015, Fremantle, WA.
- 'Choosing and experiencing university: student voices'. Member of Symposium submission for Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) conference 29 Nov–3 Dec 2015. Fremantle, WA.

### 3.6.3 Future Planned Dissemination Activities

- One paper presentation at the National Association of Enabling Educators (NAEE) conference, 26-29 November 2015, UWS, Sydney.
- Three further manuscripts to be developed from key findings.
- Invited workshop for University of South Australia on supporting first in family students (invitation issued by Deputy Director: Student Experience).
- Follow up seminar planned for 22 October to Flinders University School of Education Post Graduate Students and interested staff, on research outcomes.
- Invited presentation at the Heads of Students Administrators(HOSA) and Directors of Student Services (DOSSA) conference, 19 August 2015, Stamford Plaza Adelaide.

## 4. Findings

There were seven emergent topics arising from our research, which are discussed in detail below.

### 4.1 Motivations and Ambitions

The factors that influence FiF students' decisions to enrol, attend and continue at university, including their realisation of initial aspirations and ambitions, were identified through the literature review and development of the annotated bibliography and supported in our current research findings.

*Main reason I came to university ... because my dad always talked about the fact that he missed the opportunity ... he thought "oh it's just more classes"... he didn't like school ... he always talked about regretting it because he never knew. So from an early age ... I had this idea ... that university is not the same as school, it opens up opportunities. My dad is very big on do whatever you want to do ... Just do something that you enjoy doing ... I enjoy mathematics ... (parents) very supportive ... very, very supportive. I had a couple of good maths teachers who were very keen on the idea (university) ... they could see students who were very smart and they help us towards university because they saw a lot of potential to do really well.*

*Brian*

*I'd always wanted to attend university when I first left school and for various reasons life just got in the way ... then part of my work development supported me so I thought "it's now or never".*

*Marg*

Researchers (Deci & Flaste, 1995; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Reeve, 2005; Schunk & Pajares, 2002; Zeldin & Pajares, 2000) agree that behaviour is influenced by personal factors (motivation or internal factors) and by environmental factors (external factors or outside influences). Sansone and Harackiewicz (2000) define motivation as a behaviour that is directed by the need or desire to achieve particular outcomes: "motivation energizes and guides one's behaviour toward reaching a particular goal in life" (Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000, p. 2). In our project, we discovered that a key causal factor was that the participants all wanted a better life for themselves. These aspirations could be subdivided into various components – career betterment or advancement, financial freedom from parental or other income sources, and the improvement of post-graduation job prospects. This is evident in numerous qualitative studies that narrate low SES FiF students aspirations with comments such as "I don't want to live pay check to pay check" (Banks-Santilli, 2014); "growing up with no money makes you want to have money" (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003) and "my parents don't want to see me suffer working in a factory" (Lehmann, 2009).

A study conducted by Chapman (2013) involving mature age FiF students found that many participants who had previously spent time in the workforce decided to return to university due to an inability to progress their career without possessing formal qualifications. These findings concurred with a study by Fleming and Finnegan (2011) which found that a number of participants had faced impediments to job promotions and believed that a degree would lead to enhanced employment prospects. Della, Fazey and Fazey (2001) report that self-perceived confidence in student learners' own competence is a key motivator for engagement and ambition:

*Autonomous people are intrinsically-motivated, perceive themselves to be in control of their decision-making, take responsibility for the outcomes of their actions and have confidence in themselves [...] Many authors link these characteristics to the sense of self which enables autonomous people to act within a personal belief system, providing them with the framework for their decision-making and*

*personal planning. (pp. 345-6)*

Many FiF students display a remarkably high level of autonomy. FiF students come to university with significant pre-existing motivational strengths often drawn from prior challenging circumstances and life experiences that assist them in thriving at university. Benson, Heagney, Hewitt, Crosling & Devos (2012) and Devlin and O'Shea (2011) also maintain that although FiF students may have deficits in some areas of academic skills, possession of strong personal characteristics such as motivation, perseverance and determination can be attributed to academic success. In their study on Australian Indigenous students DiGregorio, Farrington & Page (2000) define this mixture of positive personal attributes and low self-efficacy displayed through self-doubt as 'vulnerable determination' consisting of a determination to succeed that is easily frustrated due to an awareness of gaps in academic skills and leading to self-doubt. In analysing the traits of non-traditional students who persisted with higher education, Fleming and Finnegan (2011) identified resilience as a personal attribute that contributed towards FiF student academic success. FiF students frequently use comments such as 'I am going to do what it takes': this is a key indication of their motivations and ambitions.

#### 4.1.1 Catalyst for a Better Life

Of those students in this study who revealed details of their background: four participants had been brought up in a single parent family; four had come from a rural location; and others stated they had grown up in a low SES household with eight indicating they came from poorer or working-class backgrounds.

*One ambition I've always had is for when I have a family, not to be stretched like my mum was.  
Carl*

*Growing up in, never financially struggling, but an environment where money goes on necessities rather than luxuries. And I think just financial independence and freedom would be good.  
Brendon*

*A lot of girls that I did high school with have finished high school and then they haven't studied, they haven't worked, many have had a kid soon afterwards and they're living off the system and I didn't want to do that.  
Gail*

Motivations indicated by participants in our research study included: wanting a better paid job or financial security; an interest in learning or passion for the subject area; a desire to help people; enjoyment; and self-improvement. Others perceived the need for more abstract changes to take place in their lives – in this sense, university can be seen as a life catalyst, providing an opportunity for the individual to achieve something that was previously denied them by other competing circumstances (family, money, illness, caring responsibilities, etc.) We argue that many of the FiF students in our project display a remarkably high level of autonomy. FiF students come to university with significant pre-existing motivational strengths often drawn from prior challenging circumstances and life experience that assist them in thriving at university. Benson et al., (2012) and Devlin and O'Shea (2011) also maintain that although FiF students may have deficits in some areas of academic skills, possession of strong personal characteristics such as motivation, perseverance and determination can be attributed to academic success.

The motivation to achieve a better life was particularly evident amongst mature age students whose responses reflected a notion that attending university would provide greater opportunities for the future. Their reasons included wanting to improve their chances of promotion; desiring a better life after taking a redundancy package; or being bored by their office job.

### 4.1.2 Overcoming Challenges of Competing Demands

The pathways into tertiary education necessitate a series of multiple and complex decisions: the decision to attend, the courses to choose, the institution to choose, and so on. Once enrolled at a specific institution, these complex and interlinked factors continue, as FiF students grapple with the reality of a full-time course load and external factors (often equally time-consuming family and work circumstances) with subsequent challenges arising from competing work and life demands (Baker, Brown & Fazey, 2006; Bowl, 2001; Henderson, Noble & George-Walker, 2009) that often contribute to higher attrition rates for FiF students in comparison to their intergenerational peers (Ishitani, 2003).

*I'm quite organised, I am a compulsive list maker, set myself targets and time frames because I have too, I've got teenage kids, a house to run, a full-time job.*  
Marg

*I would say I'm a dedicated student in so far as that I don't just want to get a degree, I'd say as a student I want to learn more skills, I want to get better at what I do and as a person I suppose I want to develop as a person.*  
Brendon

The fact that FiF students are able to overcome these challenges was confirmed by our own research. Statistical analysis of the SSEE project data confirmed that more FiF continuing students strongly agreed that they were able to combine study with paid work (Chiera & Schultz, 2014, 53).

One participant, Nina, discussed how she tries to balance her life between university and her children:

*I do lots of work between 4am and 7am. So I get up early and get stuff done that needs to be done ... you've got to have priorities – my priorities, obviously, is obviously my family. And then you need to sort of fit around that. Luckily being part-time – I'm doing one subject at the moment, so it's not massive ... setting out days that I can specifically do Uni things and days where it's kid things and everything else.*

### 4.1.3 Influence of Life's Events

Rasmussen (2006) emphasises that timing of the decision to enrol also varies amongst this cohort, with some returning later in life and others following the more traditional pathway from high school. As shown in our own SSEE study and other research, the early expectation of attending university by FiF students is generally lower than their intergenerational peers, with Engle (2007) claiming that only 68% of FiF students planned to continue to study after high school in comparison to 91% of intergenerational students. Two recent Australian studies found that for non-traditional FiF students that do not enrol immediately after high school, a life crisis, external influences or change of personal circumstance often led them to pursue higher education (Benson et al., 2010; O'Shea & Stone, 2014).

Rowan made the following comments which indicated his decision was influenced by life events:

*(Decision to go to uni?) It was in Year 10 ... there was subject selections and my counsellor actually refused to sign off ... On my selections and called an interview with my parents ... Said that I would be wasting myself ... that then changed my SACE schooling into more of an academic base.*  
Carl

*Left high school, worked pretty much in a variety of different jobs ... my parents were part of a group that didn't allow group members to go to university, so until I left that church group I wasn't going to university ... it wasn't until the birth of my daughter that things changed. I had friends who said "look you're smart enough, you should go to uni." I made that decision to go in 2011, she was born in the middle of 2010 so there was that sort of motivation.*

For Denise, going to university was the chance to “redeem herself” (her words). She had felt compelled by family expectations to follow a particular path, and after a while she realised that she was dissatisfied, and wanted to go to university to push herself:

*No I just wanted to get out in the wide world, I got a job on my 15th birthday and just worked, and I was in the world and getting married and all that sort of stuff. Then all of a sudden everything just changed.*

For Roxie, her initial motivation to attend university came from her boss who indicated that the company she worked for wanted to promote her and a prerequisite for promotion was working towards a relevant university qualification. Roxie recounted the conversation with her boss as it included a compelling message pertaining to Roxie’s father who had died six months earlier and who had wanted

Roxie to go to university. As these three interviewees reinforce, the decision to attend university, and the motivating factors behind it, for FiF students is often compelling, emotionally cathartic, and based on wanting a better future for themselves and those closest to them.

*Why UniSA? Flinders no, purely because of distance ... I liked the idea of UniSA, it looked a bit more innovative ... I think Adelaide is more associated with the theoretical side of things ... I just think UniSA seemed a better fit for me. And particularly with law being trimester system.*  
Brendon

*Why UniSA? City West because it's easy to get to.*  
Kerry

*I've always loved this place [The University of Adelaide North Terrace campus] like architecturally it's beautiful and I thought if I ever went to uni I'd really like to go here because I really loved it, and always had, as a teenager had a love for this place. So I guess it didn't really matter what I studied as long as I was here basically.*  
Denise

#### 4.1.4 Proximity of Campus

Globally, proximity of campus was a common reason provided by FiF students when explaining why they applied to specific universities (Engle, 2007; Gorard, 2006; O'Shea, 2007; Reay, David & Ball, 2005). An example of this aspect can be found in a study by O'Shea (2007) in which female FiF students attending a regional Australian university campus explained that the close proximity of campus provided a familiar environment, and therefore offered an additional incentive to participate in higher education. Further findings of the benefits that closeness of campus proximity provide are derived from a UK study conducted by Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) which consisted of a longitudinal study of non-traditional students. The authors reported benefits that comprised of a reduction of costs to attend university through living at home, reduction in travel costs or support from networks with childcare. Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) found similar results in their comparative analysis, stating that FiF students base their choice of institutions on their worldviews and are therefore more likely to select local universities to which they feel more connected, in comparison to intergenerational students who demonstrated a broader understanding of the implications of university choice.

Our research found that there were a range of reasons for choosing a specific university. Pragmatic choices were based on the proximity of the university in relation to where the student lived or it was the only institution in South Australia to offer the program they wished to study. While a small number of the FiF students (not the majority) discussed the importance of attending what they believed was a more reputable institution, the more common perspective was for FiF students to choose a university that was a ‘good fit for them’. For example, Brendon rejected one university on the basis of its distance from his home and another because it was not contemporary enough (less innovative and more theoretical).

#### 4.1.5 Different Perceptions on Costs of Studying

Distinct from students in the US and UK, Rasmussen (2006) contends that low income Australian students express concern regarding associated costs of study such as living expenses and travel, but have negligible concern about tuition fees, a factor that the author attributes towards Australia's current Higher Education Contribution Scheme<sup>1</sup> (HECS) which allows students to defer repayments through the taxation system (Gale & Parker, 2013). In contrast, Banks-Santilli (2014) claims that concern regarding tuition and application fees influence US FiF students choice of institution, resulting in enrolments in less selective institutions despite qualification for entry into higher ranking universities. Findings which concur with the earlier study conducted by Lohfink and Paulsen (2005). Similarly Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) found that attitudes towards tuition debt and associated study costs such as living expenses influence working class British FiF students study choices, conclusions supported by a study conducted by Callender and Jackson (2008) that determined that low socioeconomic UK students are more likely to perceive higher education as a debt as opposed to an investment.

The financial costs involved in attending university were also found to be a relevant factor in our study. These costs and their effects are covered in detail in section 4.2.

#### 4.1.6 Influence of Friends, Family and Peers

Our research found that the encouragement of teachers, family and friends was also crucial in helping FiF students decide to attend university. Jen stated that her boss encouraged her to attend, although she was initially reluctant:

*I bombed at the end of high school [...] So I shied away from going into university, climbed the ladder as much as I could through going into admin [...] and my boss at the time said to me have you thought about going to university? And of course I always had because I've always loved learning but it just never felt like much of an option.*

This is a common theme across many of the interviews. Students who initially felt that they did not belong at university (the so-called 'imposter syndrome', which will be discussed in more detail later in the report, under heading 4.5.3) or felt that it was a place that they were unable to access were often given the impetus to apply to university from work colleagues or bosses who had spotted their potential and encouraged them to embrace their intellectual curiosity. Rowan also discussed how the support of friends helped and encouraged him. He recalled:

*I had friends who said "Look you're smart enough, you should go to uni, you're actually a really smart*

*I wasted high school, honestly. I really didn't knuckle down like I should have at high school.*

*Kerry*

*I'd forgotten what I did in high school – which probably wasn't much.*

*Nina*

*I had a lot of friends and distractions at high school.*

*Denise*

*I'd never been a good student in high school because I was otherwise concerned with other things. ... I was no longer willing to be told what to do by anyone, that then just got worse and worse and worse throughout high school. I became less and less and less interested in academics, more and more and more interested in drug abuse, boys whatever I could get myself into trouble with, live music, playing eight ball all that fun stuff.*

*Roxie*

<sup>1</sup> Proposed Government changes to Australia's university funding model may alter future student attitudes.

*guy, you should just go on and do whatever you want to do”.*

Roxie, who identified as an ex-drug addict, said with pride:

*So to go from repeated drug overdoses and nearly dying to finishing university, my friends are astonished, they’re really proud of me.*

Overall, the motivations were diverse and wide-ranging – from a better-paid job to more job security, from an interest in learning or passion for the subject area to a desire to help people. Thus it is not just financial betterment or improvement that motivates students (although that is a key factor); rather, issues of altruism, personal development and a deep love of learning for learning’s sake (that has often had to be concealed, marginalised, sidelined, or ignored altogether due to other external factors) are key drivers for FiF attendance at university. Jen, who responded as follows when asked why she was attending university, best captures all of these overlapping and interweaving components:

*I use the idea of it being career advancement to justify going to university [...] but going to uni is just the emotional driver. I love to learn ... it’s like nirvana.*

Both school leaver and mature age FiF students reported their expectations of university being less influenced by family and older siblings than non-FiF students (35% vs. 65%). Mature age FiF students’ expectations were more likely to be influenced by friends and university websites or recruiting information, whilst school leaver FiF students’ expectations also included school teachers as a primary influence (as illustrated in Figure 5 below).

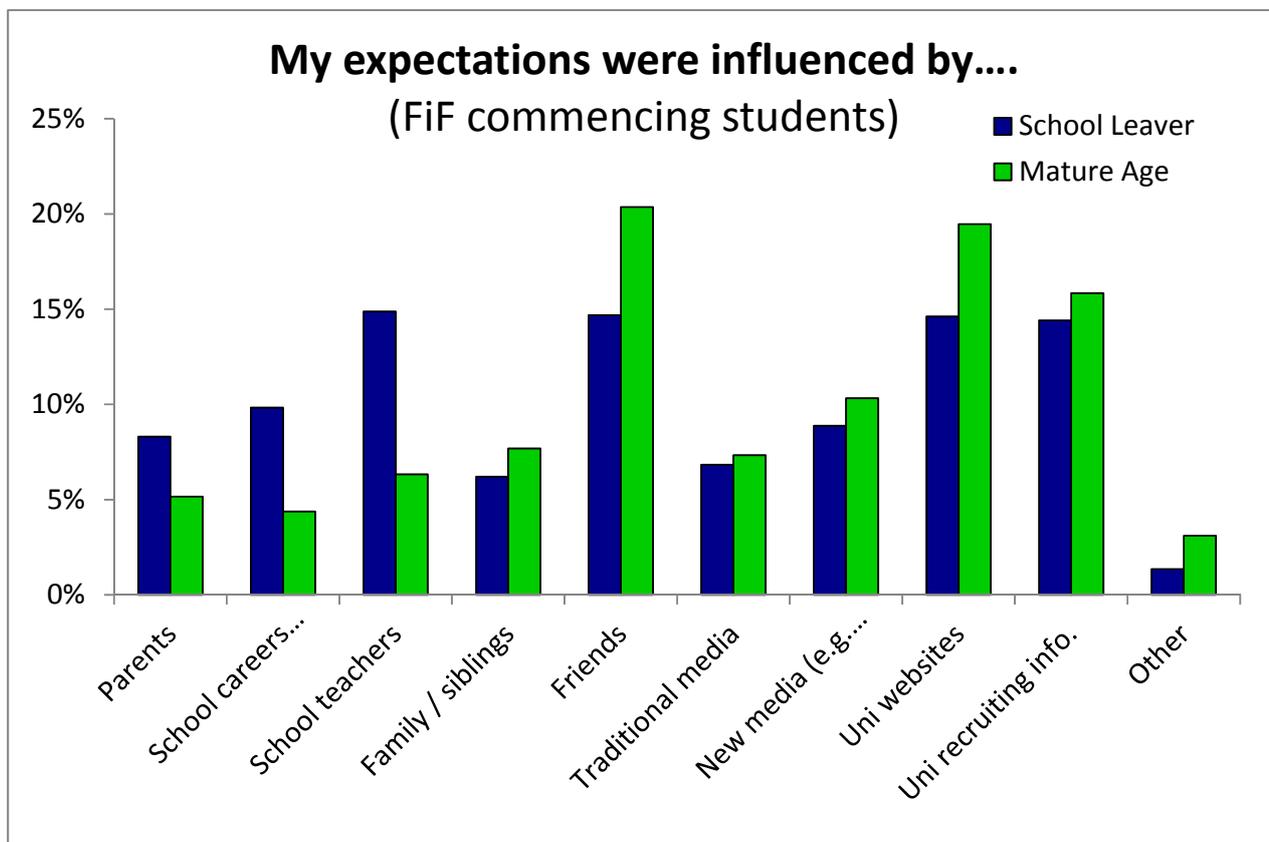


Figure 5: Factors shaping commencing school leaver and mature age FiF students’ expectations of

*what university would be like*

**Recommendation:** That university professional and academic staff make the effort to get to know their student(s) and discuss their motivations for attending university, their initial aspirations, their hopes and fears, and their ultimate ambitions.

## 4.2 Costs and Constraints

Similar to their non-FiF counterparts, the costs and constraints of attending university for FiF students have multiple layers, enmeshed with personal circumstances. Key demographic factors that have a significant association with university costs and constraints include being from rural Australia and relocating for study purposes, coming from a low socioeconomic background and having limited family resources, or being a mature age student with family and household responsibilities (Gale & Tranter, 2011; James, Bexley & Maxwell, 2008; Stone & O'Shea, 2013).

### 4.2.1 Cost of Living: Rural FiF Students

Based on the quantitative data collected through the SSEE project, 25% of FiF students surveyed came from rural backgrounds. Of the 17 participants interviewed, four relocated from rural Australia and discussed the financial challenges for both themselves and their families. All four students were traditional school leavers, having completed high school and continuing on to university, with two participants delaying commencement for the purposes of taking a gap year. The reason behind the gap year varied, with Carl working full-time for the year in order to save money to finance his relocation to Adelaide, whilst Sue took the time to travel overseas. On commencing university, three of the rural students moved into shared rental accommodation with friends from their rural hometowns, whilst one chose to live in a residential college. Notably Brian, a student who initially lived in the residential college, commented on the pressure he felt.

*Coming from the country and having your parents invest a lot of money in you coming to university, I think there's slightly more pressure ... the idea of making sure I got scholarships and prizes that would help the finances helped me going when the study is difficult at times. So the financial side of things definitely puts pressure on you to work harder.*

Brian's comments express the sense of responsibility and desire for independence that FiF students often experience, particularly where financial support is being provided by the family (James et al., 2010).

With the exception of Brian, all three rural students mentioned the necessity to receive government income support to assist meeting their financial requirements.

*Financially it was quite difficult. I did get a bit of money from Centrelink for moving out which helped a lot. My parents paid my rent and then the fortnightly money that Centrelink gave me went into food and bills. My parents were great; they also had one of those ASG scholarships so whenever I was really low they just took it out of that. (Alison)*

Carl discussed a number of eligibility restrictions that resulted in increased financial hardship, including the loss of eligibility to receive the government relocation scholarship as a result of his classification as an 'independent' due to his working gap year, a loss of support which Carl estimated to be worth approximately \$4000.

Alongside general and study related expenditure incurred by a majority of students, which are

discussed further, Alison highlighted the additional cost encountered for some rural students through regular travel back to her rural hometown. Or in Sue's case, regular travel that her mother made from her rural hometown to Adelaide. Important visits that provided essential social support from friends and families (Coffman, 2011), particularly in the pivotal first year transition that often results in higher attrition rates for FiF students (Ishitani, 2003).

#### 4.2.2 Cost of Living: Metropolitan FiF Students

Findings from the SSEE project found that 65% of school leaver FiF students still live at home compared with 71% of non-FiF students. However this number dropped significantly when looking at the mature aged student cohort with only 16% of FiF respondents aged over 21 years living at home and 24% non-FiF respondents living at home. For the six metropolitan school leavers who were interviewed, all six remained living at home. Despite the alleviation of rental costs and other living expenditure, these students report the necessity to balance their university studies with paid employment in order to meet study and other lifestyles expenses, a balancing act between employment and study that all except three of the participants reported as being necessary to manage, regardless of life situation. Of the three students that were not combining work and study, one had retired from the workforce, whilst the other two were caring for large families or a disabled family member.

#### 4.2.3 Balancing Study and Work: FiF School Leavers

Of the participants combining study and work, a wide range of different working arrangements were reported, with a consistent theme of having to earn as much money as possible to meet financial requirements. For Carl, a part-time job involves working 30 hours per week in hospitality in addition to his full-time study load:

*I had saved money to go to university but I was naïve in how much it actually costs. I fell victim to a scam in my first year and lost most of my savings so that put me back to living week to week, dollar by dollar. I know I would be able to ask my family for money, but even though they are doing well for themselves they don't have a lot, so I just can't.*

Alison reports "working every hour that she's not at university", whilst Brendon is restricted to only working weekends due to study commitments and associated travel time to and from campus. The requirement to be able to work part-time whilst studying influenced Gail's decision not to accept a place in a pre-veterinary course, an ambition that she had commenced university with. Instead she elected to remain in her current course as it allowed her to "stack her subjects across four days", allowing her an extra day to work per week.

For the majority of participants, the effect of employment added an extra level of stress on academic performance, particularly when students were required to continue to work during major assessment periods.

*My work's not normally stressful, but occasionally there will be a few weeks in a row where there's just all this bad stuff happening. And sometimes that can coincide with it being really busy at university which can be almost overwhelming. (Cory)*

#### 4.2.4 Balancing Study and Work: FiF Mature Age

Four mature age students appeared to follow a more traditional approach of combining part-time study with either part-time or full-time employment. Marg is provided with study leave, whilst Kerry receives

an annual employer contribution of \$1500 towards study costs, with both forms of employer support making it easier for them to pay course fees upfront and avoid an accrual of debt. For those participants returning to study, financial sacrifices have been required including changes to the household budget to enable participants to study. Jen discussed having to make adjustments when she changed from full-time to part-time employment, however acknowledges the support she has from her husband which alleviates some of the financial pressure. Similarly, Pete makes reference to the support his wife now provides him, thereby allowing him to continue after having retired from the workforce. Denise, who separated from her husband some years ago, chose to resign from her full-time position in order to complete full-time study, signifying one of the major transition decisions that FiF mature age women are often required to make in their journey to higher education (Stone & O'Shea, 2013):

*I thought it was going to take a very long time to do it part-time, so I thought just throw caution to the wind and risk it all. And I've gone from earning say \$65,000 dollars a year to maybe pushing \$20-22,000, so it's been a big adjustment, it's been a big challenge but I've not looked back ... Finding a suitable job is hard when university wants you to go to the tutorials and you get penalised for not going because your job requires you there.*

The requirement of juggling study with paid work is not solely a FiF student issue (Bexley, Daroesman, Arkoudis & James, 2013), however FiF students would benefit from not working in their first year of university to allow them to become acculturated into a new and foreign environment of higher education. Brian summarised this argument, stating that he thought that it best not to work in the first year “unless you absolutely had too”, citing the importance of “getting used to university first”.

#### 4.2.5 Financial Cost of Study

In relation to specific costs of studying, text books were cited by participants as being a major cost, alongside transport, and some additional course specific requirements such as printing. Alison estimated her last assignment cost approximately \$200 to produce, whilst car parking fees at the hospital were a specific financial burden for Nina to complete components of her midwifery degree. For those participants with children, childcare costs combined with caring responsibilities contribute to the ongoing pressure of studying with the ongoing demands of running a household. These sentiments are echoed in previous studies that have also highlighted the constraints of studying and managing a household, but which are overcome through determination and commitment (Henderson et al., 2009; Stone & O'Shea, 2013).

Overall, participant attitude towards university fees indicated that fees weren't a deterrent to study, with 15 participants electing to defer fees through the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) on the basis of 'need for that money more now than I do later down the track'. The attitudes expressed by participants are consistent with earlier findings by Rasmussen (2006), who contends that Australian students demonstrate negligible concerns about course fees. Course fees did not deter study, with participants believing that 'university will lead to more income'. Course fees were however identified as being a deterrent to changing degrees. Todd described finishing his first year in his current course and contemplated changing to another course, however on realising he had already “sunk five grand”, he remained with his existing degree, deciding that he “might as well stick with it”.

#### 4.2.6 Summary

The 18 FiF participants interviewed for the purpose of this study are perceived as having been successful in navigating the pathway of university and are anticipated to receive the expected

monetary benefits associated with attending university through improved employment opportunities (Daly, Lewis, Corliss & Heaslip, 2015). Consideration should be given to the FiF students that are not successful in navigating the pathway of university, with their early attrition resulting in the accrual of a study debt without the promise of monetary rewards (Daly et al., 2015). The above discussion focuses predominantly on the financial costs and constraints of university, however numerous other non-financial costs are experienced by FiF students pertaining to their relationships, physical health and mental wellbeing. These aspects of university will be discussed in the following section.

**Recommendation:** That the additional costs relating to course work expenses such as textbooks or preparation of final assignments be made more explicit to students at the commencement of their degree.

**Recommendation:** That additional scholarships or subsidies be made available for first in family students who need to relocate to attend university or who have significant additional expenses associated with work integrated learning during their undergraduate degree.

### 4.3 Health and Wellbeing

One of the key factors of interest in this project was what impact studying at university has on first in family students' health and wellbeing. Our understandings of health and wellbeing incorporated not only physical and mental health but also the social and emotional dimensions of wellbeing. As described by the World Health Organisation (2006, 2011), health and wellbeing is taken to mean more than just the mere absence of disease and infirmity, rather it refers to a state of physical, mental and social wellbeing that enables each individual to realise their full potential, to cope with the normal stresses of life, to be able to work productively and fruitfully, and finally, to be able to make a contribution to their community. Individual's experiences of health and wellbeing are also understood to be developed over their lifetime through a complex interrelationship of social, economic, cultural perceptions and practices (Bennett, 2011; Eckersley, 2011; White & Wyn, 2008).

#### 4.3.1 What We Know From Previous Research

Previous research has shown that university students commonly experience a decline in their overall health and wellbeing during their time at university. When compared to their age-matched peers in the workforce, university students report decreases in physical activity (Leslie et al., 1999; Wallace, Buckworth, Kirby & Sherman, 2000), increases in recreational drug use (Hallett et al., 2012; Kypri, Cronin & Wright, 2005), and poor dietary practices (Garrett, Wrench & King, 2012). In addition, university students also experience higher levels of psychological distress compared to their non-university peers (Bewick, Koutsopoulou, Miles, Slaa & Barkham, 2010; Stallman, 2010). Students belonging to non-traditional cohorts, such as first in family students, those from low SES areas and mature age or relocating students, are more at risk of experiencing these negative health outcomes (Abbott-Chapman, 1994; Bitsika, Sharpley & Rubenstein, 2010; Goto & Martin, 2009; Lewis, Dickson-Swift, Talbot & Snow, 2007; Von Ah, Ebert, Ngamvitroj, Park & Kang, 2004), particularly in their first year transitioning to university study (Glogowska, Young & Lockyer, 2007).

#### 4.3.2 First Year is Hardest on Health and Wellbeing

Many of the FiF students in this study found that their health and wellbeing was negatively impacted by multiple factors, particularly in their first year of transition. These factors included: time spent engaging with the new learning environment; developing new friendships and a sense of belonging and community; as well as balancing competing demands of paid work and household responsibilities.

Many students reported feeling unprepared for university study, commenting that they felt nervous or worried about the standards of work or what to expect.

Feelings of uncertainty, insecurity and disconnection were commonly experienced during this first year with some of the students finding it difficult to make friends initially. As Brendon, one of the first in family students studying a double degree in law and business elaborated, many students form social cliques with former school friends in their first year which makes it harder for students coming from different schooling backgrounds to 'break into' established social circles:

*On the first night I got here I was crying in my room because I was just so scared and worried about what it was like.  
18 yo male (SSEE Survey)*

*I am very nervous and anxious as to what lies ahead.  
17 yo female (SSEE Survey)*

*I am worried about the work load and difficulty.  
18 yo female (SSEE Survey)*

*When I started the next year of my double degree all the newer groups of students were coming in from their orientation days or from school – so they've already formed cliques. So I had a couple of friends that I hang with most of the time, but I find it harder to break in to the cliques and groups that have already formed early because they carry through degrees and I think that's coming in with both my degrees I started as a lone wolf I suppose. So that was the tough side of things I think that I struggled with the most.*

Most participants spoke of their first year as being the most difficult period of their university experience where they felt the highest levels of distress and anxiety. They spoke of feeling confused and uncertain, being unsure of what to expect, or worried about the standards of work required and feeling physically displaced by their new learning environment.

*For the first half of the year you just concentrate on yourself because there is nothing else to do – yes you are slowly building a friendship base but you have a lot more time. In the first semester because I used to stay by myself and I still had some of my friends from home who had moved down to Adelaide as well but I didn't socialise much with uni people.*

*Carl*

*I didn't really have any friends that were doing my degree. And in first year I didn't really make many new friends. I'm not quite sure why really, but then second year onwards I made a lot of friends after that.*

*Cory*

*The transition was hard. I knew how to make friends but it was just harder to make friends that, you know were obviously not in the same group as you, like breaking into a new group or something like that. In my first few weeks I was focused on finding the toilets, where all the toilets were in all the buildings and stuff, and the coffee shop, so the toilets and the coffee shop. I did a library tour and for the rest of my orientation I just wandered, did a big wander around. It took me a few days to circumnavigate the whole place, to get my bearings. I walked around with a map for at least three weeks, but I did a lot of it on my own. (Denise)*

Feelings of dislocation were often exacerbated for the relocating FiF students as they had the additional stress of leaving family, friends and their community support structures to move to the city in order to attend university.

*It was a massive first year really. And it was quite scary too because I moved three hours away from home to come [to uni] and my partner was away in the defence force and I had no friends and it was a big year. The first few weeks were difficult, I was living with another friend but she wasn't like 'a best friend' or anything. So just in that first year I didn't have that kind of support network behind me but then second year came round and I made more friends at uni. It probably was only halfway through first year that I felt really part of uni and really comfortable. (Alison)*

### 4.3.3 Social Networks Key to Success

It is encouraging to note that for the FiF students who were interviewed in this project after at least three years of study, these feelings of disconnection and loneliness were relatively short lived, with many commenting that they developed friendships and connections with the local student community which sustained them throughout their ongoing study:

*I started to focus more on developing friendships at university and it's to the point now where I've got a lot of great university friends, I know most of the people who are in my cohort doing my degree, we're all good friends, we catch up every couple of weeks for a beer at someone's place or something like that. So social networking definitely helps a lot with developing you as a person because you come out of your shell a little bit more, helps you to be a little bit more confident, a little bit more outgoing, so it definitely helps a lot. (Brian)*

*I feel like the friends I've made in Adelaide are just so good, it was pretty quick and the friends I've made are just so easy to get along with and make it easy. (Alison)*

However, it is of concern that other FiF students may experience an enduring sense of disconnection and alienation in the university environment which could significantly impact on their health and wellbeing as well as their academic success and continued participation at university.

**Recommendation:** Build structures into the first year curriculum that encourages social engagement with peers and the establishment of friendships.

### 4.3.4 Maintaining Health and Wellbeing

Students generally were quite conversant as to what is required to maintain their health and wellbeing. Those students responding to the survey question asking what they needed to be successful at university frequently commented on managing their time and competing demands and maintaining their health.

*Putting my education first before other commitments while maintaining a healthy amount of social/relaxation time. (23 yo female SSEE survey)*

*Maintaining a healthy balance between study, work, sport and exercise, nutrition and social life. Also motivation. I need to maintain a set of goals that are achievable (with rewards!) so that I continue to work hard. (17 yo female SSEE survey)*

*Well-structured weeks. Correct preparation, exercise. (21 yo male SSEE survey)*

These responses show that students know what it takes to be healthy (i.e. staying fit, eating well, taking time out to relax and maintain adequate sleep), however it was also clear from the interviews that when pressures mount, the behavioural responses that are frequently used are the very ones that can harm their health, for example not eating well or not taking time out to maintain physical activity.

*I probably don't exercise as much as I used to. (Marg)*

*I really loved squash when I was in [country town] and unfortunately the pressures of uni meant that in my first year I couldn't get back into it because there was just not enough time and obviously I didn't know many other people who played squash here. So that was obviously a little bit difficult, I'm slowly trying to get back into it this year. (Brian)*

### 4.3.5 Health and Wellbeing Not a High Priority

A central theme throughout the data was that the one aspect of their lives that first in family student commonly neglect is their health and wellbeing. Attending classes and self-directed study meant that the time that had been previously allocated to playing sport or attending the gym was reallocated.

*In early high school I was playing soccer and I was just keeping fit in general. And then after that I was still just going for runs to keep fit, but at uni it's sort of very on and off. I'll get into a good routine and then we have heaps of assignments due and then I'll just stop and I struggle to get back into the routine again. (Cory)*

For those FiF students who were also working there was the additional stress of trying to find time to maintain relationships with family and friends. This further reduced the time available to maintain health and wellbeing.

*My one cost that I regret is my fitness. Before I started uni I went to the gym about three to five times a week, I had personal training, I ate really well. The first two years of uni was really trying to understand what to do and I've finally gotten to that point where I go yeah, I just know what to expect. But being so frantic to understand meant that I was either working or I was studying and there was a lot more studying than what I'm doing now. So it was either work or study or it was what time I could give to friends, family, partner. That didn't leave a lot of room for cleaning the house, for going to the gym, for cooking healthy meals, for going to the shops. I went to the deli a lot to get my lunches so I could then rush back and do what I need to do. I've gone from a size ten to a size fourteen, so it really has been a cost to my fitness and it's so annoying because it's harder to work back. (Jen)*

Others struggled with maintaining the balance between their work and study commitments with adequate sleep being one of the first factors to suffer. This was a particular issue for students who needed to work in order to pay the rent and support themselves. As Denise notes below the only way she could manage the workload was to get up early before work to do her study:

*I started temp work selling insurance, that wasn't my passion and I cried a lot so I left that job and did a couple of temp jobs, like full-time work. But then I would find I'd come home and study, but I had to make the temp job work. So I might do four or five weeks of full-time assignments and admin and I'd get up between 4 and 7am and study and do my assignments, and then go to work.*

### 4.3.6 Achieving Health and Wellbeing is Complex

As shown in previous research, the factors affecting health and wellbeing are complex and multifactorial and for the most part are developed relationally (Bennett, 2011; Eckersley, 2011) so that when students start at university and disrupt their previous relationships with community, family and friends it can compromise their health and wellbeing (Garrett et al., 2012). While it is generally accepted that university opens up opportunities for future employment and personal development it can also mean that during this process students can be placed under stressful conditions that have negative impacts on their health and wellbeing which in turn can hamper their academic success (Meuleman, Garrett, Wrench & King, 2014).

Many of the FiF students believed that they were individually responsible for maintaining their own health and wellbeing (White & Wynn 2008), however, paradoxically it is apparent that many of the prevailing structures, arrangements and social conditions inherent in the university environment actually incorporate 'risks' for students health and wellbeing (Garrett et al., 2012).

**Recommendation:** That universities review policies and procedures that may inadvertently encourage students to neglect their health and wellbeing. For example, mapping key assessment times so that they are not all due in the same week/day or setting submission deadlines to 5pm on a weeknight to discourage students from doing ‘all-nighters’ in order to submit assignments by 9am.

**Recommendation:** That universities promote awareness of behaviours that maintain health and wellbeing to all students and staff members.

## 4.4 Managing Transitions

### 4.4.1 Introduction – A Heterogeneous Cohort will Manage Points of Transition in Diverse Ways

Just as other researchers have indicated, students are a heterogeneous group (Krause, 2006); therefore every student’s experience of managing the transition to university will be different. It is essential that the diversity of all student cohorts including those who are FiF is both acknowledged and accommodated (Kift, 2008b). Our research illustrates the diversity that exists within the FiF cohort. A number of authors included in the annotated bibliography have discussed the ways in which non-traditional, including FiF, students manage their transitions into and across university (Ballantyne, Madden & Todd, 2009; Henderson et al, 2009; James et al., 2010; Johnston, Collett & Kooyman 2013; O’Shea, 2013). These authors identify demographic differences across the cohorts of FiF students and consider how these differences impact upon the student experience.

When analysing our original SSEE survey data we identified that there were differences between mature age and school leaver students. In exploring the experiences of FiF students we found it increasingly difficult to determine whether the data was indicating that differences between cohorts was attributable to FiF status or life experience (age). It is evident from the interviews that life experience has influenced the way in which FiF students manage their transition to university.

The interviews have also provided other layers of complexity. As suggested elsewhere in the literature (Henderson et al., 2009; James et al., 2010; Meuleman et al., 2014) rural and non-rural students experiences at university are also different as a result of moving (or not) to a new location. Our interview data indicates that the experience of students who moved to the city to attend university differed from those who had not. As all students are different, it follows that the things that impact their transition and their experience of transitioning will vary. Devlin & O’Shea (2011) and Leese (2010) discuss how students from low SES areas experience higher education as an alien environment. Although not all FiF students are from low socioeconomic backgrounds they may also perceive university as ‘foreign’ as they do not have older family members to discuss or share university experiences with them, and to help them prepare themselves for the transition to this new, different environment and learning experience. Sue, one of the participants who relocated, actually used the term ‘alien’ when describing the experience of moving away from her own town to attend university. Sue said: “We’re kind of like aliens who, you know we go and create our own life.”

Our interview data provides a rich source of data which suggests that FiF students’ experience of transition to university differs depending on a variety of demographic factors. These include whether they came from a rural or a metropolitan location and/or being non-school leavers. It is not one factor but a combination of factors that impacts on the way in which our participants felt they could manage their transition to university. Brian’s experience demonstrates the difficulty of not being able to rely on other family members to help him transition to university:

*[I had a] very difficult transition because ...it's the first time when you can't rely on your parents, because they've got no idea, they're ... relying on you to know things, know how things work ... A couple of things ... helped my transition ... the first one was a program called [Unistep?].*

As discussed elsewhere in the report there are also social, financial and health and wellbeing (including emotional) factors that impact on the transition to university, hence they are not included in this section of the report which focuses on how students manage the transition from school, work, home to university.

The diverse factors impacting transition suggest that university staff need to realise how different students are and as discussed by Brook and Michell (2014) that staff spend time getting to know their students. One of the interview participants eloquently reflected the importance of appreciating that all students are different when responding to a question about the advice she would give to university managers and policy makers:

*Be flexible and consider the needs of students. Appreciate how complicated life is and that it may not be possible to go to university and not work as well. Understand that everyone has a story – and a complex set of reasons for being at university. (Marg)*

#### 4.4.2 School Leavers Experience of Transition

As all students are different so are the things that influence and inform them, or the individuals they might look to as mentors and role models. However, there were some common elements across student cohorts in relation to the pathway that they took to enter university.

Students who transferred directly from high school were influenced by a range of people as they made the decision to transition to university. Gail and Brendon both discussed the influence their parents had on their decision to attend university from a fairly early age. Gail said:

*Since I was little I had always thought I would go to university ... although they [Gail's parents] haven't been to university I guess they knew the importance of it.*

Brendon's comments were similar:

*Even like when I was 12, or 13 I always knew I wanted to go to uni, part of it was a bit of influence from parents and part was just I guess determination just to go on and I guess have a successful career. So I think it was a couple of factors but I think because I come from a background where no one has been to university before, I think, my parents thought it would be a good change.*

Despite wishing to attend university from a young age Brendon suggests that he had not worked hard enough at school to get into the course he now enjoys. His transition into university involved a realisation that he needed to work harder to fulfil his academic and professional capabilities. For Gail, her concerns were that she had not gained the right experiences at high school.

*I probably didn't put as much effort [into school] as I would have liked to, and I think going through uni and doing the hard work to get into Law after the Management I realise maybe that's something that's changed dramatically because I should have hopefully been in Law in the first place ...*  
Brendon

*I was bit worried because I thought well there's so many people here and they've all been to better schools and yeah, it was just intimidating because I thought well, I'm just going to be the dumbest person here and I'm not going to know much at all.*

Despite wanting to attend university from a young age and having the support of their parents both Gail and Brendon commented on finding the transition from being part of a small school environment to a larger university cohort difficult. Gail reflected that it had been her friends that had helped her stay at university.

*I came from a small school so everybody knew everybody and coming here it seemed free and anonymous at first and I did have a bit of a wobble and want to just leave university at one stage but, again having people in the degree that I was friends with and knew helped me out.*

With Brendon, it was his self-determination and ability to adapt that enabled him to overcome feeling daunted by the increased size of his classes.

*I think because your average class in lecture rooms would be about 300 students sometimes, so [it was] a little bit daunting but I guess I've always been a bit of a, not confident person as such, but I guess I've always just been pretty down to earth, determined kind of thing. So whatever I have to do, I'll do it, so if it means going to a big lecture theatre, then so be it, I'll adapt I suppose.*

It was not Carl's parents but his school counsellor (also his teacher) who encouraged him to fulfil his academic capabilities and attend university. Carl had intended taking a technical route through school but his counsellor intervened by calling on Carl's parents so that they too realised he was capable of much more. However, despite being academically capable Carl discussed his struggle with independent learning as he transitioned from the school environment. His discussion about trying to find resources in the library provides one example of his difficulties in transitioning to university:

*Instead of giving people the things they need – they say “here's the library – it's in there – go and find it”. It's still a big torment for today – having to go sit in a library and jump on the internet and spend hours finding nothing and then somebody else jumps on for five minutes and finds exactly what you need. It's like 'okay, cool'. I think the biggest thing for a lot of students, is that transition.*

*... my [school] counsellor actually refused to sign off because he was also my home group teacher, he refused to sign off on my selections and called an interview with my parents and said that I was just – because I always did sciences and maths and tech – and that kind of stuff and he pretty much said that I would be wasting myself going through that. So that's where that then changed my SACE schooling into more of an academic based.  
Carl*

These students stories demonstrate how despite having the support of their families and/or school teachers; a desire to attend university from a young age and the advantage of having recent experience of studying at high school, their transitions were difficult. For students who moved to Adelaide to attend university there were additional complications of needing to find somewhere to live and dealing with loneliness and isolation.

#### 4.4.3 Transitioning from a Rural or Interstate Location

The four students we interviewed who had relocated from a rural or interstate setting to attend university were all entering as school leavers, although two had taken advantage of a gap year before commencing their studies. When talking about his initial transition to university Brian commended the college he lived in for the support it provided but discussed the impact the noise of being in the city had on his difficulties in transitioning. He said:

*College ... puts a lot of training into what they call tutors ... An emphasis is put on 'this is what university is like' ... still it's a massive transition to make going from living out in the country – where you're asleep all night, to living in the city where almost every night there's a fire truck or an ambulance going by. You get used to it after the first month or so, you can sleep through an ambulance going by, but that first month is just hell.*

Sue's initial experience was quite different. She had initially intended studying nearer her home but after her gap year, which was spent travelling, decided to move to the same university as a close friend. Sue said that she found transitioning interstate and to university easy because she had a friend to show her around and help her with accommodation.

Alison, who decided to attend university because her boyfriend was moving from their town to Adelaide to complete a degree, initially struggled with her transition to university as she found it difficult to make friends during her first year of study. Alison said, "I went back most weekends in the first year purely because I didn't have many friends in Adelaide and my parents are back there and that first year was a bit difficult." Making friends and being part of a small and supportive cohort appeared to aid Alison's transition as after a year or two she stated that "Our class especially, we're quite tight knit and even if we don't have to come to uni those days we we'll all come in together and just ask opinions and that kind of thing."

When asked to provide a metaphor about her experience of being at university Alison said:

*Ultimately it's been like opening a can of worms I guess, like you go into it and you look at it and you have no idea what's going to come out of it or what you're going to get out of it and you kind of get into it and it's so much more than you expected I think.*

This suggests that Alison like others had difficulty in appreciating what to expect. As a FiF student from a rural high school transitioning to university involved a number of huge life changes.

These changes included a sense of growing up and become more independent as a result of having relocated. Carl described this as having developed life skills while Alison says that she has developed in a range of ways as a result of the people she met and moving out of home.

*When I was overseas I reapplied for Adelaide because my best friend was living here and she was at uni, and because we're both from back home so it was just my easy option at the time, because by the time I got back from overseas I only had a month or so to move to Adelaide and start uni, so it was just my easy option, I'll just move straight in with her, it's simple, I won't have to apply for accommodation and all that sort of thing. So I always had that sort of support and she was at [names university] so she showed me around a little bit, and yeah I kind of just slipped in and yeah it was just easy.*  
Sue

#### 4.4.4 Mature Age Experience of Transition

Many of the mature age students reflected on the type of student they had been at high school by way of comparison to the type of student they felt they were at university. Most indicated that they had not been 'good students' at school and were concerned that their school experiences and behaviours might hinder their success at university.

For most of the mature age interviewees their concerns of being a 'bad student' appeared to aid their transition as they were keen on showing that they were more capable than they had appeared whilst at school. Denise suggested that university was a way of redeeming her experiences at high school. She said, "it's the high school redemption, I felt dumb at high school but now I feel like a smart adult."

*When I was at school none of our family had ever attended university so my mum was of that old school, she had sort of left school when she was fourteen and thought "well what's the point, it's just deferring the point with what you start working and earning money". She couldn't understand why I would want to do that. So that was why I put it off at that point. And I think she couldn't, when I eventually was accepted in and enrolled and went through that whole process, she was still a little sceptical thinking "well, you're at quite a late stage in your career, what's it going to give you at this point in your life?" So she was a bit reserved at that point. She's changed now; she thinks it's quite good really.*  
Marg

Being a 'bad student' or not enjoying high school was not the experience of all of the mature age participants. For some, like Pete, the circumstances of their lives did not include completing their secondary education. He discussed how much he enjoyed some of his subjects: "I left school in Year 9 ... I enjoyed certain aspects of school. I enjoyed science and maths and electronics especially."

Jen had always been a good student but struggled with the pressure of her final years at school:

*I particularly bombed at the end of high school through various stresses as is fairly common. So I shied away from going into*

*university, climbed the ladder as much as I could through going into admin.*

As discussed earlier (Section 4.3 on Health and wellbeing), social and emotional health are important factors in the health and wellbeing of students. Our mature age participants described the emotion that they felt transitioning into university in negative terms. Marg said: "I was very nervous and quite apprehensive ... I hadn't written an essay since I was in high school which was a long time ago" and Roxie stated that "I was terrified, I left high school in Year 10 and there was an 18 year gap between leaving high school and starting university. So it was a very, very long time between educational drinks so to speak". For many of our mature age participants the transition to university was complicated by a sense that they had not been good students at school, so needed to develop ways of addressing bad study habits and/or concerns regarding their ability to study.

A further complication some of the mature age students also faced was having a sense that they were not supported by family or work colleagues who were sceptical about their desire to attend university. Trying to manage the negativity and/or lack of support from others also adds to the strain of transitioning into the strange new world of university.

However, a number of the mature age students found transitioning easier. Pete was pragmatic about entering university, suggesting that if he treated it like moving to a new job the shift would not be as hard. Pete reflected that he "Finished work on the Friday and I started a new job, on Monday and that's how it felt ... Just like starting a new job with a new employer – I've had many jobs." Jen took a

slightly different pragmatic approach suggesting that it was ensuring she had done her research, and asking a lot of questions that helped her transition successfully.

*... and the thing that helped me the most throughout all that was me mulling it through because I asked questions, I'm that annoying mature aged student that speaks in class.*

#### 4.4.5 The First Few Weeks

The FiF students who reported difficulties in transitioning suggested that the first year, and as discussed earlier in relation to students' health and wellbeing, and in particular, the first few weeks were the most difficult time of adjusting. They reported different reasons for these difficulties. For some finding their way around was challenging. Cory remembered "spending a lot of time trying to work out where buildings were" and dealing with the differences from school: "it was just a little bit of a shock how different things were at Uni, it was very like everyone's just doing their own thing. It's not like you're with the same people all the time". Cory also discussed the difficulties he had trying to navigate the university systems and work out how many courses he was required to enrol in.

*Even when you're applying for Uni, I remember trying to work out how many subjects I'm doing each semester, it's just not there, it's one of those things that seem obvious once you've been at Uni for a while ... But then actually trying to work it out is just a little bit ... you have no way to find it out as well.  
Cory*

Others felt socially isolated and/or struggled with the university requirements. Marg said she was "a little overwhelmed" because "reading academic literature is quite different to reading anything else", while Alison found the transition so difficult she considered leaving:

*Midway through first year just because I didn't enjoy first year. Purely the social side and even the uni side. I hate drawing and that kind of thing and it was very much that and I thought "oh this isn't going to get any better." Like first year was pretty rough and so I considered [leaving] then. But then all my friends stayed, so I thought I might as well give it a crack.*

Carl struggled with the transition for the first few weeks but once he came to get more involved in his degree it became easier for him: "I think the transition in – for the first couple of weeks, is the hardest ... it becomes easier when your degree becomes more specific". Roxie, though, thought it took about a semester to transition: "I'd say 12 weeks in I was feeling fantastic and I was doing really well."

#### 4.4.6 Support and Help Seeking Strategies

A number of writers have discussed the importance of developing strategies to support student success (Benson, Heagney, Hewitt, Crosling & Devos, 2012; Devlin et al., 2012; Kift, Nelson & Clarke, 2010) and for many years universities have encouraged students to participate in activities relating to orientation. When asked if they had attended orientation activities all (100%) of the surveyed FiF students indicated that they had participated in them. However, as argued by Kift et al.,(2010) supporting students goes beyond these initial add-on activities. Also for students to have a sense of agency in supporting their own transition to university identifying ways in which they can help themselves is important.

*The main thing that helped to make that transition ... was I had lecturers who ... invested in me.  
Brian*

Gail talked about the importance of quickly getting help as a result of attending transition days and, through her peer mentor, the help offered by the university.

*... transition days where we'd just have to go there and meet people doing the course with us and activities to get to know each other and there was also the peer networking program that helped a lot as well but apart from that if I didn't find people quite quickly through those then I think I would've struggled a bit more.*

Rowan said that while he found the 'knowledge side' easy to manage it took him some time to understand that it was possible to ask for help from university counsellors and other staff when it was needed. He said

*The biggest challenge for me was understanding how uni works and so it was more a practical than a knowledge, and it was okay, so if you need help you just say "I need an extension" and you can apply for one and you can go and talk to the counsellors and you can say "Look this is what's going on"*

Jen made a similar comment, suggesting that students need to actually experience what is required of them in order to understand it:

*You don't know what you don't know ... it's not so much just seeking the information but it's you don't know that you need those tools to write, to research, until it's put right in front of you and you actually get to experience it.*

All of these comments suggest that once the FiF students had gained confidence in how to navigate their university environments and understood what was expected of them the transition became easier.

#### **4.4.7 Transitioning Across the Academic Program to Graduation and Beyond**

A number of the participants had begun further study or were considering taking on further study. As discussed by Devlin et al., (2012) in their report on supporting low SES students' success, they indicate that where students are supported to succeed they graduate from university rather than leaving early. Our research findings support those of Devlin et al. and indicate that many students also decide to transition into further study. Five of the 18 students we interviewed were completing Honours or Masters qualifications while at least two other participants indicated that they were considering further study once they graduated from their programs. Roxie discussed how she had developed good relations within the university but also as a result of her placements while doing honours "I'm doing well with all my classes, I've just completed Honours, I've made good strong relationships in the Department and good relationships with clinical educators on placements" Roxie and Brian, who believed his lecturers had provided the support he needed as he transitioned across his degree, discussed further study beyond his Masters: "now I'm doing Masters and then potentially doing a PhD", while for Kerry, she felt sad that her studies were coming to an end: "Sadly when it's finished next year, I will miss it – well at the end of 2015."

#### **4.4.8 Transition in Summary**

For many of these students staying the course despite the hurdles has been really important as it has allowed them to feel they could complete the degree and that being at university was not something that was outside of their scope just because other family members had not attended. As discussed earlier in the report, studying at university enabled these students to develop a belief in their abilities, and through their successful transition into university they have gained greater confidence.

There are numerous elements to the transition process which require managing by universities and there are others that the students themselves need to address. Both our previous and current

research shows that managing student expectations by providing clear and consistent messages about what to expect and what is required to succeed will help all students to transition into and across their university studies.

**Recommendation:** University staff take positive steps to get to know their students and gain an understanding of the backgrounds that they have come from to help them feel that they belong and also to provide advice and support on specific needs or issues which may arise as a result of the students' specific circumstances.

**Recommendation:** While universities already offer numerous transition programs, such as peer mentoring programs that help students make friends and learn to access and utilise resources, embed these programs into the curriculum for all students.

## 4.5 Identities

This section speaks to the findings that relate to identity transformations, that is, in what ways first in family students' self-image or identity was transformed as a result of their attendance at university. The findings also reveal how these transformative experiences impacted upon the students' day-to-day lives as well as the impact on relationships with significant others (e.g. partners, children, parents, close friends).

What is obvious from our research is that the first in family students who were interviewed were incredibly diverse not only in terms of their age and previous life experience but also in terms of their expectations of what they could achieve at university, hence we do the students a great disservice if we try to categorise them simply as 'mature age first in family students' or 'rural relocating first in family students'. Such generalisations can lead to confusing and contradictory assumptions as well as an oversimplification of their life stories. The excerpts from these students' stories that are presented here highlight this diversity of experience and demonstrate that no one story can be representative of the whole cohort.

### 4.5.1 FiF Background Shaping Student Experience

For each of these students their sense of becoming a student or a future professional was shaped by their previous life experience as well as their experience of being the first member in their family to attend university. For some this previous life experience was one of 'not belonging', that is they believed that university was not for 'people like us'. For others there was self-doubt as to whether they were capable of succeeding at university.

*I didn't ever necessarily think I would ever go to uni. I really didn't think I was honestly capable of doing that. (Kerry)*

*I've always wondered, like I never really applied myself at school and there was always that notion of "what if I did actually try, like am I really smart? Am I smart enough to go to university?" Not achieving a great deal in Year 12 didn't make me feel very smart for a lot of years, so it's kind of like a 'redemption' for me. (Denise)*

*My mum was absolutely rapt when I got into uni. I didn't realise at the time. She was a very intelligent woman – was actually dux of her form during her schooling in Victoria. She wanted to go to university and her family didn't want her to go. She didn't tell me this until I pretty much started at university. She basically, as we were growing up, she said that she had left school and she just went and got a job. But her dream had always been to go to university. So when I told her that I was enrolled and been accepted she was just over the moon because it's what she had always wanted to do. Within our family unit, mum placed an enormous importance on education.  
Kerry*

Other students spoke of having to combat others' lack of belief in their ability. Roxie said:

*My boss said to me, "You'll never get in." And I said, "Oh really!" Then I changed my preferences and I got in.*

And yet for other first in family students attending university was a long dreamed for ambition that had been stymied by others' expectations or by life events that prevented their attainment of this goal. As noted by Marg it was her family's expectations that influenced her decision to not try university when she left school. "When I wanted to go [to university] my mum was saying 'you should really go and get a job and start earning and buy a house'."

However most of the first in family students had someone either in their extended family or close friends or work colleagues who believed in their ability to succeed at university and who encouraged them to continue. Travis spoke of a close friend who was his "'port at sea' for many tough times in my life." Carl, a rural student who relocated to attend university, said that his ambition to attend university was fostered by his mother who had always believed that he and his brothers could do well: "my mum is always going on about how smart us boys are." He also said:

*I've always helped people whenever they've needed it, kind of thing and a lot of my friends and mum said I would be good in the health system.*

Frequently these key influencers were people who had previous tertiary experience and hence had the appropriate 'kudos' in the FiF student's eyes to be able to make a judgment as to their chance of success. As Rowan comments, this 'significant other' was his aunt who had an MBA and she strongly encouraged him to continue with his studies:

*I've got an aunt who's very supportive who's done an MBA, she's done a psychology degree at ANU, and she did her MBA either here or UniSA, I don't know which one, I can't remember. So she's always encouraged me, 'to just keep working at it'.*

For Jen this significant other was her boss at work, who encouraged her to consider university:

*My boss at the time said to me, "have you thought about going to university?" And of course I always had because I've always loved learning but it just never felt like much of an option.*

*I wanted to prove to my mum that I could but I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it as well and that I had the intellectual capacity to do something completely different to anything else I'd ever attempted. We've come from a very blue collar kind of family and so I think this has stepped right outside of that mould ... my mum always said "what's the point", what do you think you're going to gain out of it. It all came back to money – "Is this going to give you more money" And I said "Well part of it will but part of it is about achieving something for myself.*

*Marg*

*I'm a hard worker definitely, much more than like – I don't like to say it, but there are a lot of people who just kind of fly through and don't do much and if I'm there, I might as well be doing my job properly. And when I know I've got stuff to be done, I will sit down and knuckle down and get it done.*

*Carl*

*I'm really proud of it. I am proud of the degree because I feel like I'm putting the work in for it and I did my best job of it. My biggest strength is self-discipline. If I've got a job to do, I know what I've got to do, and I don't need to be told what to do. I guess it's just been in my nature, it's always been like that. And I've got a good work ethic, I like to work hard because I only feel satisfied when I know that I've had to work for something, because that's where I draw my pleasure from essentially, my satisfaction.*

*Todd*

Jen went on to say that it was the culmination of a number of factors that all aligned to effectively provide the support that she needed to consider university as a feasible option. Primarily it was the support of her boss and work colleagues as well as previous female mentors that instilled a sense of self-belief as well as having the central emotional and financial support from her husband.

*It did make a difference for my boss to see me in a university setting. She was quite high up in government before she came into consulting, I really respect her, she's one of the most clever people that I know and I'd love to work with her again in any capacity. And I have been really lucky since I left high school to have some great mentors, some great female mentors too and so there actually has been a theme throughout my work life that of "Jen, you can do well". I suppose this was just the right time for me, I finally felt like I could understand what it means financially. I also believed in myself at the time, I knew I'd handled high stresses in this particular job and I'd started to have a relationship that was quite supportive too and my partner at the time was, we got married two months ago, he was and is, still incredibly supportive, so there was all of this alignment.*

*I've always, like I said I've always really, really loved learning and it was so exciting and is still exciting to actually be able to spend an entire day on research and writing and thinking about concepts and applying those concepts. I know that my boss had a lot of faith in me and she outright said it at points she could see that I could go further than what I had, and so there was that moment of her asking that question, that one question really nibbled at me and I think at the time my feeling was if someone like her thought I could do well then maybe it was worth doing it as well.*

*Jen*

First in family students have been referred to as "higher education pioneers" (McInnis, James & McNaught, 1995, p. 70) often needing to demonstrate greater academic application than their intergenerational peers who have had the benefits of their parents' insight and experience of tertiary education systems. For the first in family students in this study there is a recognition that their academic success could not be taken for granted, that they needed to work hard and maintain their focus in order to achieve success. For the mature age students this opportunity to attend university was frequently regarded as a 'second chance' to make something of themselves and to prove to themselves and others that they were capable of academic success. However, most of the first in family participants also spoke of the need to work hard in order to achieve their goals.

For many of the students coming from a lower socioeconomic background it was necessary to overcome the notion that university is a 'citadel of class privilege', something beyond the reach and capability of the working class. There was still evidence of an underlying belief that it was essential to work hard in order to earn this privilege, that it was not theirs as an automatic right.

#### 4.5.2 Multiple Identities / Dual Identities

Commonly these first in family students identified as having a dual or multiple identities, they did not feel that being a student was a singular role – rather it was part of their life and sometimes placed secondary to other more centralised identities. Some spoke of being a parent and student, others of being a worker and student, others yet again of being a rural, relocating student. Jen's quote below

*I often forget to [say that I am a student] and I have noticed it's usually my partner who pops in and says "she's at university by the way", he usually brags about my grades or something which I actually don't like. I think of university students as eighteen to twenty-three year olds. I'm not eighteen to twenty-three year old, I'm a mature, I was going to say, I'm a mature age student so there's a separate classification, so I just tend to more think about my work role when I'm speaking to people.*

*Jen*

illustrates the multiplicity of these identities.

*I am different people and it depends on what's happening in my life at that moment but yes, hmm 'how to describe it?' There's still an aspect of me always asking questions, so whether that's in a tute or at work or with a friend to try and understand more, so there's a running thread. But when I'm at work I'm in that space of, I'm very lucky, it's very good work ... but for those eight hours I am doing what needs to be done, I'm not thinking about that other side. When I'm at uni, it's uni stuff. So there's probably about four sides, uni, work, friends and family in one group and then my partner gets just a blend of the other lot. He actually gets the most honest one of all which is good I think.*

A number of the students preferred not to use the term 'student' as their primary identifier. Marg for example, despite studying successfully for three years continued to specify that "I consider myself as studying ... but I don't see myself as a student". Jen also noted that when she was out at social engagements meeting new people she frequently "forgot to mention" the fact that she was also studying. As other authors have commented (Wakeford, 1994), identifying as a student had potentially negative social consequences such as being regarded as 'sponging off the system'.

Other participants however, were proud of their student identity and used it to add value to their conception of self. Alison, as a younger school leaver first in family student, used this descriptor quite readily as she felt that her part-time work was not very prestigious and she felt that taking on the student role had opened up opportunities for her:

*When they ask me what I do, I tell them "I'm a student" just because I don't really have a great job I guess. I'm proud of the fact that I'm a student. I think a lot of people don't take the opportunity and I'm glad I did.*

Similarly, Travis, again a school leaver first in family student, readily acknowledged the importance of his student identity:

*If I'm talking to someone professionally, Yes. If I'm meeting someone for the first time, I would say, "hi I'm Travis, how are you" and then eventually the topic would come out, "oh what do you do in your spare time?" and I'll say, "oh I go to uni" kind of thing. I see it as a very important part of my life. If I get to know someone, they should be aware that I go to uni.*

Kerry as a mature age first in family student who was studying part time whilst working with two young children was proud to be able to tell people that she was a university student. She felt that being a student meant that she was no longer merely regarded as 'a mum who works':

*I do probably have a different perspective on the uni life I suppose, and what it's like to be a uni student. It's funny, the reaction from people and I know this probably sounds a little vain also – I think also at the end of next year when I finish my study I'm going to miss saying to people "oh yeah and I'm at uni". I'm actually proud of that, I'm proud to be able to say "I'm 44 years old and I'm a uni student". I actually like that, so it's nice not to just be known just as – and I know it sounds dreadful because I do love my children terribly, but it's nice to be known as something other than just a mum who works.*

This additional 'student' identity allowed for other skills and abilities to be recognised and Kerry placed more value on herself for having achieved these goals. She found it frustrating to have to give up a well-paying job when she first had children and relished the notion that she is developing other skills now.

*I guess I probably have placed more value on myself probably since studying as well. I had a quite a good job before I had the children and found it frustrating that when you become a mum, suddenly you become the 'part-time' person and your career takes a back seat. I found that experience frustrating, so being able now to say "I'm a uni student", I feel like I've got that self-worth almost back again.*

Kerry loved her role as a mother but recognised that this was not her whole identity:

*I love being a mum – absolutely love being a mother but I do look at full-time 'stay at home' mums and wonder how they can do that as well. Like I don't undervalue what they do by any stretch but I just think "I couldn't do that. That's not for me" but I really value that they can do that though.*

Kerry recognised that her study added complexity to her life and that as a consequence she was very busy, she commented that people were often surprised when she listed everything she does, i.e. caring for a family, two jobs, plus part-time study, but as Kerry noted she enjoyed the work and it helped to sustain her: "People are flabbergasted when I list off the things I do, and I just say to people if I didn't enjoy what I do I wouldn't keep doing it."

As Leppel (2002) has noted in a previous study of women in higher education, family commitments can have both a positive and negative impact on study. Whilst there is the benefit of emotional and social support from partners and children there is also the need to respond to their emotional needs and provide financial support. As Kerry highlights, the binary of these two significant identities often caused conflicts and caused her to question what she was doing and whether it was the right time. The competing demands of wanting to spend time with family and to study caused internal conflict that was not readily resolved:

*The kids – I don't think they've suffered by me being here. I did actually start to think the other day "am I missing the best years of their life?" Given that Matt was five when I started studying, and Sally starts high school next year and she is not going to want me around. I'm thinking "have I actually decided to study right in the best years of their life and maybe given too much of my time to study rather than to them?" And I don't know – I'm still actually grappling with that thought myself – that just kind of came to me in the last couple of weeks maybe because I knew this [interview] was coming up and I was looking at some of the questions and I thought "am I actually trying to do too much?" – with the casual work and the study – all things that I love – am I, in five years' time when the kids are 15 and 17 and really don't want me around, am I going to look back and go "oh I really should have ..." – we didn't have the overseas holidays and things that we were going to do in the school holidays because I had assignments to do and those sorts of things, but then I also look on the other hand that I'm probably instilling them with some really good values."*

Throughout this response you can see the questioning stance that Kerry takes when reflecting on the impact her study has had on her family. Despite her great success at university and the pleasure she derives from this role she still questions whether she has done the right thing and whether she was being selfish in taking the time at this stage of their life to pursue this ambition. She goes on to reassure herself that whilst she has taken time out to study, the rest of her time is devoted to her children and she sacrifices other aspects of her life in order to spend time with them.

*It's not like I'm not there – it's not like I'm working two jobs, studying and then I'm out with my friends and I'm never home with them. I will forego going out with those other people because I want to be home with the kids and things, so we still as a family we spend a lot of time together.*

This discourse pictorialises the gendered conflict that arises for women when there is a tension

between their student identity and the mother identity: which role takes precedence and how does she maintain the dance between the competing demands of both roles? Taking on a student identity is an ongoing juggling act for many mothers that is never completely resolved and must be continually reviewed and re-negotiated.

Kerry's experience reflects that of the women spoken about in Edwards (1993) study on women with children returning to study where there was a distinct disjunction between their life experience and pattern and those of both their friends who are not studying and other students without children.

**Recommendation:** That academics and professional staff recognise that FiF students do not always have the luxury of placing their student identity as their top priority, and despite their high commitment to study, many grapple with balancing the competing demands of other responsibilities.

#### 4.5.3 Not a 'Real' Student / Imagined Reality

A number of first in family students spoke of not feeling like a 'real' university student, particularly contrasting their experience to a perceived or imagined reality of what student life is like. For example Sue spoke of not being a proper university student as she did not experience living in residence or being financially restricted. Similarly, for Kerry, the campus where she was studying was not how she imagined it would be or how student life is frequently portrayed in the media with students meeting to socialise on lawned areas outside old buildings or in a student bar.

*Compared to what I imagined student life would be like, my campus is probably a more mature aged campus, really, that's how I kind of feel about it. You haven't got those communal spaces and you don't seem to have that student bonding that you seem to get, at other places. When you hear about kids talking about coming to uni and meeting on the lawns and at the uni bar and those sorts of things.*

*I don't feel like I've had the proper uni experience. I never lived on [residence] and I never was a proper uni student I don't feel. I didn't do the social side of the university scene, I had my own social side out of university and so I didn't really ever go to all the parties and do all the residence things or I didn't join events or uni games or things like that. I look back and I wish I had done more of that ... I am at uni I'm a uni student, because I've been doing it for so long. But no I don't feel like a proper [student], and I never really had lack of money so I've never felt like I was a proper uni student, I've always got by and I had money and so I'm not a 'proper poor uni student' like you think of uni students.  
Sue*

This idealised or imagined view of what university would be like was not an issue for Kerry as she felt that the city based campus where people mainly come in for part time study after work satisfied her needs:

*I mean for me it didn't bother because it was not what I was looking for anyway, so it was perfect. I wanted a uni to just walk in and walk out of and not have to worry about all the other stuff.*

#### 4.5.4 Sense of Belonging

However for other students this imagined reality caused a disjunction in their sense of belonging. As Todd explained, he did not easily relate to this perceived student lifestyle which he saw as being a little pretentious in some ways.

*When I first started, I certainly felt like I was out of my depth, I did feel like I didn't belong here. Because to be honest, I've never really seen myself [as a uni student]. I've always done really well academically, but I always found it a bit pretentious, the uni, I feel. I didn't like it at first, it just wasn't really my thing.*

When asked specifically if he ever described himself as a uni student to other people Todd expanded:

*I just find saying "I'm a student" gives these impressions of just this 'lah di da life' and it's all very easy and that kind of stuff. And I don't like having that perception because I think it takes away from the effort you do put into things. I don't know why that is though, I just feel like when I see someone and their title is 'student', it kind of makes you think of the uni ads where it's all just lying around on the lawns and then "Oh I'll roll over and write my essay now". But I don't know why, I just wasn't really comfortable with that label ... So essentially I don't really define, or describe myself as a student any more than I would anything else I suppose. The uni wouldn't take any precedence in my identity.*

For Todd being a university student was no more significant than any other part of his life, he acknowledged that all of his other roles, for example being a marathon runner, the eldest son in his family, a volunteer, or a sales assistant were no less important in his identity construction:

*I think the people who possibly have the time to engage with the uni more, I mean I do a lot of other things, I play sport, I run, I do ultramarathons, I do different bits and pieces for volunteering stuff and all that. And I just don't have the time to do it. I've just got to do my work, it's just like everything else I have to do, that I, well not have to do, but want to do.*

Whilst Todd did not feel that his own experience of university life matched that of the imagined or 'advertised' life of a university student often depicted in the popular press he felt that this portrayal may be the reality for some students who were perhaps more engaged in university life.

*I see the ads and it all just seems a bit fake, it doesn't just feel like a real representation, it feels like an ad because it is I guess. But certainly for other people it might be that way and they probably think 'I'd happily associate that with myself'. But for me, it doesn't represent what I experienced so it's just not how I identify with it.*

**Recommendation:** That university marketing encourages FiF students' sense of belonging by including images that reflect students' diverse backgrounds and experiences.

#### 4.5.5 Social Incongruity

The mature age first in family students more frequently spoke of a sense of social incongruity when describing their initial experience of attending university. As Roxie explained the age difference was often the most obvious delineator and until she found her own 'type of people' she felt out of place:

*It felt strange being around so many people who were so much younger than me. There was a young lady in the course in first year she was 17 and I was 34 when I started and I think, "you just look like little tiny children and they act like little tiny children." So that was strange, but you find the right people for you and then you just ignore the other ones that are a bit weird.*

As shown in these quotes at least four of these mature age students commented on the age differences with their peers and it was an obvious key point of difference in their student experience. Pete in particular noted in his interview that he was not just mature age but was in fact what he termed “quite old” and as a consequence he was frequently mistaken for one of the teaching staff by other students.

*The subject that I'm doing at the moment we had to form a group of four and had to do a presentation. And we sort of said you know “what's your name, blah, blah, blah? How old are you?” And I think Cherie is 21 and Kim is 22 and Jarred is 28 and then they looked at me and it was like “how old are you Kerry?” and I said “44” and I just saw their jaws just dropped – “what are you doing here?” So it's been funny because I seem to have got into this younger group of people but they seem to have forgotten now thankfully after four weeks in or five weeks that I am 44 years of age.  
Kerry*

*If you walk into a tutorial for the first time they think you're the tutor immediately. It's difficult to take a back role because the group automatically puts me at the top of the list and say “Peter you do it, you go first”. Because I probably have the confidence so I'm always picked on to be the spokesman. I do it to the point where I say okay – I actually say to my group “you're not going to learn anything out of this unless you actually do this. I'll support you but the idea is for you to learn as well”.*

Both he and Kerry found that the school aged students in their classes expected them to take on a leadership or mentoring role in group activities. Kerry often found herself wanting to say to the younger students “don't blow this chance.”

*I want to tell them to pull their fingers out most of them. Just don't waste the opportunity. You've obviously done something to get yourself there. So whatever it is that you've done to get that mark to get yourself into university, don't blow that now. Because for everyone one person that's managed to get in, I hate to think how many have missed a spot and it's kind of then unfair for those that are trying to get in.*

The mature age first in family students more readily spoke of the value of their chance at higher education and how important this second chance at achieving a life ambition was for them.

#### 4.5.6 Transformation of Self

All of the participants spoke at length of the transformation that had occurred in relation to their self-concept as a result of their university experience. Terms such as ‘empowered’, ‘transformed’ and ‘sense of achievement’ were frequently used to describe these changes. For Denise being at university was a chance of ‘redemption’ a chance to prove to herself and her family that she was ‘smart’, that even though she had not achieved in high school she could now demonstrate that she had what it took to succeed academically.

*I've always wondered, like I never really applied myself at school and there was always that notion of “what if I did actually try, like am I really smart? Am I smart enough to go to university?” Not achieving a great deal in Year 12 didn't make me feel very smart for a lot of years, so it's kind of like a ‘redemption’ for me.*

*I'm much more confident, when I started uni I wouldn't have been able to feel comfortable talking to you probably. My brain has developed, I can talk and think to a lot deeper level than what I could back in high school. Certainly my worldliness, in my view, has changed. My understanding of people, socially has developed immensely, that would probably be the biggest thing. And certainly my independence as well, my driven-ness to be independent, I was pretty happy to let things be looked after, but now I want to be my own person.  
Todd*

This sense of personal accomplishment added to the shift in identity for these first in family students, they recognised the profound shifts in their confidence and ambitions for life and that they had renewed skills and ability to move out into the world. As Roxie reflects they felt ready to take on the world.

*I have a lot more ambition than I used to, I have a lot more confidence in myself and I've always been a very confident person but, but I am ready to go and take on the world now. And I was just a very 'laidback, relaxed, do whatever you want to do, do your own thing, I'll do mine' chick before. Whereas now I'm ready to, I'm ready for business, my whole attitude has changed.*

*I think I'm a more disciplined person, I'm a more confident person, I kind of feel smart, I feel like I've, and I've said this before but it's the high school redemption, I felt dumb at high school but now I feel like a smart adult.*  
Denise

For the majority of these first in family students there was a sense of achievement and resilience that pervaded their reflections on their experiences of university. They acknowledged how much they had learnt that was not simply limited to gains in academic knowledge and skills but more significantly their own personal transformations. They spoke of how they had gained confidence, and an ability to converse with other people from a wide range of backgrounds, of how they now were able to articulate their opinions and were no longer afraid to challenge the ideas of others. As Rowan suggests, "I think that my university journey has been about, I would say it's made me a more well-rounded adult, that's how I would put it."

*It's definitely broadened my view of things. I used to be a little too trusting with what the media told me. And through doing so many media related courses, I've learnt to open my eyes and look at both sides of the story. That's generally one of the main things that I've gained out of university, to actually be able to view something, and go, "yes something's not quite right here". It's made me more vocal in my opinions because earlier in life I would express my opinion and someone would say something else, and then I would just shut up because I don't want to provoke a fight or anything like that. But now, if I can actually broaden someone else's horizon without treading on their own opinions I do, because I do find it fun to an extent, to have a lively debate about paradox and that sort of stuff. Because I'm so sick and tired of people blindly following what they've been told. It's fine to believe in what you believe, as long as you know why you believe in what you believe.*  
Travis

#### 4.5.7 Opening up Horizons

The interview process also enabled these first in family students to reflect on future hopes and ambitions. Some like Todd were still unsure of where their future lay:

*I haven't changed in my perspective of where I want to go, where I envision myself, that has stayed a little bit uncertain.*

But for others like Alison and Roxie, they felt that their university experience had opened up the horizons of what was possible.

**Recommendation:** Encourage academics and professional staff to recognise the transformative potential of higher education and that for many FiF students developing a student identity requires a shift away from previous cultural norms.

#### 4.5.8 Moving Away From Family Culture

For Denise the transformation to her identity that had occurred through engaging and developing as a student had increased the distance between herself and her family. She no longer valued the same things and she now struggled to straddle the two largely distinct worlds:

*I guess that I've been growing away from the family sort of thing, like having conversations that don't*

*really stimulate me anymore but are on the family level, you know like I function up here sometimes and sometimes I don't function well with the lower level stuff like making conversation and stuff like that. I'm just spending six hours with my head in the text book and I've got to go and talk about family members that I haven't seen for ages, and their babies and talk about babies and children and stuff like that, not conversations I want – I feel like I've moved on so much but they're back here, they're still stuck in their old ways, they're still third, second and third generation Centrelink recipients, and I know that sounds horrible but – it's just, that's the mentality that I don't really have anyone, that's the mentality I had in my family.*

*The interesting thing is because I didn't have a lot of contact with family when that decision [to come to uni] was made, there was probably not much of a reaction from their side. But I told my dad last semester that I got an '80' and he, it was an interesting reaction from him, there was not much comment and what I suppose I was looking for was "Well done". Now my dad's a smart guy and it's interesting, he repeated Year 12 and in the words of one of his friends, it was because of all the stuff that was going on at home, but he repeated Year 12 and got distinctions in all his subjects that he was doing, so he could have gone to university but he didn't.*  
Rowan

Similarly for other FiF students like Rowan and Travis their move into higher education also caused a degree of separation from their families.

*Growing up, things were very tight around the house and money was something to be valued. So that does affect my view on life quite a bit. My family are very poverty stricken, well not poverty stricken, but close to. And the one person who actually does have money, he's a very Liberal thinking man and as far as he's concerned, I'm wasting my time going to uni. Because he is a carpenter and he believes tradies are more important than the arts. At one point I wanted to be a teacher and I told him that, and he said, "well don't be a teacher, you need life experience before you can even begin to teach, it's stupid to go to uni and not live your life beforehand". And it's just like, well not everyone has the luxury to go out and find a job, have real world experience. Travis*

Their very act of enrolling into university challenged some of their family cultural norms and they felt the need to justify these choices. Their families often did not place value on their academic success and were challenged by the changes they saw taking place in their values and beliefs.

*I think it's good too because I've got a couple cousins that will now be going onto uni too and hopefully my sister. I guess I've been able to help them with the experience as well.*  
Brendon

*My brother wants to get into human movement or PE teaching or that kind of thing. I think he's just seeing that he can move out and learn so much. And it's the same with my partner, his younger sister is now kind of doing exactly what he's done.*  
Alison

For some of the FiF students their new academic identity raised conflict with previous familial identity and trying to straddle the two worlds often leaves them with a sense that they no longer completely fit into either environment (London, 1989; Thomas, 2002).

#### 4.5.9 Raising Aspirations for Others

A number of the students in the study spoke of how their experience of attending university had raised aspirations for others, whether this was for siblings such as Alison's younger brother, who was now considering a degree in physical education, or extended family members such as Brendon's cousins, or friends such as Todd's co-workers.

Many of the participants who had children spoke of their experience raising the aspirations of their children to also attend university. As mentioned previously, Marg spoke of her original family where university was not seen as something that was achievable for 'their sort of people'. However, since she has been to university and achieved success for herself, she has found that it has also raised the aspirations of her own children:

*My youngest son was always going to go to university ... but my oldest son has decided to go to university which wasn't something that he was ever really going to do, it wasn't a part of his idea of where he would be going, so I think it has influenced him.*

This influence was not only limited to direct family members. As Todd explained, he often gave advice to the people he worked with at his place of casual employment. He acted in a mentoring role providing the advice that he wished had been available for himself when he started university.

*A lot of people at work are going through that stage now where they're going to the open days for uni and I guess as you work with them you talk about it. I've also encouraged people to go to uni, and to stick with it, because people have wanted to drop out before. And it's really the work crowd they're all at different stages, it's really interesting, some of them want to drop out and you say "Well you're at the end of it, you've come this far, you might be better off doing it because you do feel immense satisfaction when it's finished". I only give advice to those who want it [laughing]. It is never uninvited. And I have, I don't know, this is a little bit weird but I still feel like a bit of a mentor to some of them. Because, I sort of feel like I wish I had someone a little bit further on in their life, because I was also the eldest of the cousins, and so it would have been nice if I had someone who had just a couple more years' experience, just that little bit of advice would have been good. So I sort of take that role I feel [for work colleagues], and I love it, it's great. They appreciate it a bit, it's good.*

#### 4.5.10 Developing Student Identity

As can be seen from these students' stories identity formation is a complex, multifaceted process whereby individuals mediate a number of selves. It can be argued that constructing a student identity is an ongoing iterative process whereby an individual reflexively responds to both extrinsic and intrinsic factors to re-shape their understanding of self in relation to their social circumstances (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). When students enter university not only are they negotiating and forming a learner identity, which includes building and acquiring skills, they are also renegotiating their understandings of self, which involves developing an understanding of who they are, how they relate to themselves as students as well as to peers, lecturers and tutors (Daniels & Brooker, 2014). This re-formation of identity subsequently impacts on other social dimensions of their lives, their friends and families as well as their future career options. As Lairio, Puukari & Kouvo (2011) argue:

*Study at a university is, in many ways, a significant period since the individual constructs the foundation for various areas of life, such as work, family, and other human relations. University studies are an important stage from the perspective of constructing both a student identity emerging from the course of studies, academic identity, and a professional identity related to the future transition to working life. (p. 115)*

## 4.6 Support and Impediments

The FiF students experienced numerous supports and impediments as they successfully worked towards completing their studies. Their supports included the people they knew prior to attending university, such as family and friends, as well as the contacts they made once at university. They utilised the formal supports that the university offered through transition services, student services and other organised structures (medical, financial and legal supports) and the informal ones such as academic and professional staff; friends and peers. These supports helped them work through the impediments that they encountered. The impediments included struggling to find required information, struggling to come to terms with the change of pace from school to university and difficulties explaining what they were experiencing to family members. Some felt that academic staff could show greater compassion and get to know more about students' lives.

### 4.6.1 A Wide Range of Supports

Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) argue that working-class students feel they receive little support from institutions to develop the skills to succeed and need to rely on their own abilities to acquire these aptitudes and abilities. However the FiF students in our study indicated that they had utilised a range of support networks. These included specific resources made available by the university such as getting advice from university transition staff; utilising counselling services; and even accessing "food vouchers ... from the financial advisory office" (Roxie). Other participants talked about developing good relationships with university staff, especially those in the departments where they studied, including both lecturers and tutors. Another crucial network that these students used was family and friends.

Many of the FiF students did not utilise any of the more formal services available from the university. For example, Carl made use of informal networks such as peers and other tutors to look at his work. Acknowledging that he was asking staff who were not required to help him, he said, "I've just asked for their opinion on things like 'is it set out well? Is it grammatically correct? Am I on the right track?'" Feeling able to freely ask for help as it is needed is indicative of an ability to develop networks, which, as indicated in the literature, is important to the success of FiF students (Benson et al., 2010; Forsyth & Furlong, 2003; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Carl also indicated that acquiring help from

*I've always had really good family, like girls to live with as well, and they're always so encouraging and I come home and go "Oh I got a HD", "Oh that's awesome", so they're really supportive as well. Or if I'm sitting there and I'm like "I need a word that, you know when this happens", and they're like "This word", and they'll shout, start yelling things at me and I'm like "Yes that's it" and I'm typing away while they're yelling at me so they're really great as well.*  
Sue

*I spoke with [academic]. Lovely woman, she was very kind to give me her time and I said "okay, so I didn't do well in the exam, can you help me out to figure out why". And we talked about that a little bit, she gave me this one piece of advice, I can't remember anything else but this one piece of advice I've never forgotten, I've used it for every essay I've ever done.*  
Jen

*Being able to access healthcare up at the doctors and I see counsellors, I've seen a psychiatrist, these are all things that I wouldn't have been able to afford to do outside of the university environment. You have access to help with your resume, you've got access to financial help, you've got someone to help you with your assignments if you're not sure if they're good enough. And further to all that ... The people in the Department are incredibly supportive.*  
Roxie

*The prep course was really the underpinning of it – taught me how to write an essay construct things and operate the library – I hit the ground running, in that library on the first day of uni was so easy. I knew where the classrooms were – the geography – all those sorts of things; I know what's expected in a tutorial – how you're going to do things.*  
Pete

the tutors was possible because he was in a small degree cohort.

Roxie who was also in a small degree cohort commented a number of times throughout the interview on how well the staff in her program looked after the students. She said that she felt “very much taken under the wing of the academics in the Department ... they’ve looked after us all so well, they love us, they look after us.” Other FiF students who studied in smaller courses also commented on the support they received from staff within their programs. Pete discussed the friendliness that he felt developed between himself and lecturing staff: “... your professors get to know you, there’s a certain camaraderie between me and the professors.” While for Gail it was important that staff knew her name: “in the last year at [names campus] almost every lecturer knows all of their students’ names”.

Marg also felt she could seek the advice and support of academic staff. She told us:

*I had quite a good relationship with a couple of the lecturers that I had and they were really good to bounce ideas off and talk to them about my academic career and what’s going to get me to where I wanted to be ... That’s part of the reason I took leave of absence to do the diploma of government because I sat with a lecturer.*

The interview participants also utilised a range of support services such as: the health and counselling services; careers services; financial services for food vouchers; and careers services for advice. Many of the participants felt that having access to the range of services was extremely helpful, while others indicated that they would have liked to have known more about the kinds of services on offer.

Rowan, for instance, told us that he had talked to one of the staff from a transition advice service that the university offered. He said he had sought advice on “how I was going to be able to manage study and work ... he helped me with understanding the way that, for example Centrelink view, what they call full study load ... which meant I could do a summer subject.”

Those mature age students who had come in via a transition to university program had found that very helpful and useful as they knew how to use the library and what services were available to them.

Others discussed the networks they developed with their peers. Sue who applied for a Masters degree while she was overseas completing her final university placement was put in touch with another student who was undertaking a similar progression by the academic coordinating her undergraduate course (which was only possible because Sue was in a small school where the staff all knew the students by name). She discussed needing the other student’s help to negotiate her enrolment. She said, “and he’s like “this is what you need”, like yeah he was so great.”

Similarly Alison found the support of her friends and their families very helpful. She said “The friends I’ve made are just so easy to get along with and make it easy. Even their families, in that first year my parents weren’t around, and if I was sick their mums would cook soup for me and that kind of thing.” While Sue and Alison found having the support of fellow students and friends helpful, Travis went as far as saying “If I didn’t have my friends to lean on, I would have failed a long time ago.” While this statement may seem overly dramatic it reflects the importance of the friendships and networks developed by FiF students.

Many of the FiF students discussed the support they received from partners, parents and other family. Nina’s husband is her main source of support. She said that although her parents babysit occasionally her husband provides an emotional as well as practical support as he is her “sounding board”. Carl

said that over the years his greatest support had come from “probably my mum and other friends”. Gail discusses the way her parents provided support when she was struggling with her workload and considering leaving university. She said “my parents definitely helped me out to get over that wobble a bit and were a bit more supportive at that time”.

Alison’s parents provided financial support by acquiring funds through an Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) fund. (The ASG is an organisation that was established to help members fund their children’s education, see [ww.asg.com.au](http://ww.asg.com.au).) Alison said:

*My parents paid my rent actually, so the money the Centrelink gave me went into food and bills and that kind of thing. Yeah they were great. They also had one of those ASG scholarships so whenever I was really low they just took it out of that because that’s what the money was there for evidently. I didn’t find it too bad.*

#### 4.6.2 Impediments

Many of the impediments experienced by FiF students are included in section 4.2, which discusses the cost of being at university, and section 4.4 which talks about managing transition. As discussed earlier a number of the participants commented on the problems they faced purchasing expensive resources or paying for childcare when on placements. However, although the various costs involved in attending university and the difficulties in managing transition impede some FiF students there are also other factors that students identified as problems. Some found the language used by staff and on university websites unhelpful. Pete argued that “using frames like ‘the narrative doesn’t posit with the whatever’ – straight over [the student’s head]” while Jen found the “absence of information” problematic, stating “I felt like I was in a vacuum.” She also said:

*It was really hard to find stuff online. The language used is fairly plain but it is assumed knowledge regarding what’s being said on that, you understand the purpose of what’s being said on the web page but you’re coming from a vacuum you don’t have that knowledge of what it might relate to.*

Cory talked about the difficulty he found developing as a more independent learner:

*At school they’re spoon-fed a lot of the time, or they’re basically told do this, this and this and you’ll get a good grade. And all of a sudden you come to Uni and you’re kind of on your own aren’t you?*

Gail said, “I was daunted by some of the work ... I guess it kind of helped me out that everybody was in the same boat.” It may have been helpful to both of these FiF participants to be provided with greater insight about what to expect at university.

Other students discussed having difficulties communicating with groups and feeling they needed to overcome their own shyness. While Denise believed she was outgoing outside of the university she admitted that “I’m quite shy at uni, like to break into groups or approach someone or whatever”, and Gail said that she did not participate in the social activities or ‘pizza nights’ that were offered by her university because “none of the people in my degree were doing it and I was a bit shy.”

*Everyone has a story, so and that’s evident here when you look, you have to look around and sometimes you know, being the ponderer that I am, you think what happened on your way here today, like what happened before you sat down here and spoke to me this morning, or what’s your life story and that sort of thing. So I think maybe some of the lecturers can be a bit more mindful of that, you know whether you’re first in family or whether you have a disability or anything like that.  
Denise*

Brendon suggested that it would have been helpful if his family had a greater insight into his experiences at university:

*Mum will come and [I will say], "Oh I'm exhausted I've just done 9:00am to 2:00pm with three lectures all in a row with no break." She'll go, "Oh it's only 9:00am till 2:00pm," that's her shift part-time when she does her work. And she said, "Oh but I did the same today." And I went, "But it's different, a different form of learning, you're just constantly packing your brain full of information and having to work at the same time."*

Rowan talked about wishing he was able to attend lectures but finding it hard to manage when he also needs to work and look after his family. He said "I know that lecturers would love to see us in the lecture theatre but some of us just can't get in ... we'd really love to be there but it's just not possible." Denise made a similar comment, suggesting that she felt some academic staff could try to be more aware of who their students are, what their lives are like and what they have experienced getting to university.

The theme of struggle and sacrifice was also raised. Participants felt that they needed to really think about how they might achieve a workable balance of work, life and study. They also talked about having less time to spend with family and friends as well as losing friends or changing friendships. Sue did not see the changes in her friendships as an impediment but she acknowledged that her experiences at university had meant that she had less in common with the friends she had known from school:

*My friends I went to school with yes, because I've moved away from home and some of them stay there and they kind of don't change and then I feel like I've changed a lot because I've been overseas and I've been at uni and I've had to be away from home. So there are a lot of people back home that I probably lost contact with, just because we're moving in different directions.*

#### **4.6.3 Support and Impediments in Conclusion**

The FiF students who participated in our study were those who had utilised a variety of supports and have overcome a variety of impediments to remain at university. These students entered university with the skills and abilities to access support so that they could overcome the many difficulties they faced. While the help they sought was not always formal or provided by the university, these students were able to access it when required and successfully continue in their studies.

## 4.7 Purposes of Higher Education (HE)

This research identified that as these FiF students transition out of university, they consider they have attained a broad range of benefits as a result of their university experiences. Three core themes relating to the benefit of higher education emerged from the analysis of participant interviews: personal growth, social experiences and increased understanding of broader society. The benefit of broadening social horizons and academic experiences was not only recognised as beneficial to participants themselves, but also identified as being beneficial to other members of their immediate family. As discussed below university becomes a viable and valuable option for these siblings, parents and children within the same family. This ‘mentorship’ role frequently comes into play with FiF students looking to reciprocate to others in the same situation as them and suggests that FiF students take seriously their roles in empowering and educating their friends and family when it comes to demystifying the university experience.

### 4.7.1 Personal growth

Regardless of age, all participants identified the transition into HE as a process of entering into an unknown arena that triggered a range of emotional responses, described by Brendon as being “scared, worried and completely overwhelmed.” Despite the initial difficulties, which most participants described as disappearing halfway and towards the end of first year, all participants successfully integrated into the university environment and recognised their associated personal growth. For Alison and Sue, leaving home and relocating to Adelaide to attend university had a significant impact, with them both associating the move out of home with ‘growing up’:

*I think especially coming from the country just that experience, not even university, but just moving out and you might be uncomfortable at first but it's going to help you in the long run ... so many life skills and budgeting and all that kind of stuff, cooking for yourself and the little things that you take for granted at home, but once you move out are huge I think. (Alison)*

*Going to university is one of the few things that nobody else can do for you, it's one of the few things that no matter, nobody else can do it for you, you've got to do it yourself and the only person that will get you through that journey is you.  
Marg*

Even for participants who were not required to leave home, the realisation of the requirement to become independent from their families played a significant role in their personal growth.

*I don't think it hits you until perhaps after exams that now I have to be independent, I have to be doing this stuff myself, I can't just rely on my parents. (Brian)*

*It was a little bit hard, but I just sort of thought if everyone else can do it, I can do it as well. I realised that this is just going to be what life is going to be like, having to be independent and make your own choices on the spot. (Cory)*

On reflecting whether they thought university had changed them, a number of participants identified personal attributes, such as personal confidence, that had been positively shaped through their university experience.

Similar personal attributes were identified by other students, echoing the benefit of university developing them into more open and confident individuals. As a rural student who relocated to Adelaide to study, Brian recognised that being forced to establish new networks contributed towards his development:

*Social networking definitely helps a lot with developing you as a person because you come out of your shell a little bit more, helps you to be a little bit more confident, a little bit more outgoing, so it definitely helps a lot.*

#### 4.7.2 Social Experiences

Broadening social horizons and making new friends with similar interests were identified as key benefits by the majority of participants. Gail, who attended a lower socioeconomic high school, was the only one from her high school friendship group to continue on to complete further studies. On reflecting on how HE had changed her, she identified the establishment of different social circles as a result of her studies:

*I did keep in contact with my high school friends in the first year and part of the second year and quite regularly we'd catch up and that sort of thing. But then I guess as the degree progressed I became closer to people in the degree that had similar interests and just a bit more in common.*

For Nina, a mother of seven and constantly juggling family and study commitments, found that her major support network came from her friendship groups developed at university:

*The girls that I initially started my studies with – they've finished now, they're working, so I kind of go to them sometimes if I need help or support with anything, seeing they've been there done it and got through it – they work on anything that they can to pull me through.*

The benefit of broadening social and academic experiences was not only recognised as beneficial to participants themselves, but also identified as being beneficial to other members of their immediate family. Both Rowan and Nina expressed aspirations for their children to do what interests them, with university being a recommended pathway. As FiF students, these views indicate the development and transmission of a different form of cultural capital not previously present within their families. Similarly Brendan, Cory and Alison discussed the influence that their pathway to HE has had on younger siblings, with university now seen as a viable and valuable option.

*It probably – in some ways it has, it's probably made me a little bit more able to converse with different people, more people, so from that side of things you get pushed out of your comfort zone so you are probably more confident now than I was five years ago.*  
Nina

#### 4.7.3 Transformation of Perspectives

Alongside the acquisition of knowledge relevant to their discipline, participants also identified two additional key benefits: improvement in communication skills and the ability to see other people's perspectives. Pete a retiree who chose to participate in HE to fulfil a lifelong ambition, recognised that although he already possessed the skills to see others' points of view, he recognised that university provided him with the skills to be able to better articulate his thoughts:

*My wife and I can converse at a different level now that I couldn't have done before. Not on science but on life, the universe and everything. We might even stop a TV program and discuss that point and this point – play with the drama and relate that.*

This evidence of an increased understanding of broader society also appeared to influence student motivation beyond HE, which Alison described in her narrative surrounding how university had changed her:

*Probably it's just my ambition for life I think. Before when I was in high school I kind of had the mentality that 'finish high school, stay in [small rural town], get a retail job in [small rural town] and just kind of be there forever' and now I couldn't think of anything worse to be honest. Now I want to finish university and I want to travel and to live overseas and work overseas and I just want to do so much more than I ever wanted to do.*

Many talked about the purpose of HE as providing them with the ability to see other people's perspectives. Carl talked about "help[ing] others in the community more broadly" and "learn[ing] and develop[ing] skills that will be of benefit to others", while Brendon referred to the opening up of ideas and perspectives that had previously been closed off to him:

*[I]t's interesting coming from a very working-class background and a lot of my friends being from the same background when you see the way their life is, and then going to university when you're going to a completely different career, you get the really good aspect and you learn a lot.*

Both Carl and Brendon are hinting at some deep reflective changes that have taken place over their time at university. The 'Graduate Attributes' of each of our three partner institutions state that a key 'end result' of a university degree is a renewed or heightened sense of global citizenry, ethical behaviour and understanding, and inter-cultural competence. Unconsciously or not, our FiF students often alluded to these aspects of their university education, and were sometimes explicit in stating that these attributes were now an important part of their worldview. Todd's words are worth quoting at length:

*An educated society's probably is good, it's better than having people who know nothing at all about anything. I think in Australia we need to encourage innovation a bit more, we need to encourage business to become competitive in the world stage. And I think, we kind of expect that we're going to maintain a quality of life with this standard ... [Having an educated population] does benefit society because maybe democracy probably works better because people are more 'well read', they understand what's going on a lot more, they've got stronger views. People who go to uni have got much stronger views than those who don't, I've found [...] they're much more engaged in issues.*

Todd is articulating here not just a benefit of going to university for him as an individual; he also recognises the importance of a tertiary educated population who can gain a greater understanding of how Australian society will function in the years ahead and be both supportive and potentially critical of the ways in which that society works.

## 5. Overarching Themes

Through this research, we have uncovered a number of themes that are reflected multiple times across and throughout our findings. Some of these key themes are explored below, and feedback from our Reference Group has been included in this exploration. Further in-depth research into the following key themes could also be part of future research in this area.

### 5.1 Lack of Access to 'Hot Knowledge'

The first in family students in this study could be described as lacking the 'hot knowledge' that is generally acquired through social networks, in this case parents or older siblings (Smith, 2011; Simmons, 2013). Instead, they had to rely on other sources of information such as previous learning contexts, university websites and recruiting information which generally did not contain the implicit information of 'what university is really like'. They lacked information on how to navigate various university systems and procedures (Simmons, 2013) and were often unaware of support services available to them. There was little induction or guidance on how to manage their time or adjust to the new learning environment and participants commented that they were 'thrown in the deep end and expected to swim' which led to feelings of being overwhelmed in their first semester of study. This experience is consistent with other studies which have also shown that in most institutions the expectation is placed on the new student to 'adjust' to university and 'take responsibility' for their own learning rather than on the institution to provide guidance and support (Scanlon, Rowling & Weber, 2007; van der Meer, Jansen & Torenbeek, 2010; Leese, 2010). What is needed is greater recognition of the student voice from groups like FiF students who have heretofore been largely excluded and marginalised. Valuing their perspectives and standpoints helps to challenge entrenched institutional practices and leads to more inclusive practices for other under-represented groups in higher education (McLeod, 2011).

### 5.2 Cultural Capital and Habitus

For these first in family students a lack of cultural capital in negotiating the rules and norms of university was combined with a lack of social capital through limited social assets (Simmons, 2013). These FiF students struggled when there was a 'mismatch' between the habitus developed in their families and previous learning environments and the new field. They also discovered that the capital they brought with them was not necessarily valued in the 'field of university'. Specific examples of this mismatch included: not knowing the rules and norms of university; not always understanding academic discourse or expectations; not knowing how or where to access support services; and not easily breaking into social cliques and establishing friends with other students, many of whom seemed to know each other from previous interactions such as school.

These findings highlight the importance of exploring and understanding the habitus of first in family students in order to recognise and value the social and cultural capital these students bring to higher education. The university, as a field, incorporates structures and practices that are often rigid and biased in favour of particular groups, already privileged in the field. This was particularly evident in the analysis of which degree programs first in family students chose to pursue, which demonstrated that FiF students were less likely to choose degrees such as engineering, law or medicine which have been shown to lead to greater job security and higher incomes (Simmons, 2013). This research supports calls for a shift away from identifying non-traditional students as deficit or lacking to rather

focus on what higher education can do to support these students (Leese, 2010).

### 5.3 Luck

The theme of 'luck' fell into four main categories. Many participants associated luck with the university, indicating that they were 'lucky' to end up with a particular lecturer or were enrolled in a well organised and well run course. Others believed they were 'lucky' to meet and make new friends, maintain old friends or have opportunities to discuss university with someone either within or outside of their course. A number of the participants associated luck with employment where they suggested they were 'lucky' to get a particular part-time job or to be supported by the workplace to attend university. The fourth category associated with luck is more complex relating to the variables linked to the participants' lives, such as feeling 'lucky' to live in a particular time, having an opportunity to travel, acquiring financial support (via a grant) to attend university or being in the right place at the right time. Brendon said "luckily I find myself in the library a bit, it sort of helps out [financially]." However, it is interesting to note that none of these FiF students attributed this 'luck' to their own hard work or perseverance.

## 6. Future Directions

The above report illustrates what we have uncovered so far in our research but there are many more areas that could be explored further in future research into FiF. Some of these areas are identified below:

- The role of 'luck' / being lucky
- Imposter syndrome
- Agency/ Self-efficacy/ determination/ independence/ resilience
- Work ethic
- Academic skills
- Intellectual ability
- Resilience / overcoming hurdles
- Pragmatism and idealism
- Diversity of experience / backgrounds / aspiration
- Role of life experience
- Personal qualities influencing achievement

### 6.1 Limitations and Future Research

As for all projects, there have been some limitations and challenges which are detailed below, together with suggestions for further research.

One of the key limitations to this project was that participants all attended one of the three major universities in South Australia, hence it could be argued that the findings are germane to this setting with limited applicability to other contexts. However, as shown in the extended literature review, the key findings found in this study are comparable with those of studies on first in family students in other institutions both nationally and internationally. A further limitation was that the participants interviewed in this project were all successful first in family students who had completed at least three years of an undergraduate degree. The stories of their experiences at university therefore reflect the fact that they had persisted and were successful in achieving their goals.

Further insight into this FiF cohort would benefit through future research focusing on the experiences of students who had left university without completing a qualification. Exploration of the circumstances surrounding FiF students who had not successfully navigated university would add another dimension to our understandings of the challenges faced by this cohort and what strategies may be useful to support these students.

## 7. Conclusion

Despite the educational disadvantage that FiF students may experience in comparison to their non-FiF peers, this cohort has been shown to be able to successfully navigate the complexities of higher education when provided with the appropriate support and opportunities. The primary aim of this report is to provide a comprehensive overview on the transformative possibilities of entering higher education, as well as providing practical advice/guidelines for FiF students, academics, university managers and policymakers on how to improve outcomes for this previously under-recognised disadvantaged group.

In conducting an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of FiF university students, this report highlights both similarities and key differences between FiF and non-FiF students. Specifically, the project clarified that FiF students motivations and ambitions to study at university are similar to those of non-FiF students, with the primary ambition being 'a better life'. Where FiF students differ from their non-FiF peers is the additional challenges that arise through the very nature of being the first person in their family to attend university, and therefore lacking pertinent insider knowledge and understanding.

Similarly, although FiF students incur the same costs and constraints encountered by their fellow peers, the increased proportion of FiF students from a low SES background or from rural locations increases the financial burden. This results in FiF students being required to direct a significant amount of time towards paid employment, critical time that detracts from being able to focus their energy on learning the 'foreign' system of higher education.

Feelings of being unprepared for university and the lack of 'hot knowledge' surrounding what to expect was found to have a negative impact of FiF students' health and wellbeing. As a result of this perceived unpreparedness, FiF students focus on learning the system and consequently neglect factors such as building support systems and looking after their health, ironically the very factors that can provide a buffer to the stress experienced by FiF students.

The first year of university is well documented as being a pivotal time period during which students either successfully engage in their new environment or struggle to adopt their new role as a university student. This pivotal transition period was found to differ amongst our participants, with the duration of this challenging period varying from three weeks to 12 months. Whilst students failed to identify explicit support strategies provided by university that addressed their FiF status needs, it was clear from these successful FiF students that many of them created their own informal support structures within the university environment, whether that was with individual academics, tutors, professional staff or peers. These informal support structures provided crucial assistance in either identifying opportunities within the university systems or overcoming impediments which had the potential to derail the FiF students' participation in higher education.

Unquestionably it is the significant transformation of not only the individual FiF student, but also the transformative ripple effect on siblings, children or extended family that was evident as a key benefit of participation in higher education. This transformative experience extends beyond the walls of university, impacting on FiF students' future aspirations and their broader societal perspectives. In recognising the challenges that FiF students are required to overcome, in addition to the normal adjustments associated with studying at university, this report strongly advocates for increased emphasis on establishing support strategies for FiF students.

Overall this project has led to a deeper understanding of how FiF students can successfully navigate university. The preliminary disseminations of the project outcomes have had very positive feedback and we hope to extend the project with further publications as well as collaborations with other institutions to implement the recommendations arising from this report. Above all, we hope that the findings of this project lead to a greater understanding and increased support for those people who are the first in their family to attend university.

## Appendix A: Annotated Bibliography



*Exploring the Experience of Being First in Family at University*

*An Annotated Bibliography 2000–2014*

*A/Professor Sharron King, Dr Ann Luzeckyj, A/Professor Ben McCann and Charmaine Graham*

*A collaborative project between three universities in South Australia, University of South Australia, Flinders University and The University of Adelaide.*



*The First in Family project was funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) at Curtin University through the centre's 2014 Student Equity in Higher Education Research Grants Program. The information and views expressed in this report are those of the authors, and not necessarily those of the NCSEHE.*



*The researchers would like to express their appreciation to the members of the project reference group: Dr Deb Tranter, Dr Di Bills, Mr Lee Pope, A/Prof Rachael Field, Dr Grant Banfield, and Ms Audrey Stratton.*

*Permission is granted for copying, distributing and use by other institutions, with appropriate acknowledgement.*

© National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, 2015

Enquiries should be addressed via email to [ncsehe@curtin.edu.au](mailto:ncsehe@curtin.edu.au)

## Introduction

First in Family (FiF) is an under-recognised equity grouping which may encompass low SES, mature age, regional and remote, and indigenous students. Research indicates that these cohorts are highly capable when given opportunities to participate and support to succeed (Devlin, Kift, Nelson, Smith & McKay, 2012). However, previous research also shows that FiF students experience significant educational disadvantage as they do not possess the requisite cultural and social capital that is required to easily navigate their way through higher education institutions (Luzeckyj, King, Scutter & Brinkworth, 2011).

The aim of this annotated bibliography is to determine what is known about the FiF student experience in higher education, predominantly from an Australian context but within the broader global perspective. The terms 'first in family' and 'first generation' are often used interchangeably within the literature, but the use can vary dependent on the geographical location of the group of students being researched. Consequently it is important that consideration be given to the definition and interpretation of the term 'first in family' as it may be influenced by the international viewpoint from which it is being explored.

## Australia (AUST)

Australia's equity in higher education policies focus on improving access for four primary disadvantaged groups. These consist of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, indigenous students, students from regional areas and students with disabilities, groupings which do not explicitly incorporate FiF students. Despite this lack of national focus, there are a number of emerging quantitative and qualitative studies on FiF students that provide a unique Australian voice to the topic. Within an Australian context, FiF students are generally defined within the literature as being the first in the immediate family to attend higher education, which includes both parents (or other primary care givers) and siblings (Luzeckyj et al., 2011).

## United States (US)

The United States is one of the few countries that specifically identifies and collects relevant data on what is termed 'first generation' university students. The government policy emphasis, combined with a range of financial support mechanisms provided to this particular educationally disadvantaged group, has led to a large quantity of research on this cohort. For our purposes, we have equated the term 'university' to encompass both the traditional higher education system that operates within the US, as well as the two year colleges that offer associate degrees. The experiences of these college students follow similar themes to the university students in the US literature. Furthermore, for many disadvantaged students the pathway into university is through two year community college, hence capturing the voices of these students is important when considering the broader aspects of the FiF student experiences. A 'first generation' student in the US context is normally defined as a student whose parents have not graduated from college with a bachelor degree (a definition which does not include siblings who may have graduated) (Aspelmeier, Love, McGill, Elliott & Pierce 2012).

## United Kingdom (UK)

Within the UK system, 'first in family' students are encapsulated within the broader widening participation policy agenda which, in the higher education literature, includes a particular focus on socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The review of literature conducted by Gorard et al. (2006)

on widening participation research in the UK found very few local studies focusing specifically on FiF students. These findings are echoed in our current literature search, with limited UK studies available that focus explicitly on this under-recognised equity group. In order to address a potential gap and to ensure the UK literature is covered, a number of UK studies that discuss findings pertaining to the broader topic of 'widening participation' have been included within this annotated bibliography. Where a UK study has focused on FiF students, the definition used to define the cohort is similar to that applied in Australia and centres on students whose parents have not attended university; however it does not generally exclude siblings.

## Key Themes

Four key themes emerged from the literature and are presented in Figure 6 below. These four key themes which provide readers with a broad understanding of the FiF student experience are outlined as:

1. *The 'Individual'* – a review of the literature confirms that the differences within FiF students are as diverse as the differences identified between FiF students and traditional students. Key sub themes that emerge under the collective term of the 'individual' emphasise the role that internal characteristics, abilities and personal agency contribute to the experiences of FiF students. Furthermore, the theoretical concepts of social and cultural capital, and habitus arise repeatedly as significant factors.
2. *The 'Student'* – the decision to return to study is a significant life changing event for FiF students, however it is an event that does not stop once the enrolment process is finalised. What follows is a process of adjustment and tension as the FiF student takes on the 'learner identity' and attempts to master the role of student. The review of literature highlights that FiF students are less likely to be involved in extra-curricular activities and campus life, and the omission of these activities may contribute towards a sense of isolation and early attrition.
3. *The 'Journey'* – for FiF students, the pathway into university and the journey once there, are as diverse as the students themselves. Significant topics highlighted by students regarding their journey emphasise the motivation(s) that lead them to attend higher education. The literature identifies that for a significant number of FiF students it is necessary to combine employment and study as there are often prohibitive costs associated with attending university.
4. *The 'Networks'* – a common theme evident in the literature is the importance that support networks provide to FiF students. These networks not only support FiF students to initially consider tertiary studies as a viable option, but they also provide the necessary support for the successful attainment of the degree qualification. Due to the heterogeneous nature of the FiF cohort a range of support networks, both external and internal to the higher education system, are identified.

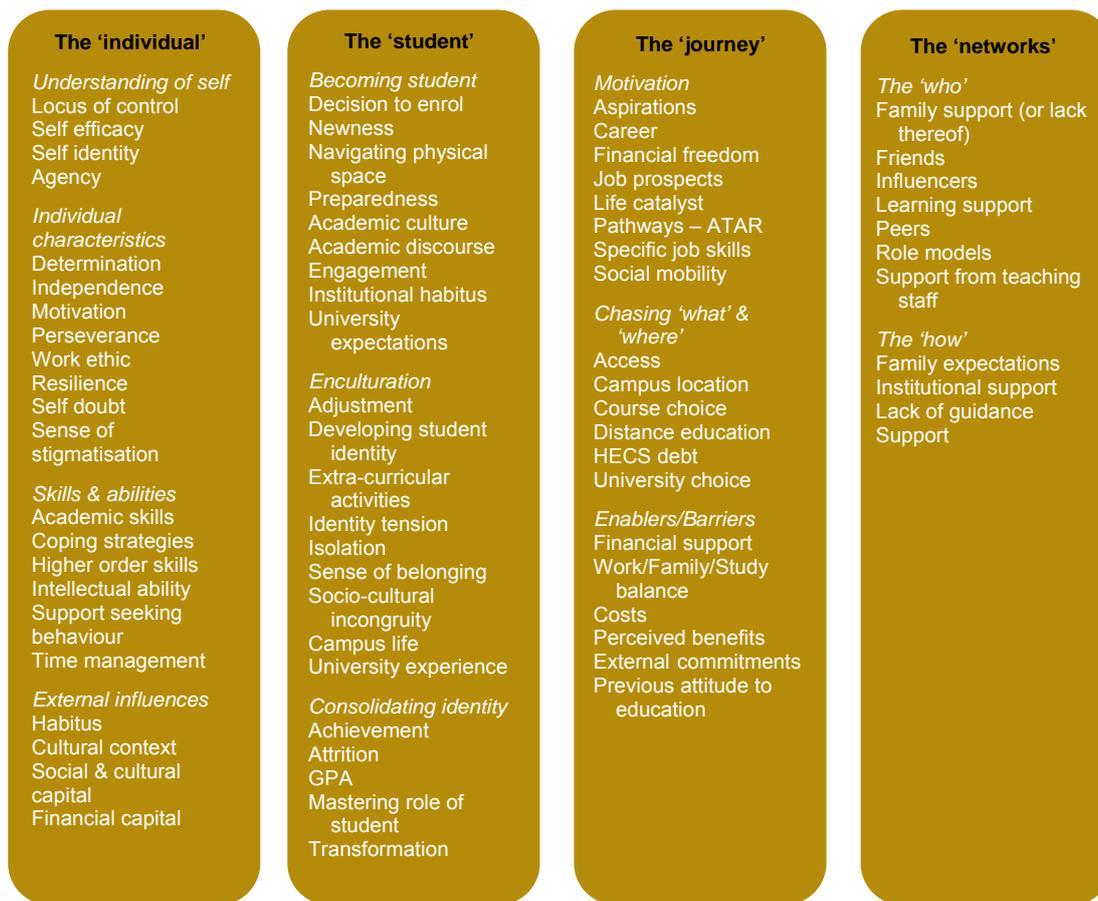


Figure 6: Conceptual framework of the key themes within 'first in family' literature

## Methodology

An examination of journal articles was conducted using the key terms 'first in family' and 'first generation' with the interchangeable terms of 'university' and 'college'. Searches were limited to the period 2000 to 2014 and geographical locations of Australia, United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada. A broader search was then conducted examining research organisations and government websites in order to identify relevant policy documents and working papers. The final stage of developing the annotated bibliography involved examining published documents from higher education conferences, including keynote presentations, abstracts and articles discussed in smaller work group sessions. Only the most appropriate literature pertaining to FiF student experiences were selected for inclusion. A summary of literature sources can be found in Appendix A.

Literature addressing programs and other intervention strategies to improve transition and academic success for FiF students were outside of the scope of this annotated bibliography and have therefore been excluded. Similarly, research focusing on aspirations and experiences prior to commencing university, such as those of high school students, were also excluded as they too, were determined to be outside the scope of this review. Despite the exclusion of these fields of study, they are recognised as being important factors within the broader understanding of FiF student pathways. Consequently it is recommended that future research and annotated bibliographies consider including, and possibly focusing, on these broader areas.

## Structure

The annotated bibliography has been structured in two parts: the first section includes literature from an Australian perspective, whilst the second section includes literature from the UK, USA, NZ, Canada and South Africa.

Formatting for literature citation includes the electronic DOI, ISBN or URL, keywords and extracted abstract or introduction. Reference is made as to whether the author's original abstract or introduction has been replicated or amended.

## Australian Perspective

Asmar, C., Page, S., & Radloff, A. (2011). Dispelling myths: Indigenous students' engagement with university. *AUSSE Research Briefings*, 10, 1-15.

URL: <http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=ausse>

Keywords: aboriginal students; indigenous students engagement; university enrolment

It has been known for years now that students who engage more frequently in educationally effective practices get better grades, are more satisfied, and are more likely to persist with their studies. It is also known that while engagement is positively linked to desired outcomes for all types of students, historically underserved students tend to benefit more than majority students (Kuh, Kinzie, Cruce, Shoup & Gonyea, 2006). In the case of Indigenous Australians, positive responses in relation to engagement and satisfaction are not necessarily accompanied by the overall levels of persistence and completion one would expect. (Extracted from Introduction)

Asmar, C., Page, S., & Radloff, A. (2014). Exploring anomalies in Indigenous student engagement: findings from a national Australian survey of undergraduates. *Higher Education Research & Development* (ahead-of-print), 1-15.

DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2014.934334

Keywords: aboriginal; attrition; indigenous education; retention; student engagement; student support; university

Increases in participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in higher education across Australia continue to be promising. However, it is also known that Indigenous students' attrition, retention and completion rates remain areas of concern. In this paper, we report our findings from an analysis of Indigenous student responses to the 2009 Australasian Survey of Student Engagement. Overall, Indigenous Australian students express positive responses in relation to engagement, but are more likely than non-Indigenous students to be planning to depart. We explore this somewhat unexpected anomaly, whilst also suggesting that much more needs to be known about our Indigenous students, including, for example, whom they may interact with at university; where they turn for support; and why they may decide to leave. Our findings strongly indicate that better national and institutional data are needed to address the current gaps in knowledge relating to Indigenous student populations in Australia and around the world. (Abstract)

Ballantyne, J., Madden, T., & Todd, N. (2009). Gauging the attitudes of non-traditional students at a new campus: An Australian case study. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 31(4), 301-313.

DOI: 10.1080/13600800903191948

Keywords: first-year experience; higher education evaluation; non-traditional students

Of the challenges facing universities, the need to attract and accommodate students of increasingly

varied demographic backgrounds is perhaps one of the most pressing. This study was conducted to profile the first-year student cohort at a new university campus characterised by the non-traditional students typical of a rapidly changing tertiary sector. The project was designed to follow on from the findings of a recent nation-wide review of first-year students in Australia, which provided a robust point of comparison. The cohort in this context differed from those of previous studies—over half were first-generation tertiary students; less than one-third were from a high socioeconomic status background; and just under half were mature-aged students. Overall, results indicated that students at this university, despite their backgrounds, were remarkably positive about their university experience and well-equipped to achieve at university study. These findings are highly relevant in terms of understanding the transitional experiences of non-traditional students. (Abstract)

Benson, R., Heagney, M., Hewitt, L., Crosling, G., & Devos, A. (2012). Social inclusion and the student experience: what are the implications for academic support? *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 14(2), 11-28.

DOI: 10.5456/WPLL.14.2.11

Keywords: diversity; social inclusion; student experience; student support

In Western countries, governments continue to emphasise social inclusion in higher education. While access is important in social inclusion, there is a need to broaden the conceptualisation of the student experience to optimise opportunities for the academic achievement of students from diverse backgrounds. Potentially, this includes increased support strategies by both academic and professional staff. In this paper, we discuss the experiences of a group of students from diverse backgrounds in a longitudinal research project that aims to provide insight into how these students succeed in higher education. We focus particularly on students' comments about their study management to explore the implications of their experiences for academic support. (Abstract)

Benson, R., Hewitt, L., Heagney, M., Devos, A., & Crosling, G. (2010). Diverse pathways into higher education: Using students' stories to identify transformative experiences. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 50(1), 26-53.

URL: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ952222.pdf>

Keywords: higher education; family influence; socioeconomic status; first generation; rural population

This paper is based on findings from the first phase of a longitudinal project examining how a group of students from diverse backgrounds succeed in higher education. The concept of perspective transformation is used to explore students' stories about factors that influenced them on their journey to university, including socio-economic background, family difficulties, gender, the effect of being first in family to enter higher education, migration, location and experiences of schooling. The paper argues that, for some participants, the decision to enrol was not primarily the effect of perspective transformation, but rather the result of other aspects of their lives. Finally, we comment on the value of narrative inquiry for revealing participants' experiences and, potentially, for supporting the process of transformation. (Abstract)

Bexley, E. (2007). *Social capital in theory and practice* Melbourne, Vic: Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne.

URL: <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/research/equity/docs/SocialCapitalNov2007.pdf>

Keywords: social capital; higher education; TAFE; student engagement

This report explores the use of social capital theory in understanding educational advantage/disadvantage from a public policy development perspective. We undertake a detailed review and critique of the key 'strands' of social capital theory, contextualising these in an analysis of applied social capital theory in a public policy and a development environment. Finally, we use our modified understanding of the theory to explore the social capital of business and IT students in higher education and vocational education and technology (VET) in Victoria. (Extracted from Executive Summary)

Brinkworth, R., McCann, B., King, S., Burke da Silva, K., Luzeckyj, A., Scutter, S., Palmer, E., Hill, J., Wright, V., & McCann, J. (2013). *Student and staff expectations and experiences*. Australian Government: Office for Learning and Teaching.

URL: [http://fyhe.com.au/expectations/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/CG9-1158\\_Adelaide\\_Brinkworth\\_Final-report\\_2013.pdf](http://fyhe.com.au/expectations/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/CG9-1158_Adelaide_Brinkworth_Final-report_2013.pdf)

Keywords: student expectations; first year; higher education; first in family; rural students

The underpinnings of this project were developed in 2007-08 when a number of pilot surveys were conducted at The University of Adelaide. Students commencing tertiary education at The University of Adelaide were surveyed in order to further elucidate the difficulties they faced upon entry (Crisp et al., 2009). Students from all faculties were asked what they expected in a number of areas such as workload, feedback on assignments, and access to teaching staff. Interestingly, while students responded that they thought studying at university would be different to high school, they consistently indicated that their expectations of access to teachers, response times for the return of work and feedback, and reviewing of drafts, was the same as high school. This suggested that while students knew there *would* be a change they did not really appreciate the *nature* of the change, nor were students sufficiently cognizant of the more ambiguous expectations and demands placed on them compared with the highly structured environment of secondary school. (Extracted from Executive Summary)

Brook, H., Fergie, D., Maeorg, M., & Michell, D. (2014). *Universities in Transition: Foregrounding Social Contexts of Knowledge in the First Year Experience*: University of Adelaide Press.

URL: <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/press/titles/universities-transition/universities-transition-ebook.pdf>

Keywords: higher education; first year experiences; university students

Universities are social universes in their own right. They are the site of multiple, complex and diverse

social relations, identities, communities, knowledges and practices. At the heart of this book are people enrolling at university for the first time and entering into the broad variety of social relations and contexts entailed in their 'coming to know' at, of and through university. By recasting 'the transition to university' as simultaneously and necessarily entailing a transition of university — indeed universities — and of their many and varied constitutive relations, structures and practices, the contributors to this book seek to reconceptualise the 'first-year experience' in terms of multiple and dynamic processes of dialogue and exchange amongst all participants. They interrogate taken-for-granted understandings of what 'the university' is, and consider what universities might yet become. (Edited from abstract)

Cameron, S., & Robinson, K. (2014). The Experiences of Indigenous Australian Psychologists at University. *Australian Psychologist*, 49(1), 54-62.

DOI: 10.1111/ap.12036

Keywords: aboriginal; Australian; education; indigenous; psychology; university.

Disparities exist between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians on indicators of life expectancy, alcohol and drug use, adult and juvenile incarceration, and rates of hospitalisation for self-harm, suicide, and mental and behavioural disorders due to psychoactive substance use. Psychology is a discipline that can assist in remedying these issues, yet disparities are evident in Indigenous participation in higher education generally, as well as within tertiary psychology education specifically. Ten Indigenous Australian psychologists were interviewed to investigate possible barriers and enablers for Indigenous students studying psychology at university. Sources of support for Indigenous students included family support, financial assistance, and Indigenous student support centres. Potential barriers to university study of psychology were negative conceptions of higher education and psychology by the Indigenous community, "culture shock" upon relocating to the metropolitan area, a lack of Indigenous content and staff, and culturally insensitivity by staff members. Efforts should be made to address these barriers to participation, as well as to support those structures and services that were supportive for students. (Edited from abstract)

Catterall, J., Davis, J., & Yang, D. F. (2014). Facilitating the learning journey from vocational education and training to higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 33(2), 242-255.

DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2013.832156

Keywords: first-year experience; pathways; student diversity; transition; vocational education and training

An increase in students who enter higher education in Australia following their studies in the vocational education and training (VET) sector has led to heightened national interest in the transition experiences of these students. This paper reports on the experiences of students who, as a result of their VET studies, entered a relatively new, large, metropolitan university in 2009 and 2010 in the fields of Business and Law, Early Childhood and Nursing. The investigation elicited responses from students about a range of personal, administrative and academic experiences. A total of 529 students responded to a survey, 74 students were interviewed by telephone and 33 students attended focus

groups. A major finding of the research was that many students saw the new learning context as a positive factor and responded to challenges with enthusiasm and resilience. Despite this, it seems that the transition period, particularly the first semester of study, is an unnecessarily stressful time for many students and that this could be mitigated by the provision of timely information about differences between institutional and learner expectations, workload, administrative processes and learning practices. (Abstract)

Chesters, J. (2014). Maintaining Inequality Despite Expansion: Evidence of the Link between Parents' Education and Qualitative Differences in Educational Attainment. *Higher Education Quarterly* (ahead-of-print)

DOI: 10.1111/hequ.12060

Keywords: higher education; parental education; educational attainment

The restructuring of the Australian labour market decreased demand for low-skilled workers and increased demand for highly skilled workers and professionals further strengthening the relationship between educational and occupational attainment. To satisfy the demand for highly educated workers, the government reorganised the higher education sector increasing the number of universities and trebling the number of places for domestic undergraduate students. Analysing data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey, this paper examines the association between parents' education and the likelihood of graduating from university for six birth cohorts of Australians. Overall, the findings suggest that although the expansion of the higher education sector in Australia provided alternative pathways into university, differences in educational attainment persist. (Abstract)

Chesters, J., & Watson, L. (2013). Returns to education for those returning to education: evidence from Australia. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(9), 1634–1648. DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2013.801422

Keywords: mature age students; Australia; employment; earnings; expansion of higher education

There is widespread support for expanding access to universities for underrepresented groups, such as students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and older students, because of the higher rates of return to university degrees. This study examines whether this assumption holds true for mature-aged graduates who have received their degrees in an era of mass participation. Using data from Australia, where around a quarter of university students are now over 25 years of age, the returns to higher education of mature-aged and younger graduates between 2001 and 2009 were compared. It was found that mature-aged graduates are more likely to reside in less-advantaged areas and to be the first person in their family to attend university but are less likely to be employed in the year before graduation, compared to younger graduates. However, in the year after graduation, employment status and earnings do not differ significantly for graduates regardless of their age at graduation. (Abstract)

Cowie, E., & Hamilton, K. (2014). Key beliefs related to decisions for physical activity engagement

among first-in-family students transitioning to university. *Journal of community health*, 39(4), 719-726.

DOI: 10.1007/s10900-013-9817-3

Keywords: physical activity; first in family; university; beliefs

The current study investigated key beliefs related to decisions for physical activity (PA) engagement among first-in-family (FiF) students transitioning to university. FiF students (n = 157) completed an online questionnaire assessing standard theory of planned behaviour constructs and belief-based items. One week later, participants completed a follow-up questionnaire assessing self-reported PA during the previous week. Results identified a range of behavioural, normative, and control beliefs that were significantly correlated with both PA intention and behaviour. Various key beliefs were also identified in relation to FiF students' decisions to be regularly physically active, with behavioural beliefs such as "take up too much time", normative beliefs including "friends outside of university", and control beliefs such as "cost", identified. The study addresses a gap in the literature of targeting FiF students, a cohort at risk for inactivity, and utilises a sound theoretical framework to identify the unique set of beliefs guiding decisions for PA for this at-risk community group. (Edited from abstract)

Cuthill, M., & Jansen, D. (2013). Initial results from a longitudinal impact study focusing on a higher education 'widening participation' program in Australia. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 15(1), 7-21.

DOI: 10.5456/WPLL.15.1.7

Keywords: widening participation; equity in higher education; low socio-economic background; raising aspiration

In Australia, the issue of social equity within higher education has been a focus of national policy since 1990. While this has resulted in some increases in participation by particular equity groups, access rates for people from low socioeconomic backgrounds remain persistently low. The most recent review of Australian higher education has set a 20% participation target for people from low socio-economic backgrounds by 2020, with some institutional funding linked to achievement of that participation target. Understandably, universities are now developing program responses to meet these targets. This paper reports initial results from a five year study which explores the impacts of one such program on participants, their families, schools and community. Four key 'impact' themes identified through this research are discussed: 'Recognition', 'Raised awareness', 'Relief' and 'Social connections'. Collectively, these themes underpin participants' higher education decision-making processes. (Abstract)

Devlin, M. (2010). Non-traditional student achievement: Theory, policy and practice in Australian higher education. Keynote Address. *13th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference*, Adelaide, June 27-30, 2010.

URL: [http://www.fyhe.com.au/past\\_papers/papers10/content/pdf/Marcia\\_Devlin\\_keynote\\_4.pdf](http://www.fyhe.com.au/past_papers/papers10/content/pdf/Marcia_Devlin_keynote_4.pdf)

Keywords: higher education; non-traditional students; cultural capital; widening participation

Government widening participation policy, performance measurement and funding to universities will now provide an additional incentive. The future growth of the number and proportion of non-traditional students in Australian universities will focus attention keenly on student achievement. This paper argues that particular theories may be helpful in understanding the experiences and perspectives of non-traditional students and, therefore, in informing policy and practice within institutions and beyond to facilitate student achievement. In particular, notions of role theory, cultural capital, the hidden curriculum at university and socio-cultural theory in action are examined to inform suggestions for proactive responses. (Edited from abstract)

Devlin, M. (2013). Bridging socio-cultural incongruity: Conceptualising the success of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds in Australian higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(6), 939-949.

DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2011.613991

Keywords: low socio-economic status; socio-cultural incongruity; cultural capital; student success

This article examines the conceptual frames that might be used to consider the success and achievement of students from low socio-economic status in Australian higher education. Based on an examination of key literature from Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and North America, it is argued that Australia should avoid adopting either a deficit conception of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds or a deficit conception of the institutions into which they will move. Further, rather than it being the primary responsibility of the student or of the institution to change to ensure the success of these students, it is argued that the adjustments necessary to ensure achievement for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in Australian higher education would be most usefully conceptualised as a 'joint venture' toward bridging socio-cultural incongruity. (Abstract)

Devlin, M., Kift, S., Nelson, K., Smith, L., & McKay, J. (2012). *Effective teaching and support of students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds: Resources for Australian higher education* Australian Government: Office for Learning and Teaching.

URL: <http://www.lowses.edu.au/assets/ALTC%20LSES%20Final%20Report%202012.pdf>

Keywords: higher education; low socioeconomic status

This project is about enhancing the learning and experiences of LSES students in Australian higher education. The project will identify and document successful initiatives and create a new, easy-to-use and adaptable set of resources to assist institutions in effectively implementing policies, programs and practices to facilitate the success of students from low socioeconomic (LSES) backgrounds enrolled in higher education institutions in Australia. A key feature of this project will be the development of a distinctive conceptual framework that embodies an Australian conception of inclusive teaching in high education. The project will focus on effective approaches to teaching and supporting students who come to university with greater diversity in preparedness and in social and cultural capital, and develop new resources to assist Australian universities to better meet the needs of students from

LSES backgrounds. (Edited from Executive Summary)

Devlin, M., & O'Shea, H. (2011). Directions for Australian higher education institutional policy and practice in supporting students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 33(5), 529-535.

DOI: 10.1080/1360080X.2011.605227

Keywords: institutional policy; institutional practice; low socioeconomic status; student success

The Australian Government's response to the 2008 Bradley Review of higher education has set clear targets for increased university participation of people from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Using a 'success-focused' methodological approach, this research documents the factors that a sample of 53 later-year, low socioeconomic status background students at one Australian university report have assisted them to manage and overcome the challenges of remaining at, progressing through and succeeding at university. Thematic analyses of the data identified the most helpful factors as including the students' own study behaviour around, and attitude toward, study; teacher characteristics; institutional support of particular kinds; and student-to-student connections. Directions for institutional policy and practice are outlined. (Abstract)

Devlin, M., & O'Shea, H. (2012). Effective university teaching: Views of Australian university students from low socio-economic status backgrounds. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 17(4), 385-397.

DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2011.641006

Keywords: effective university teaching; low socio-economic status; widening participation; university success

As the Australian higher education population further diversifies as a result of federal government policy changes, the collective understanding of effective university teaching in the Australian context will need to evolve to incorporate such shifts. The Australian Government has set clear targets for increased university participation of people from low socio-economic status (LSES) backgrounds. While their performance is comparable to students from higher SES backgrounds, many LSES students face particular challenges in undertaking university study. Using a 'success-focused' (Devlin 2009) methodological approach, this research documents the factors that a sample of 53 later-year, LSES students at one Australian university report have assisted them to manage and overcome the challenges of remaining at, progressing through and succeeding in their studies. The most helpful factors included teacher availability to help, their enthusiasm and dedication; and their effective communication with students particularly but not exclusively around assessment requirements. (Abstract)

DiGregorio, K. D., Farrington, S., & Page, S. (2000). Listening to our students: Understanding the factors that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' academic success. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 19(3), 297-309.

DOI: 10.1080/758484344

Keywords: higher education; indigenous; success

While the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in higher education in Australia has doubled in recent years, the gap between their attainment and the attainment of other Australians has remained consistent. This study focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' experiences in a diploma program offered in block mode, in order to better understand the "on-" and "off-" campus experiences. The research yields important findings related to students' motivations to enrol and their definitions of academic success; the challenges they experience in making the transition to tertiary study; the vulnerability of our students' determination to succeed; the effects of being in a program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and the ways in which minor challenges, if unresolved, can accumulate to interfere with students' study. (Edited from abstract)

Foster, J., Allen, W., Oprescu, F., & McAllister, M. (2014). Mytern: An Innovative Approach to Increase Students' Achievement, Sense of Wellbeing and Levels of Resilience. *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association*, 43, 31-40.

URL: <http://myterncity.com.au/sites/default/files/uploads/JANZSSA-extract.pdf>

Keywords: university students; wellbeing; resilience; first year

Many university students, particularly first year, do experience feelings of stress and social isolation, which negatively impact on their physical, mental and academic wellbeing. This paper reports on a study at a regional Australian university using mixed methods to investigate the impact of an emotional fitness intervention (Mytern) on the emotional health and resilience of students in a compulsory first year course. Results indicated that this supportive intervention developed a feeling of connection and a sense of control within a large number of students; enabling them to feel stronger mentally and physically; perform better academically; encouraging them to continue their study; despite continually being confronted with everyday stressors. Equipping students with a skill to reframe the daily stressors of university and life revealed increased wellbeing and retention rates, with implications to decrease the number of students presenting to an already overburdened student counselling service. (Edited from abstract)

Funston, A., & Lee, N. (2014). The Graduating Project: A Cross-Disciplinary Inquiry-Based Capstone in Arts. *Inquiry-based Learning for Faculty and Institutional Development: A Conceptual and Practical Resource for Educators (Innovations in Higher Education Teaching and Learning, Volume 1)* Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 1, 223-241.

DOI: 10.1108/S2055-364120140000001012

Keywords: capstone units; university students; final year

Australian academics and students are discovering the value of final-year capstone units. Often designed as inquiry-based projects, capstones can engage students in authentic work that interests them personally, while building on their disciplinary knowledge and graduate capabilities. The cross-

disciplinary inquiry-based capstone in Arts at an Australian university includes a high proportion of non-traditional and first in the family students, many from non-English speaking backgrounds. The success of this capstone stems from student teams selecting and designing their own projects, often drawing on knowledge(s) and concerns relevant to their own diverse communities. The range and quality of student projects carried out in this capstone (many of which involve close links with local communities and advocacy organisations) attest to the value of cross-disciplinary, inquiry-based and student-managed capstone units. (Edited from abstract)

Gale, T. (2009). Towards a southern theory of higher education. Paper presented at the *Preparing for tomorrow today: the first year experience as foundation: First Year in Higher Education Conference 2009*, 29 June-1 July 2009, Townsville, Queensland: conference proceedings.

URL: [http://fyhe.com.au/past\\_papers/papers09/ppts/Trevor\\_Gale\\_paper.pdf](http://fyhe.com.au/past_papers/papers09/ppts/Trevor_Gale_paper.pdf)

Keywords: widening participation; social inclusion; higher education; cultural capital

While the student recruitment departments of universities focus on 'bums on seats', equity advocates draw attention to 'which bums', in 'what proportions', and, more to the point, 'which seats', 'where'. In this paper I propose an expanded conception for social inclusion and an enlarged regard for what is being accessed by students who gain entry to university. Drawing on Connell's conception of 'Southern Theory', I highlight power/knowledge relations in higher education and particularly 'southerners': those under-represented in universities and whose cultural capital is similarly marginalised and discounted. While increasing regard for the importance of Indigenous knowledge is beginning to challenge the norms of higher education, we are yet to generalise such preconceptions of epistemology to include knowledge particular to people from regional and rural areas, with disabilities, and from low socioeconomic backgrounds. To take account of marginalized forms of knowledge and of thinking will mean thinking differently about higher education. (Edited from abstract)

Henderson, R., Noble, K., & George-Walker, D. (2009). Transitioning into university: 'interrupted' first year students problem-solving their way into study. *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development: Rockhampton*, 6(1), 51-65.

URL: <http://sleid.cqu.edu.au/include/getdoc.php?id=817&...>

Keywords: first year experience; interrupted learners; academic support; social support

For many 'new' university students, especially those who might be called 'mature age', 'interrupted' or 'second chance' learners, the commencement of university study is often fraught with difficulties. This paper sets out to investigate some of the concerns experienced by a group of 'interrupted' learners who are enrolled in the first year of an education degree in a regional Australian university. In contrast to the traditional approach of offering academic support to students, this program emphasises social support and the development of a learning community as essential to academic success. The program operates with no fixed academic agenda and positions students and academics as life-long learners. (Edited from abstract)

Hillman, K. (2005). The first year experience: The transition from secondary school to university and TAFE in Australia. *LSAY Research Reports*, 44.

URL: [http://research.acer.edu.au/lsay\\_research/44](http://research.acer.edu.au/lsay_research/44)

Keywords: school leavers; university students; LSAY

This report examined the experiences of young people during their first year of tertiary education. The data used in this report are drawn from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), which study the progress of cohorts of young Australians as they make the transition from secondary school to work and further education and training, beginning in Year 9. The group of young people who were in Year 9 in 1998, and who first entered tertiary education during 2002, are the focus of this report. (Executive Summary)

James, R., Bexley, E., & Maxwell, L. (2008). *Participation and equity: a review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people*. Deakin, ACT: Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne for Universities Australia.

URL: <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/news/commissioned-studies/Participation-and-equity-in-higher-education>

Keywords: higher education; low socioeconomic background; indigenous students; participation

This report reviews available literature and data relating to the participation and success of people from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds and Indigenous people in Australian higher education, including information on school achievement and retention where this is relevant to access to higher education. Where data are available they are reported for both urban low SES people and rural/remote low SES people. The analysis does not include international students. The report also contains a broad brush summary of the equity activities and initiatives of Australian universities and a summary of equity policies, programs and trends in selected nations, in particular the United Kingdom, USA and Canada. The purpose of the report is to shed light on the factors associated with the persistent underrepresentation of low SES people and Indigenous people in Australian universities with a view to informing policies and strategies and providing a framework for further analysis of equity for people from low SES backgrounds. The report includes a summary of barriers and inhibiting factors as well as suggestions for possible ways of defining and measuring socioeconomic status for higher education purposes. Recommendations for future work are also proposed. (Extracted from Executive Summary)

James, R., Krause, K.L., & Jennings, C. (2010). *The first year experience in Australian universities*: Canberra: DEEWR.

URL: [http://cshe.unimelb.edu.au/research/experience/docs/FYE\\_Report\\_1994\\_to\\_2009.pdf](http://cshe.unimelb.edu.au/research/experience/docs/FYE_Report_1994_to_2009.pdf)

Keywords: aspirations; university engagement; course experience

The 2009 First Year Experience survey is the fourth national study undertaken by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at five-yearly intervals since 1994. This report therefore presents findings on the changing attitudes and experiences of first year students in Australian universities across a period of 15 years. The findings of the 2009 First Year Experience study suggest that good progress has been made in improving the transition to university and the quality of the educational experience

for first year students. The investment in high quality transition programs and in monitoring and responding to the needs and experiences of first year students is yielding dividends. (Extracted from Executive Summary)

Jardine, S., & Bonne, M. (2014). Factors that affect the persistence with their studies of regional mature-age female university students with children at home. *17th International First Year in Higher Education Conference*, Darwin.

URL: [http://fyhe.com.au/past\\_papers/papers14/06F.pdf](http://fyhe.com.au/past_papers/papers14/06F.pdf)

Keywords: regional; non-traditional students; student retention; socioeconomic background; rural

The project will investigate the factors that affect the persistence of regional mature-age (aged 21 or over) female university students with children at home. By surveying this cohort across four regional campuses, the research will initially establish factors which students find most difficult to manage, and which may have caused them to consider ceasing or intermitting university study. The major focus is on the retention of this cohort of students, who are being enrolled in increasing numbers at regional campuses. Many in this category are from low SES communities and are often first in family to attend university. It is essential that this group continue with their studies and not cease or intermit, as their persistence will not only benefit themselves and each regional/rural campus but also the local communities where they will most likely pursue their future careers. (Abstract)

Johnston, H., Collett, D., & Kooyman, B. (2013). Enabling parents, partners and friends to collaborate in student transition and success. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 7(2), A50-A61.

URL: <http://arrow.unisa.edu.au:8081/1959.8/157037>

Keywords: widening participation; university transition; first year experience; first in family; parents, enculturation

When students are first in their family to enrol at university, enculturation into university life is an essential element of academic language and learning development. Now, with the widening participation agenda, not only is there an increasingly more diverse student population and greater numbers of “first generation at university” students, but many students are more dependant for longer on their parents, partners and friends for everyday support. The capacity of family members to understand how they might provide their students with appropriate support may be limited, especially if they have no prior experience of university. This paper argues for an updated view of enculturation in which academic language and learning staff broaden their scope to educate and enable other stakeholders in students’ lives. The paper outlines a collaborative transition initiative at the University of South Australia driven jointly by an academic language and learning coordinator and counsellor in the Learning and Teaching Unit and involving three independent services units. (Edited from abstract)

Kinnear, A., Boyce, M., Sparrow, H., Middleton, S., & Cullity, M. (2008). *Diversity: A longitudinal study of how student diversity relates to resilience and successful progression in a new generation university*. Australian Government: Office for Learning and Teaching.

URL: <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-library?text=diversity>

Keywords: student diversity; university; undergraduates

This project used the voices of diverse cohorts of students to describe their learning journeys as they progressed through the later years of their degree and into the workforce. The project combined quantitative data from a large student sample with qualitative data from a series of case study

narratives to document the students' perceptions about their learning experiences, the factors underpinning progression in their studies and their transition into the workplace. The project has attempted to answer the question: *does diversity matter?* Do students of different diversities progress differently, and are there differences in the factors enhancing progression and developing resilience that can be linked directly to diversity? In this project, successful students are those who have completed first year and have progressed to their second or final year of their undergraduate degree. (Extracted from Executive Summary)

Luzeckyj, A., King, S., Scutter, S., & Brinkworth, R. (2011). The significance of being first: A consideration of cultural capital in relation to "first in family" student's choices of university and program. A Practice Report. *International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 2(2).

DOI: 10.5204/intjfyhe.v2i2.89

Keywords: Higher education; student expectations; first in family; cultural capital

This presentation explored the differences between expectations of first in family students and students who have immediate family members (parents, care givers, or siblings) who have attended university before them. The authors draw on Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital to examine how being first in family influences student expectations. Data from a large survey of over 3,000 first year students conducted in 2010 across the three South Australian universities is used to explore the demographic make-up of first in family students, and the choices they make as to what type of university and program they enrol in. Based on qualitative and quantitative data, the authors compare choices of first in family students with those made by non-first in family students. (Edited from abstract)

McKay, J., & Devlin, M. (2014). 'Uni has a different language ... to the real world': demystifying academic culture and discourse for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. *Higher Education Research & Development* (ahead-of-print), 1-13.

DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2014.890570

Keywords: academic culture; academic discourse; diversity; equity; low socioeconomic students; student success

The Australian government has set ambitious targets for increased higher-education participation of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds. There is, thus, a pressing need to explore how best to empower these students with what they require to progress and succeed at university. The paper draws on a literature review and qualitative data from a national study in which 89 students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and 26 staff were interviewed. The paper argues that demystifying academic culture and discourses for these students is a key step institutions and staff can take in assisting students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to progress and succeed at university. A recurring theme to emerge from both the literature and interviews with students and staff was that teaching the discourse empowers and enables students to learn, has a positive impact on their sense of belonging and ultimately helps them succeed in higher education. (Abstract)

Meuleman, A.-M., Garrett, R., Wrench, A., & King, S. (2014). 'Some people might say I'm thriving but ...': non-traditional students' experiences of university. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* (ahead-of-print), 1-15.

DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2014.945973

Keywords: higher education; non-traditional students; Bourdieu; capital; loneliness

While an increase of a wider range of students might be seen as contributing to a more just and equitable higher education system, research has shown that broadening entry points does not necessarily ensure inclusion or positive experience for these students. This research investigated the experiences of first in family, rural and international students as they transitioned into their first year of university. Focus group interviews and surveys were used to collect data. Using Bourdieu's theory of field, habitus and capital as well as Weiss's dimensions of loneliness findings illuminate a number of poignant experiences for non-traditional students. We suggest that facilitating the transition for non-traditional students might require a cultural change by universities and a move away from the notion that the students need to 'adapt' to university. Rather, the evolving university might provide for increasingly diverse student cohorts by embracing their habitus and unique features. (Edited from abstract)

Naylor, R., Baik, C., & James, R. (2013). Developing a Critical Interventions Framework for advancing equity in Australian higher education: Discussion paper prepared for the *Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education*, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne.

URL:

[industry.gov.au/highereducation/Policy/Documents/CriticalInterventionsFrameworkDiscussionPaper.pdf](http://industry.gov.au/highereducation/Policy/Documents/CriticalInterventionsFrameworkDiscussionPaper.pdf)

Keywords: higher education; equity groups; university

This report presents for discussion a Critical Interventions Framework designed to assist in advancing equity in higher education. The report summarises the patterns of access and participation for key equity target groups in the period following the 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education (the 'Bradley Review'); reviews the national and international literature in search of available evidence in support of the effectiveness of specific initiatives and programs implemented to advance equity; presents a possible typology of equity initiatives, styled as a Critical Interventions Framework, to assist in conceptualising policy and practice and informing research and evaluation; and presents a summary of the plausibility and apparent evidence base for the types of initiatives described in the Critical Interventions Framework. (Extracted from Executive Summary)

Oliver, R., Rochecouste, J., Grote, E., Richardson, J. J., Kemp, S., Malinen, S., Brockmann, M. (2013). *The transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into higher education*. Australian Government: Office for Learning and Teaching.

URL: <http://www.olt.gov.au/project-transition-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-students-higher-education-2011>

Keywords: indigenous students; Aboriginal centres; university

This project represents collaboration between four universities. The project team will investigate processes involved in transitioning Indigenous students to higher education across all Australian university Aboriginal centres. Several qualitative data collection methods will be employed: initial

interviews and focus groups at the participating universities will inform an extensive survey, the findings from which will be available for distribution across all university Aboriginal centres. Particular attention will be given to inclusive data analysis procedures to identify success and best practice in this area. Resultant deliverables will include an online resource providing advice for policy and practice on best practice in the transition of minority Indigenous groups to higher education. It is also envisaged that the project's strategy for internal communication and inclusive engagement will provide a model for future collaborative studies of this kind. (Abstract)

O'Shea, S. (2007). Well I got here ... but what happens next? Exploring the early narratives of first year female students who are the first in the family to attend university. *Journal of Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association*, 29, 36-51.

URL: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2307&context=edupapers>

Keywords: first in family; university students; regional campus

The so-called massification of higher education has led to what Rendon (1994) terms a 'tapestry of differentiation' (p. 33) amongst students. No longer is the typical candidate a school leaver originating from predominantly white, middle class enclaves where the tradition of attending further education is well established. Instead, many students now access university through non-traditional modes of entry or may be the first in the family to attend such an institution and as such, may not readily identify with or adhere to the values and practices found there. This article highlights the initial experiences of a group of female students, who are all first generation university students, as they enter undergraduate study at a regional university campus. Exploring the early narratives of these subjects not only provides clearer insight into the types of obstacles initially encountered but also facilitates some understanding of the motivation and persistence required by individuals in their academic pursuits. (Abstract)

O'Shea, S. (2011). Nomads in diaspora space: exploring women's identity work in the University. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 43(1).

ISSN: 0266-0830

Keywords: diaspora space; first-generation; mature-age students; student identity formation; nomadic moments

How individuals position themselves as 'students' within the university landscape can provide insight into the personal experience of entering this environment. This article will explore how one group of female students narrated their identity work as they moved through the first year of study in an Australian university. These students were all first in the family to attend university and some had had a significant gap between educational experiences. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals at four points during the year. Interviews generated rich description, revealing how students chose to articulate the growth and development of their identities, the contradictions this process engendered as well as the ways in which existing and new identities were blended. (Edited from abstract)

O'Shea, S. (2013). Transitions and turning points: exploring how first-in-family female students story

their transition to university and student identity formation. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* (ahead-of-print), 1-24.

DOI: 10.1080/09518398.2013.771226

Keywords: transition to university; first in family students; mature-age students

The purpose of this article is to explore how one group of students reflect upon their transition into the higher education environment. This qualitative research project followed one group of female undergraduate students as they moved through the first year of study. All of the participants were the first in their family to consider further education and each participated in four semi-structured interviews over one year. Drawing on the conceptual lens of 'turning points', the intent is to provide a 'close-up' analysis of the complex process of identity formation within the university landscape. By revisiting the students at various points over time, richly descriptive detail about what this undertaking means for those involved can be presented and the significance of these turning points explored in terms of their wider political implications. (Abstract)

O'Shea, S. (2014). Filling up silences—first in family students, capital and university talk in the home. *International Journal of Lifelong Education* (ahead-of-print), 1-17.

DOI: 10.1080/02601370.2014.980342

Keywords: higher education; cultural and social capitals; intergenerational educational mobility; first in family

Internationally, research has indicated that returning to education for older learners provides the means for growth and change, for some students this can translate into a sense of 'empowerment' and control in their personal lives. However, what is not so well researched is how having a significant 'other' present within the university landscape impacts the household and other family members. Exploring how this return to education influences others provides a basis for institutional approaches to engaging with and supporting the lifelong learning of family members, ultimately assisting in the access and participation of current and future generations. This article draws on research conducted with first in family students to explore how their participation in the higher education environment led to conversations in the family around learning. Drawing upon theories of social and cultural capital, this article reflects upon the flow of capitals between home and university. (Abstract)

O'Shea, S., & Stone, C. (2014). The hero's journey: Stories of women returning to education. *International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 5(1).

DOI: 10.5204/intjfyhe.v5i1.186

Keywords: higher education; women; students

This paper draws upon the metaphor of the "hero's journey" to further analyse seven stories of women returning to education. These stories have formed the basis of a recent book publication by the authors (Stone & O'Shea, 2012) and are derived from two complementary but separate research studies (O'Shea, 2007; Stone, 2008). None of the women featured in this article have a parent who went to university and all have a number of competing demands in their lives including families, partners and employment. This paper aims to both frame the richly descriptive nature of these stories within a heroic metaphor and also to indicate how these stories, whilst unique, share common

thematic elements and turning points. The paper foregrounds these commonalities capturing a universal narrative and also explores how this mythical framework could be used by both educators and students to conceptualise movements within this environment. (Abstract)

O'Shea, S., Stone, C., & May, J. (2014). Breaking the barriers: supporting and engaging mature age first-in-family university learners and their families. *17th International First Year in Higher Education Conference*, Darwin.

URL: [http://fyhe.com.au/past\\_papers/papers14/11D.pdf](http://fyhe.com.au/past_papers/papers14/11D.pdf)

Keywords: first in family; higher education, intergenerational effects; mature age students; students with dependents

This nuts and bolts session will report on preliminary findings from research currently being conducted with older, first in family university students. This student cohort often has family commitments and so the research was specifically interested in the impacts of returning to education for both the students and their family members. The study is significant because mature age/first in family students are often at risk of attrition and they also represent a growing student cohort; hence higher education institutions need to be actively engaging with this group to improve retention and explore the possibilities for intergenerational educational participation. This research has been funded under the Office of Teaching and Learning Seed Grant initiative and is a partnership study between University of Wollongong, University of Newcastle and Open Universities Australia. The project is innovative, as it not only focuses on the students' experiences but also, more significantly, their families in order to better conceptualise family discourses around how knowledge and learning are negotiated. (Abstract)

Pitman, T. (2013). 'Miraculous exceptions': what can autobiography tell us about why some disadvantaged students succeed in higher education? *Higher Education Research & Development*, 32(1), 30-42.

DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2012.750278

Keywords: autobiography; Bourdieu; cultural capital; diversity; research methodologies; social inclusion

This study examines the use of the autobiographical research method, where information is gathered from a participant's largely unstructured construction of narrative. It considers the experiences of three 'miraculous exceptions': university graduates from low socio-economic backgrounds, who are people traditionally under-represented in higher education. The analysis adapts Bourdieuan notions of economic, cultural and social capital to examine the interrelationship between various factors contributing to educational success. Findings from this study suggest that although the relationship between structure, agency and capital is highly complex, there is greater potential for ongoing educational 'outreach' activities to inspire disadvantaged students – and their parents – to consider higher education as an aspiration. (Abstract)

Rasmussen, C. J. (2006). Effective cost-sharing models in higher education: Insights from low-income students in Australian Universities. *Higher Education*, 51(1), 1-25.

DOI: 10.1007/s10734-004-6373-x

Keywords: income-contingent lending; low income students; public policy; student access; student

loans

This study examines the global trend in shifting university costs from national governments to individual students and families, with a specific focus on the existing cost-sharing model in Australian higher education. The research examines the manner in which the availability of income-contingent loans (through the Higher Education Contribution Scheme, or HECS) enters into individual cost assessments and evaluative frameworks during the university exploration and search process of low income Australian youth, and the resulting lessons that might be applied to other national contexts. Semi-structured interviews with 16 participants addressed a broad range of issues related to the development of educational aspirations, and how beliefs and attitudes about cost influenced participants' understanding and decision-making regarding tertiary enrolment and post-graduate plans. (Edited from abstract)

Richardson, S., & Friedman, T. (2010). *Australian regional higher education: student characteristics and experiences*. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Canberra

URL: [http://research.acer.edu.au/higher\\_education/22](http://research.acer.edu.au/higher_education/22)

Keywords: Higher Education; Australia rural conditions

This study was undertaken for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) during May, June and July of 2010. It focuses on students who study at higher education institutions (HEIs) in regional parts of Australia, with particular attention paid to their characteristics, motivations, experiences and outcomes, both in terms of further study and of employment. The study catalogues a number of existing data sources which can be utilised for research into this population and identifies key gaps in the current collections which inhibit some areas of analysis into students at regional HEIs. What is clear, however, is that Australia's regional HEIs provide the opportunity to gain a higher education to people for whom doing so would otherwise require moving to a metropolitan area. (Edited from abstract)

Robinson, S. R. (2012). Freedom, aspiration and informed choice in rural higher education: why they are saying 'no'. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 22(2).

ISSN: 1839-7387

Keywords: vocational interests; higher education; rural communities

Using recent discussions of Isaiah Berlin's two concepts of freedom as a starting point, this paper poses and attempts to answer the question, to what extent are those living in rural and remote communities 'free' to pursue their dreams of higher education? What would count as adequate educational opportunity for those embracing regional and rural lifestyles? Freedom conceived as the ability to pursue options (option-freedom) is sensitive to a variety of factors, including the number of options available, the character of those options, and the nature of an actor's access to options (Pettit 2003). This paper explores some creative ways in which small university campuses might interact with local communities to shape aspirations and flexibly deliver sustainable academic programs (face-to-face and through blended learning) for all members of the local populace, from low SES students to rural practitioners seeking local opportunities for continuing professional development. It is argued that regional and rural campuses need to demonstrate critical self-awareness as they responsibly model higher education and its benefits to local populations. (Edited from abstract)

Rubin, M. (2012). Social class differences in social integration among students in higher education: A meta-analysis and recommendations for future research. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 5(1), 22.

DOI: 10.1037/a0026162

Keywords: social class; socioeconomic status; first-generation students; social integration; sense of belonging

A meta-analysis of 35 studies found that social class (socioeconomic status) is related to social integration among students in higher education: Working-class students are less integrated than middle-class students. This relation generalized across students' gender and year of study, as well as type of social class measure (parental education and parental income). However, type of social integration measure was a significant moderator. In particular, the social subscale of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire obtained the largest effect ( $r = .18$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Significant effects were also found using measures of the sense of belonging and participation in formal and informal social activities. Future research in this area should use multidimensional measures of social integration and investigate potential mediators of the social class-social integration relation. (Abstract)

Southgate, E., Douglas, H., Scevak, J., Macqueen, S., Rubin, M., & Lindell, C. (2014). The academic outcomes of first in family in an Australian university: An exploratory study. *International Studies in Widening Participation*, 1(2), 31-45.

URL: [http://nova.newcastle.edu.au/ceehe/index.php/iswp/article/viewFile/12/pdf\\_12](http://nova.newcastle.edu.au/ceehe/index.php/iswp/article/viewFile/12/pdf_12)

Keywords: first in family; under-presented students; academic outcomes

Although the first-generation and first in family status (FiF) of university students has been of intense interest in the USA, it has received very little consideration in Australia. The present research redressed this imbalance by investigating the academic outcomes of FiF undergraduate students at a large, public, Australian university. Undergraduate students (N = 227) who were enrolled in education, nursing and liberal arts degrees completed an online survey. Data are representative of typical gender enrolment patterns for these degrees. In contrast to US research, there was no clear relationship between socioeconomic status and FiF status in this sample. Consistent with US research, FiF students had poorer academic outcomes than non-FiF students. However, this difference was only significant after the first-year of study when students were less likely to receive scaffolded learning support within courses. FiF students were more likely than non-FiF students to seek support from university services. The implications of these results for Australian universities are considered. (Abstract)

Southgate, E., Kelly, B. J., & Symonds, I. M. (2015). Disadvantage and the 'capacity to aspire' to medical school. *Medical Education*, 49(1), 73-83.

DOI: 10.1111/medu.12540

Keywords: low socioeconomic; first in family; medical school; participation

This study was designed to elucidate why students from backgrounds of lower socio-economic status (SES) and who may be first in their family (FiF) to enter university continue to be under-represented in medical schools. Academically able high school students (n = 33) from a range of socio-economic

backgrounds participated in focus groups. School careers advisors (n = 5) were interviewed. Students discussed their career and education plans and ideas about a medical career. Students of lower SES and of FiF status attending schools situated in poorer geographic locations had limited access to suitable work experience and, despite their participation in gifted and talented classes, were considered to be at greater risk of not achieving the high level of academic achievement required for admission to medical school. A focused materialist approach to building the aspirations of disadvantaged students, particularly those attending schools located in poorer areas, is required if effective pre-entry equity programmes are to be developed and evaluated. (Edited from abstract)

Stone, C. (2008). Listening to individual voices and stories--the mature-age student experience. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 48(2)

ISSN: 14431394

Keywords: higher education; student experience; non-traditional students; undergraduate; socioeconomic status

This paper presents the findings of a qualitative research project, part of a doctoral thesis, which examines the impact of university study on a group of 20 female and male mature-age students at the University of Newcastle, Australia, who have entered university via a non-traditional pathway. These students are in the second to final years of their undergraduate degree programs and have all faced significant hurdles in gaining university entrance and continuing with their studies. The majority have come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, with little, if any, family history of higher education and little positive experience of prior study. This paper gives voice to their stories – their triumphs and achievements as well as their struggles – and highlights the important role that publicly funded institutions can play, not only in widening access to higher education, but also in encouraging and assisting students from a diverse range of backgrounds to participate fully in higher education and achieve their goals. (Abstract)

Stone, C. & O'Shea, S. Elizabeth. (2013). Time, money, leisure and guilt – the gendered challenges of higher education for mature-age students. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 53(1), 95-116.

URL: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1193&context=sspapers>

Keywords: leisure, age; money; time; mature; education; higher; challenges; gendered; guilt; students

Two qualitative research projects examined the impact of university study on two cohorts of mature-age students at a regional university in Australia. All the students interviewed had entered university via non-traditional pathways and had faced significant hurdles in gaining university entrance and continuing with their studies. The influence of gender on their experiences of managing home, family and work responsibilities in combination with their responsibilities as students is examined. Issues such as lack of time and money, self-sacrifice and guilt emerged strongly from the stories of these students as they struggled to manage their multiple responsibilities. The gendered nature of these struggles is explored. (Abstract)

von Treuer, K., Marr, D., Oriel, J., Arthur, J., Nicoll, C., & Palermo, J. (2013). *Tracking Student Success: who is falling through the cracks?* Australian Government: Office for Learning and Teaching.

URL: [www.olt.gov.au/resource-](http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-)

library?text=Tracking+Student+Success%3A+who+is+falling+through+the+cracks

Keywords: university students; retention framework

Literature on student retention in higher education abounds with case studies that demonstrate successful retention rates in single institutions. However, what remains unclear is how generalizable these programmes are to other universities. As stated by Keeton, Clagett and Engelberg (1998), 'by linking theory and institutional research to planning, we can have greater confidence that our decisions will be good ones and will serve the needs of diverse students' (p.18). They recommended that theoretical literature and national research should be consulted to guide institutional research and possible intervention models and that campus researchers should conduct sophisticated, institution-specific research based on their institution's needs and characteristics. This advice embodies our approach to this research. (Extracted from Executive Summary)

Whannell, R. (2013). First-in-family students in a tertiary bridging program. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 15(3), 6-21.

ISSN: 1466-6529

Keywords: bridging; first in family; cultural capital; Australia

This study presents an examination of the role of cultural capital in the experience of students from an on-campus tertiary bridging program at a regional university in Australia. A custom questionnaire was completed by 294 participants from two different semester cohorts on two occasions allowing for test-retest analysis. The study identified that participants who were the first in family to attend university experienced lower levels of support from family members, which remained unchanged throughout the program. By contrast, an initially lower level of academic self-efficacy for these students at week 3 of the semester was found to have been resolved by week 12. While the study demonstrated differences in cultural capital between participants from the different demographic groups, there was little evidence that these differences influenced the quality of academic outcomes achieved. It was concluded that the bridging program facilitated substantial improvements in academic efficacy through the social and academic support provided which bridged the gap between students of different cultural capital. (Abstract)

Whannell, R., Allen, B., & Lynch, K. (2010). Casualties of Schooling? 18 to 22 Year Old Students in a Tertiary Bridging Program. *Australian journal of teacher education*, 35(5), 1-17

DOI: 10.14221/ajte.2010v35n5.1

Keywords: postsecondary education; college students; non-traditional students; student characteristics

A sample of 81 students between the ages of 18 and 22 years in a tertiary bridging program at a regional university completed a questionnaire examining how demographics, social context, academic engagement and the ability to cope with the curriculum complexity influenced academic success in high school and adversely affected their preparedness for tertiary study. The demographics of the study participants, including socio-economic status, private/public school attendance and first in family to attend university were such that the study participants could not be considered to be members of a disadvantaged group. The study supports the hypothesis that a number of the study participants are casualties of their schooling and their poor long-term academic performance at high school occurred due to poor student-teacher relationships with associated poor academic engagement. The implications for educational pedagogy for educators in tertiary bridging programs are discussed.

(Abstract)

Wilson, K. L., Murphy, K. A., Pearson, A. G., Wallace, B. M., Reher, V. G., & Buys, N. (2014). Understanding the early transition needs of diverse commencing university students in a health faculty: informing effective intervention practices. *Studies in Higher Education* (ahead-of-print), 1-18.

DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2014.966070

Keywords: transition; academic engagement; academic at-risk students; retention

The engagement and retention of commencing students is a longstanding issue in higher education, particularly with the implementation of the widening student participation agenda. The early weeks of the first semester are especially critical to student engagement and early attrition. This study investigated the perceived early transition needs of three cohorts of commencing students in their first three weeks of university study in a Health Faculty. A short survey was developed based on a systematic understanding of student transition and supplemented by open-ended qualitative data. The results showed a stable, consistent pattern of early transition needs across the cohorts, with commencing students expressing most concern about accessing resources, balancing work, family and study commitments, establishing peer relationships, and understanding the requirements and standards for early assessment tasks, particularly group tasks. Findings are discussed in terms of implications for early co-curricular and curricular interventions to enhance early student engagement and retention. (Abstract)

Wrench, A., Garrett, R., & King, S. (2014). Managing health and well-being: student experiences in transitioning to higher education. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education*, 5(2), 151-166.

DOI: 10.1080/18377122.2014.906059

Keywords: health/well-being; first-year university students; transition

It is commonly recognised that health and well-being are influenced by social conditions, such as the transition to higher education. This study explored student perceptions and experiences of factors that impacted on health and well-being during the first year of university studies. Data for this study were collected via an online student questionnaire. The questionnaire included closed questions to collect demographic data and open-ended questions to collect data about students' perceptions and experiences of factors that impact on health and wellbeing. Findings revealed that a range of factors impact on student well-being during the transition to university studies. These include geographical relocation, engagement with university learning, sense of community as well as managing time and competing demands. Implications for the higher education sector and the need for further research amongst specific student cohorts, including first in family and relocating students, are discussed. (Abstract)

Young, J. (2004). "Becoming different": accessing university from a low socioeconomic community—barriers and motivators. *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, 17(5), 425-469.

DOI: 10.1007/s11213-004-5788-8

Keywords: higher education; low socioeconomic; barriers; motivators

Access to tertiary education by individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds has been extremely low historically, despite policies to address this inequity. Twenty eight people from a low socio-economic community with almost the lowest rates of access to university in Australia were interviewed to identify the barriers they had encountered and the factors that had enabled them to access and complete a university qualification. Barriers reported occur both within the community, and external to, or on the boundary of the community. Internal barriers included lack of information about the existence of university or its value for individuals, cultural beliefs about acceptable aspirations, a lack of role models within the community, and a lack of the opportunity to compare the impact of a university education on lifestyle, opportunities and options. Motivators identified are categorised as “nature of work”; “interest,” role models/comparisons”; “competition/proving,” and “encouragement.” (Abstract)

## International Perspective

Anders, J. & Micklewright, J. (2013). *Teenagers' expectations of applying to university: how do they change?* Institute of Education, University of London: London, UK

URL: [repec.ioe.ac.uk/RePEC/pdf/qsswp1313.pdf](http://repec.ioe.ac.uk/RePEC/pdf/qsswp1313.pdf)

Keywords: expectations; university application; family background; LSYPE

We show how young people's expectations about application to university change during the teenage years, drawing on the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE). We reveal the pattern of change by family background (measured by parental education and family income), prior attainment at the end of primary school (measured by Key Stage 2 tests) and, critically, the combination of the two. We document the relationship between expectations about university application and the decision on whether to stay on in full-time education at 16. We point to the importance of schools in sustaining or changing expectations. We relate the expectations reported by the teenagers in LSYPE to their actual university application decisions by age 20 or 21. Expectations are high but not universally high. Family background gaps in expectations widen during the teenage years. (Abstract)

Aspelmeier, J. E., Love, M. M., McGill, L. A., Elliott, A. N., & Pierce, T. W. (2012). Self-Esteem, Locus of Control, College Adjustment, and GPA Among First-and Continuing-Generation Students: A Moderator Model of Generational Status. *Research in Higher Education*, 53(7), 755-781.

DOI: 10.1007/s11162-011-9252-1

Keywords: first generation students; college adjustment; academic performance; self-esteem; locus of control

The role of generational status) as a moderator of the relationship between psychological factors and college outcomes was tested to determine whether generational status acts as a risk factor or as a sensitizing factor. Generational status significantly moderated the relationship between psychological factors and academic outcomes. Generally, it was found that the relationship between psychological factors and academic outcomes were strongest among first-generation students. Further, it was found that for the majority of the interactions with locus of control, first-generation status acted as a sensitizing factor that amplified both the positive and negative effects of locus of control. In contrast, for self-esteem, first generation status acted as a risk factor that only exacerbated the negative effects of low self esteem. These results are interpreted as reflecting motivational differences between first and continuing-generation students and are discussed with respect to the social/cultural capital hypothesis that is most frequently presented in the existing literature. (Edited from abstract)

Atherton, M. C. (2014). Academic Preparedness of First-Generation College Students: Different Perspectives. *Journal of College Student Development*, 55(8), 824-829.

DOI: 10.1353/csd.2014.0081

Keywords: first generation; academic preparedness; parental education

As student populations continue to become more diversified, institutions must understand students' academic preparedness to better serve them. Although first-generation students have much in common with other disadvantaged student groups, their situation presents unique conditions and

obstacles to their college experience. This research project seeks to focus on the topic of academic preparedness of first-generation students. More specifically, this project builds on previous research on academic preparedness of first-generation students by exploring differences in students' attitudes about preparedness compared with traditional academic measures. This study investigates whether first generation student status affects self-assessment of academic preparedness in the same way it affects traditional measures of academic preparedness. (Edited from abstract)

Baker, S., Brown, B., & Fazey, J. (2006). Individualization in the widening participation debate. *London Review of Education*, 4(2), 169-182.

DOI: 10.1080/14748460600855302

Keywords: widening participation, higher education, non-traditional students

We provide an analysis of some recent widening participation literature concerning the barriers preventing non-traditional students accessing higher education. This literature criticizes higher education institutions and staff, opening up the academics' attitudes and skills to inquiry. We follow the genesis of four themes in the literature and these are visited in turn to provide substantive arguments. Students' accounts of their experiences are taken as if they were a systematic analysis of higher education institutions and result in an individualistic analysis of the problems related to access and progression. Beck described such assumptions and devices as individualization. We question the use of such pervasive individualism in the widening participation debate. (Abstract)

Banks-Santilli, L. First-generation college students and their pursuit of the American dream. *Journal of Case Studies in Education*, 5, 1-32

URL: <http://www.aabri.com/manuscripts/131657.pdf>

Keywords: first-generation college students; case study; qualitative research; higher education, cultural capital;

First-generation college students, students whose parents have not earned a four-year degree, are not new to higher education, but their increasing presence at private, four-year institutions requires careful attention from administration and faculty. The rising costs of higher education combined with the nation's recent economic decline have made earning a college degree and achieving the American dream nearly impossible for these students. This qualitative research study seeks to understand the lives of first-generation college students at a small, private college in the Northeast. It draws on the analyses of demographic, interview, and case study data to examine the experiences of first-generation students and then to compare them to related research in the fields of sociology, psychology, and college access and preparation. The study results in three distinct case studies that provide insight into the individual lives of first generation students. It concludes with specific steps this institution can take to respond to the needs of this growing population on its campus. Recommendations, though specific to the case, can be applied to other institutions facing similar challenges. (Abstract)

Barry, L. M., Hudley, C., Kelly, M., & Cho, S.-J. (2009). Differences in self-reported disclosure of college experiences by first-generation college student status. *Adolescence*, 44(173).

ISSN: 0001-8449

Keywords: first generation students; college experiences; disclosure

Disclosure of stressful life experiences is described here as a potential means of stress reduction and as a potential indicator of available support. This study compared reports of the disclosure of college experiences by college freshmen (N = 1,539). Using a student survey conducted at four universities across the country, disclosure by first-generation student status was compared. The targets of students' disclosure, including family, friends from home, friends at school, and professionals at school also were examined. Differences by first-generation status were found in disclosure and the targets of disclosure. Implications include first-generation college students' need for increased opportunities to disclose stressful college-related experiences to others. (Abstract)

Bergerson, A. A. (2007). Exploring the impact of social class on adjustment to college: Anna's story. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20(1), 99-119.

DOI: 10.1080/09518390600923610

Keywords: social class; higher education; students

The purpose of this instrumental case study (Stake, 2003) is to explore the role of social class in student adjustment to the college environment. The story of Anna is presented to illustrate how social class impacts on the ability of students to participate in campus life and engage in their academic work. Anna's story is interpreted through the lens of research that examines the role of social class in the choices and experiences of college students, as well as through Bourdieu's (1977, 1987, 1993) ideas of social class reproduction. This paper contributes to the conversation about how higher education institutions respond to the needs of an increasingly diverse student population that includes working-class students, students of color and first-generation college students like Anna. (Abstract)

Bowl, M. (2001). Experiencing the barriers: non-traditional students entering higher education. *Research Papers in Education*, 16(2), 141-160.

DOI: 10.1080/02671520110037410

Keywords: access; higher education; participation; non-traditional students

The paper describes part of an ongoing study of the experiences of 32 mature, 'non-traditional' students as they make the transition to higher education. The paper draws on the stories of three of the participants to highlight some of the financial and institutional barriers experienced by mature minority ethnic students. It points to the need for institutional change if non-traditional students are to thrive within a system that purports to be directed towards widening participation. The study reveals the non-traditional student as a frustrated participant in an unresponsive institutional context and questions the tendency to problematize students from non-traditional backgrounds, rather than the educational institutions responsible for their progress. This paper is based on research carried out with adults involved in a community based, flexible access to higher education project in an inner-city area of the UK. The study involved the development of a participatory research design to encourage mature students to speak directly to an academic audience and to reflect on their experiences as they made the decision to aim for higher education entry, and as they entered a variety of part-time and fulltime higher educational establishments and courses. (Abstract)

Brooks, R. (2003). Young people's higher education choices: the role of family and friends. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 24(3), 283-297.

DOI: 10.1080/0142569032000070119

Keywords: higher education; friends; family; educational choice

Previous studies of higher education (HE) choice have tended to draw a strong contrast between the decisions made by young people from working-class backgrounds and those of their middle-class peers. This paper draws on a qualitative, longitudinal study to argue that such assumptions about social class homogeneity overlook the very different ways in which students from a similar (middle class) location come to understand the HE sector. It also suggests that while families have a strong influence on young people's conceptualisation of the sector, friends and peers play an important role in informing decisions about what constitutes a 'feasible' choice. Indeed, this paper shows how rankings within friendship groups were, in many cases, transposed directly onto a hierarchy of HE institutions and courses. On the basis of this evidence, it concludes that a two-step interaction between family and friends best explains the decision-making processes in which these young people were engaged. (Abstract)

Brooks, R. (2004). 'My mum would be as pleased as punch if I actually went, but my dad seems a bit more particular about it': paternal involvement in young people's higher education choices. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(4), 495-514.

DOI: 10.1080/0141192042000237202

Keywords: higher education; parental involvement; educational choice

Research on parental involvement in educational 'choice', as well as in educational processes more generally, has highlighted clear disparities between the close and active involvement of mothers and the more distant role of fathers. While this paper does not question the broad patterns identified by such studies, it does suggest that, in some circumstances at least, fathers are both able and willing to become closely involved in decision-making processes and to take on much of the 'hard work' of educational choice. Drawing on a longitudinal study of young people's higher education decision-making processes, the paper presents evidence of detailed paternal involvement. It then suggests that this apparent 'anomaly' can be explained by: the mothers' and fathers' differential access to cultural and social capital; a lack of previous experience of active engagement with educational markets; and, in a few cases, young people's active resistance to the involvement of their mothers. (Abstract)

Bryan, E., & Simmons, L. A. (2009). Family involvement: Impacts on post-secondary educational success for first-generation Appalachian college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(4), 391-406.

DOI: 10.1353/csd.0.0081

Keywords: first generation students; barriers; success

First-generation college students face a number of barriers to academic success and completion of their degrees. Using Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological theory as a framework, qualitative research was used to examine the experiences of first-generation Appalachian Kentucky university students (mean age = 21 years) and factors they attributed to their educational success. Content analysis was

used to analyze the data. Seven themes representing participants' experiences in a university setting were identified: (a) close-knit families and communities, (b) separate identities, (c) knowledge of college procedures, (d) pressure to succeed, (e) returning home, (f) the pervasiveness of poverty, and (g) the importance of early intervention programming. Additional areas for research and potential policy adjustments for universities serving this population are presented. (Abstract)

Bui, V. T. (2002). First-generation college students at a four-year university: Background characteristics, reasons for pursuing higher education, and first-year experiences. *College Student Journal*, 36(1). ISSN: 0146-3934

Keywords: first generation students; characteristics; experiences; financial support

This study examined the background characteristics of first-generation college students at a four-year university, their reasons for pursuing higher education, and their first-year experiences. In comparison to students whose parents had some college experience but no degrees (n = 75) and students whose parents had at least a bachelor's degree (n = 68), first-generation college students (n = 64) were more likely to come from a lower socioeconomic background, to report that they were pursuing higher education to help their family out financially after they complete college, and to worry about financial aid for college. It is recommended that campus support services for these students directly address their unique challenges and concerns. (Abstract)

Buissink-Smith, N., Spronken-Smith, R., & Walker, R. (2010). You're doing what? Students' experiences of advice from a New Zealand university. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 29(4), 357-371.

DOI: 10.1080/07294361003601891

Keywords: academic advising; advisers; student experience; student support services

This case study explores student perceptions and experiences of advising at a New Zealand university. It considers the implications arising from the students' responses and also investigates the influence of students' demographic characteristics on perceptions of advice. Both first- (n = 191) and final- (n = 171) year cohorts of students were surveyed to determine why they chose particular courses, what advice they received and how aware they were of various support services. Although students were happy overall with the advice received, many had little or no expectations of the type of advice they should be receiving. The main sources of advice were the University enrolment pack, family and University School's Liaison Officers. Academic advisers were less well used as a source of advice, even during later years of study. Advisers need to be educated about particular advising issues related to first-generation students, part-time students and international students. Many students had a career path in mind so it is important to provide holistic developmental academic advice that includes future career options. (Abstract)

Byrd, K. L., & MacDonald, G. (2005). Defining college readiness from the inside out: First-generation college student perspectives. *Community College Review*, 33(1), 22-37.

DOI: 10.1177/009155210503300102

Keywords: college readiness; academic skills; preparedness

This study provides understanding of college readiness from the perspectives of older first-generation

college students who transferred from community colleges. Results indicate that life experiences contribute to academic skills, time management, goal focus, and self-advocacy. Research is recommended to improve non-traditional student advising and placement, community college-to-university transfer, and college reading instruction. (Abstract)

Callender, C., & Jackson, J. (2008). Does the fear of debt constrain choice of university and subject of study?. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(4), 405-429.

DOI: 10.1080/03075070802211802

Keywords: university; debt; higher education; low-income students

The new student funding regime introduced by the 2004 Higher Education Act in England is predicated on the accumulation of student debt. Variable tuition fees, repaid by student loans, will increase average student loan debt on graduation. This article examines how fear of debt and financial constraints affect prospective students' choices of where and what to study. Using data derived from a survey of about 2000 prospective students, it shows that financial issues constrain lower social class students' choice of university far more than those from other social classes. It demonstrates that fear of debt is related to two key financially-driven decisions – applying to a university with low living costs, and applying to one with good term-time employment opportunities – but only for students from low-income families. However, concerns about debt do not influence their choice of qualification and subject. The article concludes that low-income students are more likely than their wealthier peers to perceive the costs of higher education as a debt rather than an investment. (Abstract)

Chapman, A. (2013). A (re) negotiation of identity: From 'mature student' to 'novice academic'. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 14(3), 44-61.

DOI: 10.5456/WPLL.14.3.44

Keywords: mature students; non-traditional students; student experience; identity; communities of practice.

The purpose of this paper is to present the findings of an investigation into the first-year experience of mature students. The research focuses on the identity shift that these students underwent throughout the year and problematises the construct of 'student'. Semi-structured interviews were used at key points throughout the academic year. The research employs communities of practice as a framework for identity shift. The students in this research engaged in the learning aspect of student identity but some felt alienated and marginalised by the predominant discourse of student social life. The paper concludes with the argument that mature students align themselves with the community of practice of 'academia' and therefore form a position of 'novice academic' rather than 'student'. The study aims to contribute to the debate over whether universities may need to change some practices in order to improve the experience of mature students, which will become an increasingly important demographic group as the number of school leavers drops. (Abstract)

Choy, S. (2001). Students Whose Parents Did Not Go to College: Postsecondary Access, Persistence, and Attainment. *Findings from the Condition of Education, 2001*. Washington DC: National Centre for Education Statistics.

URL: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2001126>

Keywords: academic achievement; academic persistence; college preparation; college students; course selection

The Condition of Education" summarizes important developments and trends in U.S. education using the latest available data. The 2001 edition had a special focus essay on the access, persistence, and success of first-generation students (students whose parents did not attend college). To make the essay available to audiences interested in how academic preparation in high school can increase postsecondary education opportunities, the essay is reprinted in this document. The essay summarizes findings of a recent series of National Center for Education Statistics studies about the experiences of high school graduates and postsecondary students whose parents did not attend college. Data are from the National Education Longitudinal Study, the beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, and the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study. These studies show that such students are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to accessing postsecondary education, and those who overcome barriers and enroll in postsecondary education remain at a disadvantage with respect to staying enrolled and attaining degrees, even when there is control for other factors. For students who do earn a degree, labor market outcomes in the short term are similar regardless of their parents' education. (Abstract)

Clegg, S. (2011). Cultural capital and agency: Connecting critique and curriculum in higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 32*(1), 93-108.

DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2011.527723

Keywords: cultural capital; widening participation; knowledge; curriculum; student voice; higher education

This paper explores some of the unresolved tensions in higher education systems and the contradiction between widening participation and the consolidation of social position. It shows how concepts of capital derived from Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam provide a powerful basis for critique, but risk a deficit view of students from less privileged backgrounds. These students are more likely to attend lower-status institutions and engage with an externally focused curriculum. The paper argues for greater attention to agency, and community and familial capital, in conceptualising the resilience of those from less privileged backgrounds. While the recognition of 'voice' is important, a curriculum that acknowledges the context independence of knowledge is essential if these students are not to be further disadvantaged. (Abstract)

Coffman, S. (2011). A social constructionist view of issues confronting first-generation college students. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 2011*(127), 81-90.

DOI: 10.1002/tl.459

Keywords: first generation students; academic preparation; social networks

Drawing on interviews with first-generation college students (FGS), the author argues that the students' culture affects college attendance and success. Although FGS often have a vocational perspective to college, the author found that they seek meaningful work with good pay. The author also suggests that good decision-making, academic preparation, and a strong social network (family, friends, teachers, and others) play a crucial role in helping FGS adjust to college. (Abstract)

Collier, P. J., & Morgan, D. L. (2008). "Is that paper really due today?": differences in first-generation and traditional college students' understandings of faculty expectations. *Higher Education*, 55(4), 425-446.

DOI: 10.1007/s10734-007-9065-5

Keywords: college student adjustment; cultural capital; faculty expectations; first-generation students

Success in college is not simply a matter of students demonstrating academic ability. In addition, students must master the "college student" role in order to understand instructors' expectations and apply their academic skills effectively to those expectations. This article uses data from focus groups to examine the fit between university faculty members' expectations and students' understanding of those expectations. Parallel discussions among groups of faculty and groups of students highlight important differences regarding issues of time management and specific aspects of coursework. We find definite incongruities between faculty and student perspectives and identify differences between traditional and first-generation college students. We argue that variations in cultural capital, based on parents' educational experiences, correspond to important differences in each group's mastery of the student role and, thus, their ability to respond to faculty expectations. The conclusion discusses the theoretical and practical implications of considering role mastery a form of cultural capital. (Abstract)

Cooke, R., Barkham, M., Audin, K., & Bradley, M. (2004). How social class differences affect students' experience of university. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 28(4), 407-421.

DOI: 10.1080/0309877042000298894

Keywords: social class; social support; university experiences

The present paper outlines the experiences reported by students from different social class backgrounds who have recently graduated from university. Students from manual skilled and partly skilled backgrounds were classed as disadvantaged, while students from professional or intermediate backgrounds were classed as advantaged. Data were collected from the same cohort of students on seven occasions across their university career. Students completed questions about their family background, paid employment, financial concerns, participation in recreational activities, perceptions of academic quality and perceptions of social support. Results showed that students from disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely to have parents that attended university, more likely to have been in paid employment, less likely to have participated in non-academic activities and spent fewer evenings per week socializing compared with students from advantaged backgrounds. Also, there was some evidence of less positive perceptions of social support among disadvantaged

students. However, there were no social class differences in ratings of teaching quality and all students reported high levels of financial concern. These findings are discussed in relation to proposed changes to the way higher education is funded in Britain and the implications these changes will have on recruiting students from disadvantaged backgrounds. (Abstract)

Croll, P., & Attwood, G. (2013). Participation in higher education: aspirations, attainment and social background. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 61(2), 187-202.

DOI: 10.1080/00071005.2013.787386

Keywords: higher education participation; school attainment; social background, aspirations

The recent report of the Milburn Review into Social Mobility highlights the under-representation of young people from lower socio-economic groups in higher education and encourages universities and others to act to remedy this situation as a contribution to greater social mobility. The paper uses data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England to examine the relationship between social background, attainment and university participation. The results show that differences in school-level attainment associated with social background are by far the most important explanation for social background differences in university attendance. However, there remains a small proportion of the participation gap that is not accounted for by attainment. It is also the case that early intentions for higher education participation are highly predictive of actual participation. The results suggest that although there may be some scope for universities to act to improve participation by people from less advantaged backgrounds, a much more important focus of action is on improving the school-level achievement of these students. (Abstract)

Crozier, G., & Reay, D. (2008). The Socio-Cultural and Learning Experiences of Working Class Students in HE: *Full Research Report—ESRC End of Award Report*. RES-139-25-0208. Swindon: ESRC.

URL: [www.esrc.ac.uk/my-esrc/grants/RES-139-25-0208/outputs/Read/652b5c30-d2c5-4051-9298-e593b2a3d519](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/my-esrc/grants/RES-139-25-0208/outputs/Read/652b5c30-d2c5-4051-9298-e593b2a3d519)

Keywords: social; cultural; learning; identity; working class; Higher Education; HE

Our research has taken place during a period of policy driven Widening Participation in Higher Education and, both in the UK and globally, when there has been concern about breaking down the exclusivity of university education (McDonough and Fann 2007; Blanden and Machin 2004). In spite of the relative success in increasing participation in higher education generally, concerns remain about the social class gap in entry to higher education (HEFCE 2005). There exists an apparent polarisation of types of university attracting working class and minority ethnic students (Sutton Trust 2000; 2004; 2007) and considerable concern with student retention. The universities with the most success at Widening Participation have the highest drop-out rates (HEFCE 2006) which has suggested a causal relationship and a tendency therefore to construct working class students as problematic (Leathwood and O'Connell 2003) and a risky investment for HEIs. Our research presents a very different picture of resilience, commitment and success. (Extracted from background)

Crozier, G, Reay, D, Clayton, J, Colliander, L & Grinstead, J. (2008). Different Strokes for Different Folks: Diverse Students in Diverse Institutions--Experiences of Higher Education. *Research Papers in Education*, 23(2), 167-177.

DOI: 10.1080/02671520802048703

Keywords: widening participation; social class; Bourdieu; higher education

In the context of widening participation policies, polarisation of types of university recruitment and a seemingly related high drop-out rate amongst first generation, working class students, we focus on the provision offered by the universities to their students. Exploring differences between the middle class and working class students locates widening participation discourse within a discussion of classed privilege. We conclude that, whilst there is a polarisation of recruitment between types of universities, there exists a spectrum of interrelated and differentiated experiences across and within the HEIs. These are structured by the differential wealth of the universities, their structure and organisation; their ensuing expectations of the students, the subject sub-cultures, and the students' own socio-cultural locations; namely class, gender, age and ethnicity. (Abstract)

Cushman, K. (2005). *First in the Family: Advice about College from First-Generation Students*. Next Generation Press.

URL: [http://issuu.com/wkcd/docs/firstinthefamily\\_collegeyears](http://issuu.com/wkcd/docs/firstinthefamily_collegeyears)

Keywords: first in family students; college; culture shock

You can't be rolling through alone." In the words of the same college students who gave advice earlier, this next-step guidebook tells students how to persist in college—an even bigger challenge for those who are blazing new trails. They speak of culture shock, remediation woes, and finding their way in the new freedoms of college studies. They stress the importance of forging relationships—with professors who will open the doors to new learning and accomplishments, as well as with peer mentors and study partners.

Cushman, K. (2007). Facing the culture shock of college. *Educational Leadership*, 64(7), 44.

ISSN: 0013-1784

Keywords: culture conflict; first generation college students; college freshmen; student attitudes;

Many first-generation college students struggle during their first year in college. Cushman shares the reflections of 16 college students she worked with over two years who were the first in their families to attend college. Students describe how entering a climate where most fellow students come from backgrounds of greater wealth and privilege--and from family traditions of higher education--called forth feelings of intimidation and doubt. Students describe strategies for maintaining their confidence while learning to succeed in a college climate. Cushman provides a list of approaches and key resources secondary teachers can use to prepare first-generation college students to make it through

their college years (Abstract)

David, M., Bathmaker, A.-M., Crozier, G., Davis, P., Ertl, H., Fuller, A., Parry, G. (2009). *Improving learning by widening participation in higher education*: Routledge.

ISBN: 9780415495417

Keywords: Educational equalization --Great Britain. People with social disabilities --Education (Higher)

Improving Learning by Widening Participation in Higher Education presents a strong and coherent rationale for improving learning for diverse students from a range of socio-economic, ethnic/racial and gender backgrounds within higher education, and for adults across the life course. (Abstract)

Davis, J. (2012). *The first generation student experience: Implications for campus practice, and strategies for improving persistence and success*: Stylus Publishing, LLC.

ISBN: 1579225268, 9781579225261

Keywords: education; counseling; academic development ; higher education; student life & student affairs

More first-generation students are attending college than ever before, and policy makers agree that increasing their participation in higher education is a matter of priority. Despite this, there is no agreed definition about the term, few institutions can quantify how many first-generation students are enrolled, or mistakenly conflate them with low-income students, and many important dimensions to the first-generation student experience remain poorly documented. Few institutions have in place a clear, well-articulated practice for assisting first-generation students to succeed. At the heart of the book are 14 first-person narratives – spanning freshman to graduate years – that help the reader get to grips with the variety of ethnic and economic categories to which they belong. The book concludes by defining 14 key issues that institutions need to address, and offers a course of action for addressing them. (Abstract)

Dennis, J. M., Phinney, J. S., & Chuateco, L. I. (2005). The role of motivation, parental support, and peer support in the academic success of ethnic minority first-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(3), 223-236.

DOI: 10.1353/csd.2005.0023

Keywords: first generation students; social support; motivation

The role of personal motivational characteristics and environmental social supports in college outcomes was examined in a longitudinal study of 100 ethnic minority first-generation college students. Personal/career-related motivation to attend college in the fall was a positive predictor and lack of peer support was a negative predictor of college adjustment the following spring. Lack of peer support also predicted lower spring GPA. (Abstract)

Dukhan, S., Cameron, A., & Brenner, E. A. (2011). The Influence of Differences in Social and Cultural Capital on Students' Expectations of Achievement, on their Performance, and on their Learning Practices in the First Year at University. *International Journal of Learning*, 18(7), 337-351.

URL: <http://www.ijl.cgpublisher.com/product/pub.30/prod.3286>

Keywords: first-year university; expectation at university; student university experience; academic performance

Since access to tertiary education has increased, many individuals, who have attended under-resourced schools, are now able to attend university as "first generation" students whose parents have had no university experience. This study compares the learning practices and academic performance of first and second generation students in a first year Biology course at Wits University. The influence of social and cultural capital on student academic performance is investigated. Students' expectations and experiences of their academic performance become more realistic as they go through first year but they experience great difficulty in trying to adjust their study methods to meet the expectations of the academic environment. In order for educational redress within South African democracy to be effective, it is important to understand the supportive measures that students may require in order to succeed at university. Furthermore, first generation students who have siblings that attended university have access to social capital, unlike those without this experience. (Abstract)

Dumais, S. A., Rizzuto, T. E., Cleary, J., & Dowden, L. (2013). Stressors and supports for adult online learners: comparing first-and continuing-generation college students. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 27(2), 100-110.

DOI: 10.1080/08923647.2013.783265

Keywords: first generation students; online learning;

A mixed-methods approach was used to examine the perceptions that adult online learners have about their ability to succeed in their educational pursuits, the barriers that they face, and the institutional supports that help them to persist. Particular attention was paid to the differences between first-generation and continuing-generation adult online learners. Survey findings show that the majority of adult online learners—both first- and continuing-generation—are confident in their abilities to succeed in school. First-generation adult online learners are more likely to cite highly demanding work environments, which may impede their ability to balance school with other commitments. Both groups make use of the supports offered by their schools, especially those related to curriculum and technical guidance, but first-generation adult online learners have higher rates of usage overall. In interviews, both groups cite the importance of advisors, whereas first-generation adult online learners are more likely to cite problems with teachers as obstacles to their success. These findings imply that it is important to consider students' generational status when developing programs and services for the adult online student population. (Abstract)

Dumais, S. A., & Ward, A. (2010). Cultural capital and first-generation college success. *Poetics*, 38(3),

245-265.

DOI: 10.1016/j.poetic.2009.11.011

Keywords: cultural capital; education; inequality

Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 and the Postsecondary Education Transcript Study, we assess the levels of cultural capital possessed by first-generation college students and their non-first-generation peers. Drawing from past quantitative and qualitative studies, we operationalize cultural capital both as high arts participation rewarded by those in power, and as purposeful interactions with key gatekeepers to access information and resources. We analyze the effects cultural capital has on enrollment in and persistence through a four-year postsecondary education and on undergraduate grade point averages (GPA), and determine whether cultural capital has a greater effect on non-first-generation students (the reproduction model), first-generation students (the mobility model), or neither group. We find that family cultural capital, cultural classes, and the number of ways parents helped in the college application process are all significant for four-year college enrollment, and parents' help and students' receiving assistance at school with their college applications are significant for graduation. No significant associations are found between the cultural capital variables and GPA. Overall, no support was found for either the reproduction or the mobility models. (Abstract)

Engle, J. (2007). Postsecondary access and success for first-generation college students. *American Academic*, 3(1), 25-48.

DOI: <http://dbweb01.aft.org/pdfs/highered/academic/january07/Engle.pdf>

Keywords: first generation students; social mobility; challenges

A college education is considered the key to achieving economic success and social mobility in American society. While access to higher education has expanded dramatically in recent years, students whose parents did not go to college remain at a distinct disadvantage. First generation college students, most of whom come from low-income and minority backgrounds, face a number of challenges that make it more difficult for them not only to get into college but also to get through it. This article will review recent research on first-generation students, focusing on, the factors that affect their access to and success in college, and the interventions targeted toward better serving their needs in postsecondary education. (Edited from introduction)

Engle, J., Bermeo, A., & O'Brien, C. (2006). *Straight from the Source: What Works for First-Generation College Students*. Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education.

URL: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED501693.pdf>

Keywords: first generation; risk; outreach programs

The purpose of the study was to ascertain from first-generation students themselves which messages and services have the most impact on whether or not they enroll in college. The findings from this

study are intended to assist administrators and staff in outreach programs and post-secondary institutions in Texas and around the country by informing and improving the practices they use to help first-generation students get into and through college. The findings are also intended to raise awareness and generate dialogue among state and federal policymakers about the impact and benefits of pre-college programs and services for first-generation and other educationally at-risk student populations. (Extracted from executive summary)

Engle, J., & Tinto, V. (2008). *Moving beyond access: College success for low-income, first-generation students*: ERIC.

URL: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED504448.pdf>

Keywords: low income; first generation; barriers; success

In order to inform the efforts of educators and policymakers to improve college access and success, the Pell Institute has produced a report, funded by the 3M Foundation, that examines the current status of low-income, first-generation college students<sup>1</sup> in higher education. Using data from the U.S. Department of Education datasets, we describe the ways in which this population participates in higher education, including persistence and degree attainment rates, and compare their participation to other students, including those who are neither low-income nor first-generation. We discuss the barriers that low-income, first-generation students face to achieving success in college, as well as the strategies that colleges and universities can pursue to address these barriers and improve students' chances of earning degrees. We also offer recommendations for institutional and government actions that could go a long way towards closing the access and success gaps that exist today for this doubly-disadvantaged population. (Executive Summary)

Finnie, R., Childs, S., & Wismer, A. (2011). Access to post-secondary education among under-represented and minority groups: measuring the gaps, assessing the causes. *EPRI working paper no. 2011-01*, Education Policy Research Initiative, Ottawa

URL: [http://www.socialsciences.uottawa.ca/irpe-epri/eng/documents/Finnie\\_URMG\\_09-30-2011.pdf](http://www.socialsciences.uottawa.ca/irpe-epri/eng/documents/Finnie_URMG_09-30-2011.pdf)

Keywords: equity; teaching and learning; demographics; disadvantaged; indigenous people; participation

This paper provides an empirical analysis of access to post-secondary education [PSE] among under-represented and minority groups in Canada based on the uniquely rich Youth in Transition Survey [YITS] (Reading Cohort). We first treat the groups individually and then together to see how membership across different groups affects the identified gaps. We then add other sets of explanatory variables available in the YITS-A (high school grades and engagement, [Programme for International Student Assessment] PISA reading scores, etc.) to see what portion of the gaps are related to these variables – and how much still remains after taking them into account. Not having a family history of PSE attendance is the most important (independent) factor, followed by being disabled, further followed by being an Aboriginal, coming from a rural area, or being in a low income family. Conversely, the children of immigrants are much more likely to go to PSE (especially university), as

are (official) language minorities, while coming from a single parent family appears to have no effect of its own. (Abstract)

Fitzgibbon, K., & Prior, J. (2006). Students' early experiences and university interventions-a timeline to aid undergraduate student retention. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 8(3), 17-27.

ISSN: 1466-6529

Keywords: higher education; expectations; experiences

The University of Glamorgan has a policy of encouraging widening participation. However, as many universities are realising, widening the entrance gates can sometimes lead to increasing numbers leaving through the exit gates before the completion of their programme. At the University of Glamorgan, a project established in 2001 is demonstrating how interventionist policies can improve progression rates. This project involves two of the University's biggest departments and comprises of a series of timed interventions designed to support vulnerable first year students during the first semester of their studies. Typical experiences of students in UK higher education (HE) have been highlighted and mapped onto a timeline, along with the sequence of retention and support initiatives introduced at Glamorgan. It is this timeline that will be explored in the paper. (Abstract)

Fleming, T., & Finnegan, F. (2011). *Non-traditional students in Irish higher education: a research report*. RANLHE Wroclaw

URL: [http://www.dsw.edu.pl/fileadmin/www-ranlhe/files/Final\\_Copy\\_July\\_20\\_2011.pdf](http://www.dsw.edu.pl/fileadmin/www-ranlhe/files/Final_Copy_July_20_2011.pdf)

Keywords: non-traditional students; student retention; access to education and training; socioeconomic background

The RANLHE (Access and Retention: Experiences of Non-traditional Learners in Higher Education) project looks at how non-traditional students in higher education experience the processes of learning. The project involves eight universities from seven countries: Ireland, Spain, Poland, Sweden, England, Scotland and Germany. This report is based on 125 in-depth interviews with non-traditional students in three Irish higher education institutions each of which has their own distinct ethos and reputation. The majority of the participants were female and a small majority of the sample was composed of mature students in their 30s and 40s (however the cohort included students who were as young as 18 years and some who were in their 60s and 70s). Nearly all of the interviewees were the first in their families to attend higher education and just under two thirds of all the interviewees came from working class families. (Abstract)

Forbus, P. R., Newbold, J. J., & Mehta, S. S. (2011). First-generation university students: motivation, academic success, and satisfaction with the university experience. *International Journal of Education Research*, 6(2), 34-55.

URL: <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/70244067/first-generation-university-students->

motivation-academic-success-satisfaction-university-experience

Keywords: first-generation students; higher education; life roles; support systems; motivation; academic success

First-generation college students are becoming the center of an increasing amount of research. The primary purpose of this study was to examine the variation in motivation, academic success, and satisfaction levels between first-generation and continuing-generation students along with the influence of relations established between a four-year university and area community colleges. In addition, the study explored the different backgrounds and characteristics of first generation and continuing-generation students. The findings of this analysis enhance previous research by demonstrating the benefits of identifying the backgrounds of students entering the university and developing formal associations between the university and those institutions in which the students were previously enrolled. (Abstract)

Forsyth, A., & Furlong, A. (2003). *Losing out?: socioeconomic disadvantage and experience in further and higher education*. Bristol, UK: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

URL: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/jr139-socioeconomic-disadvantage-education.pdf>

Keywords: outcomes of education and training; educationally disadvantaged; access; economic conditions;

This publication reports on a research project that is a continuation of previous research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, in which a sample of young people, who undertook their final year of schooling in disadvantaged areas of Scotland, were tracked in order to determine who of those from the sample accessed higher education (HE), and the careers barriers experienced by students classified as disadvantaged. The current research tracks the progress of these students further and investigates the experiences of those undertaking HE. The impact of changes in Britain's funding for HE is noted. The current research draws data from postal surveys of participants from the previous research project and in-depth face-to-face interviews with a sample of survey respondents. The research highlights patterns of participation in HE. Approximately two thirds of survey respondents were found to be engaged in education more than two years after leaving school, either full-time, part-time or as an applicant for the following year. The study investigates characteristics of these students, including career pathways. Barriers to participation in HE are highlighted using evidence from the interviews. Recommendations are made based on the findings, and it is hoped that the study will inspire a response to the inequalities of access to HE. (Abstract)

Fuller, A., Foskett, R., Johnston, B., & Paton, K. (2011). 'Getting by' or 'getting ahead'? Gendered educational and career decision-making in networks of intimacy. In: *Gendered Choices*. London, UK: Springer. pp. 189-208

DOI: 10.1007/978-94-007-0647-7\_16

Keywords: social relationships; gender; higher education; family and friends

In social network analysis it is social relationships rather than individuals that form the unit of analysis. A key strength of this approach is that it prevents decisions and behaviour being viewed as either individually or structurally determined. This chapter draws on research<sup>1</sup> that is examining the potential of network data to help explain educational decision-making, with a specific focus on Higher Education (HE) in the United Kingdom. The study is designed to explore the ways in which 'networks of intimacy' (Heath and Cleaver 2003) made up of family and friends may provide a critical context within which thinking about HE is embedded and co-constructed. The following discussion represents an early attempt to explore the network of intimacy as the unit of analysis for understanding decisions about education, including the decision to participate, or not, in HE. For the purposes of this chapter, we are focusing on one network which we suggest is illustrative of (among other issues) the gendered nature of educational 'choices' and transitions. (Extracted from introduction)

Fuller, A., & Heath, S. (2009) Educational decision-making, social networks and the new widening participation. In: *Improving learning by widening participation in higher education*. Abingdon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. pp. 132-146

ISBN: 9780415495417

Keywords: educational decision-making, social networks; widening participation

There is a growing emphasis within UK education policy on encouraging adults to gain higher level qualifications through participation in higher education (DIUS 2007). However, little previous research has focused on the decision-making about education and careers of individuals who possess the qualifications normally required for enrolment on higher level courses but who have not, as yet, participated. Similarly, little is known about the values people in this category attach to formal learning or the potential relevance of HE to their lives. This chapter makes a contribution to the knowledge base in this area (Abstract)

Fuller, A., Heath, S., & Johnston, B. (2011). *Rethinking widening participation in higher education: the role of social networks*. Abingdon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

ISBN: 9780415575638

Keywords: higher education; widening participation; diversity

Extending the chance for people from diverse backgrounds to participate in Higher Education (HE) is a priority in the UK and many countries internationally. Previous work on widening participation has focused on why people choose to go to university but this vital new research has focused on looking at why people choose not to go. This book examines, therefore, the ways in which (non-) decision-making about HE is embedded within a range of social networks consisting of family, partners and friends, and to what extent future participation in HE is conceived as within the bounds of possibility. It: provides a conceptual framework for understanding the value of network-based decision-making about participation in HE, in the light of the changing historical and policy contexts in which it is always located; highlights the importance of researching the socially embedded narratives of 'ordinary people' in order to critique the deficit discourse which dominates debates about widening participation in HE;

(Edited from abstract)

Giancola, J. K., Munz, D. C., & Trares, S. (2008). First-versus continuing-generation adult students on college perceptions: Are differences actually because of demographic variance? *Adult Education Quarterly*, 58(3), 214-228.

DOI: 10.1177/0741713608314088

Keywords: first generation; non-traditional students; continuing generation; sex differences; perceptions

The profile of students is changing, with an increase in first-generation and adult students. The purpose of this study was to examine differences in college perceptions between first-generation and continuing-generation adult undergraduates while controlling for demographic variables. The study and hypotheses are grounded in the Model of College Outcomes for Adult Students. It was hypothesized that first-generation students would report higher importance and lower satisfaction scores on the following variables: instructional effectiveness, academic advising, registration effectiveness, campus climate, safety and security, academic services, admissions and financial aid effectiveness, and service excellence. The results revealed that sex (more females) accounted for variance between first- and continuing-generation students on importance. There were no differences regarding satisfaction. With a higher number of female adult and first-generation students, higher education should better examine how to meet these students' needs. Recommendations for future research and practical implications are provided. (Abstract)

Gibbons, M. M., & Woodside, M. (2014). Addressing the Needs of First-Generation College Students: Lessons Learned From Adults From Low-Education Families. *Journal of College Counseling*, 17(1), 21-36.

DOI: 10.1002/j.2161-1882.2014.00045.x

Keywords: first-generation, career development; first generation

The fact that 1st-generation college students have lower retention rates than their peers and confront barriers hindering college success is well known. However, less information exists about the effect that 1st-generation college status has after college completion. In this qualitative study, the career development experiences of adults from families without college education were examined. Three themes were identified: the role of the father, expectations about career, and expectations about college. Implications for college counselors are provided. (Abstract)

Gofen, A. (2009). Family capital: How first-generation higher education students break the intergenerational cycle. *Family Relations*, 58(1), 104-120.

URL: <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/publications/dps/pdfs/dp132207.pdf>

Keywords: higher education; first generation students; intergenerational

The first children in a family to attain a higher education, referred to as “first-generation students,” embody the realization of social mobility. Previous analysis has often portrayed them as succeeding *despite* their family background. This research suggests that although they face many material challenges, their families are often a key resource, rather than a constraint. This research attempts to reveal what enabled the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage to be broken. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from Israeli families in which intergenerational mobility took place (N = 50). Employing a grounded theory approach, the analysis reveals that breaking the intergenerational cycle mostly concerns family day-to-day life, and that it reflects three main components: time horizon, interpersonal relationships, and family values. (Abstract)

Gorard, S., Smith, E., May, H., Thomas, L., Adnett, N. and Slack, K. (2006) *Review of Widening Participation Research: addressing the barriers to participation in higher education*, Bristol: HEFCE

URL: <http://www.ulster.ac.uk/star/resources/gorardbarriers.pdf>

Keywords: widening participation; higher education

A large body of research since the 1950s has found that the determinants of participation, and non-participation, are long-term. There is a clear pattern of typical learning ‘trajectories’ which are both shaped by, and constrain, learning experiences. Thus, the key social determinants predicating lifelong participation in learning involve time, place, gender, family, and initial schooling. Such findings emphasise the importance of reviewing evidence on participation through the ‘life course’ of each individual, and compromises the analytic utility of the ‘barriers’ metaphor. (Extracted from summary)

Grayson, J. (2011). Cultural capital and academic achievement of first generation domestic and international students in Canadian universities. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(4), 605-630.

DOI: 10.1080/01411926.2010.487932

Keywords: first generation; university; cultural capital

In Canada little research has been conducted on those who are the first in their families to attend university. Cultural reproduction theory suggests that such students would be less likely to engage in the type of activities that, according to the college impact model, contribute to academic achievement. In order to test these and other possibilities a longitudinal survey-based study of domestic and international students was conducted at four Canadian universities. Overall it was found that university experiences did vary by the educational background of parents; however, such experiences were not always of consequence for academic achievement. (Abstract)

Gutman, L., & Akerman, R. (2008). *Determinants of aspirations: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning*, Institute of Education, University of London.

URL: <http://eprints.ioe.ac.uk/2052/1/Gutman2008Determinants.pdf>

Keywords: university; aspirations; parental education

Young people make choices that influence whether their potentialities are cultivated or remain untapped. These choices are, in turn, partly influenced by their parents, the opportunities available to them, and their own aspirations – to gain qualifications, to get a job, to have a career and to have a family. Yet, understanding what determines aspirations is not a straightforward task: they change throughout childhood and beyond, shaped by the characteristics of young people and their families, peers, schools, and neighbourhoods as well as wider forces such as the labour market and historical context. And it is well-known that aspirations vary for different sections of the population both in terms of parents' educational and occupational goals for their children and the ambitions of the young people themselves. In this report, we review the current research literature across a range of disciplines to set out these differences and consider how educational and career aspirations in particular are formed and developed in response to different environments and circumstances. We also examine the extent to which aspirations are related to eventual outcomes and discuss the implications for current policies and practices. (Abstract)

Harrison, N., & Waller, R. (2010). We blame the parents! A response to 'Cultural capital as an explanation of variation in participation in higher education' by John Noble and Peter Davies (*British Journal of Sociology of Education* 30, no. 5). *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 31(4), 471-482.

DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2010.484922

Keywords: social class; higher education; widening participation; cultural capital; methodology

This paper offers a response to a recent article where the authors argue cultural capital is the only determinant of the propensity of young people to seek to enter higher education, dismissing other indicators such as social class. This response questions the support the original authors draw from other literature and offers criticism of the sample used in their study, the survey tool employed, the analysis undertaken and their conclusions relating to the agenda of 'widening participation'. In reality, the wider literature suggests that social class, as represented by parental occupation, continues to have a role in explaining educational trajectories, even once other factors are controlled for. (Abstract)

Hartig, N., & Steigerwald, F. (2007). Understanding family roles and ethics in working with first-generation college students and their families. *The Family Journal*, 15(2), 159-162.

DOI: 10.1177/1066480706297955

Keywords: family roles; first-generation college students; narrative therapy; case study; ethics

This article examines the family roles and ethics of first-generation college students and their families through discussion of a case vignette. London's family roles applied to first-generation college students are discussed. Narrative therapy practices and an ethical model that examines the value process of counselors are explored as possible solutions. (Abstract)

Heath, S., Fuller, A., & Paton, K. (2008). Network-based ambivalence and educational decision-making: A case study of 'non-participation' in higher education. *Research Papers in Education*, 23(2),

219-229.

DOI: 10.1080/02671520802048760

Keywords: widening participation; educational decision-making; higher education; social networks; ambivalence

Much contemporary theorising on educational decision-making starts from the premise that the process of decision-making is a deeply embedded social practice, which is inextricably linked to behaviours, attitudes and dispositions which hold sway within an individual's social network. Drawing on data from a project focusing on decision-making amongst nonparticipants in higher education (HE) who are nonetheless 'potentially recruitable' to HE, this paper uses the sociological concept of ambivalence as a useful tool in exploring their educational decision-making within a broader network-based approach. In focusing on the ways in which individuals manage contradictions and tensions within their networks, and how the ways in which they manage these tensions are linked to broader structural factors, the concept provides a framework which is able to bridge social structure and individual agency. (Abstract)

Heath, S., Fuller, A., & Johnston, B. (2010). Young people, social capital and network-based educational decision-making. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 31(4), 395-411.

DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2010.484918

Keywords: social capital; widening participation; higher education; social networks

This paper explores whether and in what ways young people's perceptions and experiences of higher education (HE) can facilitate the transmission within their social networks of social capital both upwardly (from child to parent) and horizontally (from sibling to sibling), and thus can potentially provide bridging capital to family members, especially in families with little or no prior experience of HE. It utilises data from a project that explored the embedded nature of decision-making about HE amongst a group of 'potentially recruitable' adults and their wider networks. The paper concludes that, despite the general emphasis within existing theoretical approaches to network capital on the downward transmission of social capital, the educational experiences of younger generations can be critical in shaping the perceptions of other (including older) network members, albeit not always in ways that encourage formal educational participation. (Abstract)

Hoskins, K. (2013). Widening participation aims and outcomes: examining higher education prospects for four non-traditional students. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 14(3), 235-249.

ISSN: 1466-6529

Keywords: widening participation; social class; non-traditional; social justice; habitus; power

This paper provides an overview of New Labour's policy initiative to widen participation, and considers the consequences this policy has had for four non-traditional students, that is, 'students from under-represented groups' (Medway et al., 2003:3). As a result of widening participation policy, a broader

range of higher education institutions (HEIs) have actively sought to enrol larger numbers of those they have historically tended to exclude: the working classes, women, mature students, those from minority ethnic groups and those with disabilities (Burns, Sinfield and Holley, 2006). The shift in emphasis away from Access programmes as a route into higher education for those traditionally excluded to the New Labour government push for widening participation across the sector has reshaped higher education, raising questions about what and who higher education is for. The paper asks if changes to education (such as widening participation ostensibly as part of a move to increase social justice) changed the status quo, giving voice, stake and power to those traditionally excluded from those realms. (Abstract)

Irlbeck, E., Adams, S., Akers, C., Burris, S., & Jones, S. (2014). First Generation College Students: Motivations and Support Systems. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 55(2), 154-166.

DOI: 10.5032/jae.2014.02154

Keywords: first generation college students; retention; agricultural education and communications; recruitment

The number of first generation college students enrolling at universities is on the rise. These students often struggle with the transition into university life because of the lack of knowledge about this new environment. A case study was conducted to determine the motivations and support systems of first generation college students within the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) at Texas Tech University (TTU). Nine respondents from different departments in CASNR and one representative of the TTU's first generation college student program were interviewed. It was determined that three factors led to their enrolment: parental/family support, teacher encouragement, and self-motivation. The researchers also found most participants were involved in at least one department/college organization, religious group, or other university program. It was also determined these students depended upon three major support groups and systems, such as parents, friends, and advisers /professors. (Edited from abstract)

Ishitani, T. T. (2003). A longitudinal approach to assessing attrition behavior among first-generation students: Time-varying effects of pre-college characteristics. *Research in Higher Education*, 44(4), 433-449.

ISSN: 0361-0365

Keywords: first-generation students; student attrition; event history modeling

Although going to college may be viewed as a rite of passage for many students, some groups of students often face unique challenges in their pursuit of a college degree. One group of students that we are trying to gain a better understanding of is "first-generation" students, those whose parents did not graduate from college. This article presents the results of a study that investigated longitudinal effects of being a first-generation student on attrition. Results indicated that first-generation students were more likely to depart than their counterparts over time. After controlling for factors such as race, gender, high school grade point average (GPA), and family income, the risk of attrition in the first year

among first-generation students was 71% higher than that of students with two college-educated parents. (Abstract)

Jehangir, R. R. (2010). *Higher education and first-generation students: Cultivating community, voice, and place for the new majority*. Palgrave Macmillan.

ISBN: 9780230623446

Keywords: higher education; first generation students; experience

Higher Education and First-Generation Students offers readers a rich understanding of the experience of students who are first in their family to attend college. This book contends that first-generation students are isolated and marginalized on many large college campuses and considers learning communities and critical multicultural pedagogies as vehicles to cultivate community, voice, and place for this new majority of students. This book is a theoretically informed study of the lived experience of FG students and draws on their voices to demonstrate how their insights interface with what we, as educators, think we know about them. What can we learn from these students? How might their insights inform and shape the learning spaces we create for them? (Abstract)

Jenkins, S. R., Belanger, A., Connally, M. L., Boals, A., & Durón, K. M. (2013). First-generation undergraduate students' social support, depression, and life satisfaction. *Journal of College Counseling, 16*(2), 129-142.

DOI: 10.1002/j.2161-1882.2013.00032.x

Keywords: first-generation student, social support, life satisfaction

First-generation undergraduate students face challenging cross-socioeconomic cultural transitions into college life. The authors compared first- and non-first-generation undergraduate students' social support, posttraumatic stress, depression symptoms, and life satisfaction. First-generation participants reported less social support from family and friends, more single-event traumatic stress, less life satisfaction, and marginally more depression symptomatology than non-first-generation participants, but significant generation-gender interactions showed first-generation women doing worse and first-generation men doing better than others. (Abstract)

Jones, I. (2010). Senses of belonging and fitting in? Affinities and emergent identities. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 12*(2), 23-35.

ISSN: 1466-6529

Keywords: affinity; identity; focus groups; student experience; widening participation.

This article will present the initial findings of research investigating the complexity of specific situated experiences of widening participation among two cohorts of undergraduate students. The case study focuses on the recalled expectations and decision-making processes that resulted in the take-up of a

higher education (HE) place by a sample of current undergraduate students and on their initial experiences within the institution. Previous studies have used individual interviews and questionnaires to explore different dimensions of student experience and identity. The article will use and reflect on the complementary qualitative method of focus groups and specifically the use of affinity groups. It builds on recent research that emphasises the multiplicity of first-year experiences in higher education and work that highlights the complex lives and heterogeneity of students and the often fragmentary experience they can consequently have. The study aims to contribute to a debate on how to deepen understanding of the complexity of students' experiences using different dimensions of affinity. (Abstract)

Kahn, P. (2009). On establishing a *modus vivendi*: the exercise of agency in decisions to participate or not participate in higher education. *London Review of Education*, 7(3), 261-270.

DOI: 0.1080/14748460903290256

Keywords: widening participation; realist social theory; reflexive deliberation; higher education policy; equality

It is becoming increasingly clear that the notion of 'removing barriers' offers a limited foundation for widening participation to higher education. Drawing on realist social theory, we consider how decisions to participate or not participate form part of a process to establish a *modus vivendi* or 'way of life' for oneself. We explore factors that affect how individuals pursue courses of action around entry into potentially alien educational contexts. Our analysis suggests that interventions designed to widen participation should take account of different modes of reflexive deliberation, underpinning social and cultural structures, and a range of notions of human flourishing. (Abstract)

Kim, Y. K., & Sax, L. J. (2009). Student–faculty interaction in research universities: Differences by student gender, race, social class, and first-generation status. *Research in Higher Education*, 50(5), 437-459.

DOI: 10.1007/s11162-009-9127-x

Keywords: student–faculty interaction; research university; conditional effects; gender;; race; social class

This study examined whether the effects of student–faculty interaction on a range of student outcomes—i.e., college GPA, degree aspiration, integration, critical thinking and communication, cultural appreciation and social awareness, and satisfaction with college experience—vary by student gender, race, social class, and first-generation status. The study utilized data on 58,281 students who participated in the 2006 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES). The findings reveal differences in the frequency of student–faculty interaction across student gender, race, social class and first-generation status, and differences in the effects of student–faculty interaction (i.e., conditional effects) that depended on each of these factors except first-generation status. The findings provide implications for educational practice on how to maximize the educational efficacy of student–faculty interaction by minimizing the gender, race, social class, and first-generation

differences associated with it. (Abstract)

Leathwood, C., & O'Connell, P. (2003). 'It's a struggle': The construction of the 'new student' in higher education. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(6), 597-615.

DOI: 10.1080/0268093032000145863

Keywords: university student; widening participation; non-traditional; new student

This paper explores constructions of the 'new' university student in the context of UK government policy to widen participation in higher education. The paper draws on an ongoing longitudinal study of undergraduate students in a post-1992 inner-city university in the UK to examine students' constructions of their experiences and identities in the context of public discourses of the 'new' higher education student. Many of the participants in this study would be regarded as 'non-traditional' students, i.e. those students who are the focus of widening participation policy initiatives. As Reay et al. (2002) discovered, for many 'non-traditional' students studying in higher education is characterized by 'struggle', something that also emerged as an important theme in this research. The paper examines the ways in which these new student identities both echo the New Labour dream of widening participation and yet continue to reflect and re-construct classed and other identities and inequalities. (Edited from abstract)

Lehmann, W. (2009). University as vocational education: working-class students' expectations for university. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 30(2), 137-149.

DOI: 10.1080/01425690802700164

Keywords: higher education; working-class students; habitus; educational dispositions; knowledge economy

Labor market conditions, a pervasive public discourse about the benefits of higher education, and parental hopes push many young working-class people into university. The institutional culture and demands of university, however, often remain elusive and fraught with uncertainty. In this paper, I draw on qualitative interviews with first-generation, working-class students at a Canadian university to analyze the ways in which these students discuss their reasons to attend and their expectations for university, and the implications of their attitudes for their future success at university. Analysis of the interview data shows how the relatively high and risky investment of working-class youth in education leads to strong utilitarian and vocational orientations toward university. Although a narrow focus on the career potential of university is generally perceived as problematic, I argue that it may also help working-class students in their transition to university. Nonetheless, a critical educational process is necessary that not only helps working-class students achieve their educational and occupational goals, but also understand their unique status in a social institution that they entered as outsiders. (Abstract)

Leese, M. (2010). Bridging the gap: Supporting student transitions into higher education. *Journal of*

*Further and Higher Education*, 34(2), 239-251.

DOI: 10.1080/03098771003695494

Keywords: transition; higher education; new student

This research focused on the early experience of students entering an undergraduate course in a post-1992 university that is committed to widening participation. Using Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and habitus as a theoretical framework, data were collected from students during the critical first days and weeks when they need to fit in to their new environment. The research was designed to consider whether there is a 'new student' in higher education (HE) and to consider the possible influence of cultural capital and habitus on a student's transition. Data were collected using an online questionnaire with a response rate of 52% (n=180), and this was followed up with five small-group discussions with 25 of the respondents. Participants self-selected to take part in the smallgroup discussions but the sample did not reflect the cohort in relation to ethnicity, age and gender. The results showed that the majority of the students (70%) were combining work with study and most students spent a minimal amount of time on campus, perhaps supporting the concept that there is a 'new student' in HE. (Edited from abstract)

Lohfink, M. M., & Paulsen, M. B. (2005). Comparing the determinants of persistence for first-generation and continuing-generation students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(4), 409-428.

DOI: 10.1353/csd.2005.0040

Keywords: higher education; first generation students; persistence

In this study we examined and compared the determinants of first-to-second-year persistence for 1,167 first-generation and 3,017 continuing generation students at four-year institutions, using data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Survey (Wine, et al., 2002). Because first-generation students are overrepresented in the most disadvantaged racial, income, and gender groups, we used a critical theorist perspective to frame the research problem, guide inquiry, and interpret results. (Abstract)

Longwell-Grice, R., & Longwell-Grice, H. (2007). Testing Tinto: How Do Retention Theories Work for First-Generation, Working-Class Students? *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice*, 9(4), 407-420.

DOI: 10.2190/CS.9.4.a

Keywords:

This article presents results of a multiple case study involving four first generation, working-class, white male college freshmen who discuss their perceptions of faculty support. These perceptions are analyzed using Tinto's theories of student retention, specifically as they relate to faculty-student interaction. The study found that first-generation, working-class students are intimidated by the idea of

seeking out faculty for support, resulting in a lack of support from their faculty. Since Tinto's theories find a strong link between faculty support and student retention, this study suggests that colleges need to be more strategic and systematic in finding ways to develop faculty-student interactions for first-generation, working-class college students. (Abstract)

Lowery-Hart, R., & Pacheco, G. (2011). Understanding the first-generation student experience in higher education through a relational dialectic perspective. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 2011(127), 55-68.

DOI: 10.1002/tl.457

Keywords: higher education; first generation; academia culture

The authors use relational dialectics theory to argue that first-generation college students (FGS) often struggle with a give-and-take tension between getting involved in campus life and losing their familial and working-class identity. They suggest that because FGS straddle two different cultures of academia and home, institutions must address these tensions to improve the students' retention and graduate rates. (Abstract)

McCarron, G. P., & Inkelas, K. K. (2006). The gap between educational aspirations and attainment for first-generation college students and the role of parental involvement. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(5), 534-549.

DOI: 10.1353/csd.2006.0059

Keywords: higher education; aspirations; first generation students

The primary purpose of this study was to examine if parental involvement had a significant influence on the educational aspirations of first generation students as compared to the educational aspirations of non-first-generation students. Additionally, the study investigated if the educational aspirations of first-generation students differed from their actual educational attainments. Lastly, the study explored the differences in educational attainment for first generation students by gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Longitudinal data from a nationally representative sample of 1,879 students generated by the National Educational Longitudinal Study 1988-2000 was used as the basis for analysis. (Abstract)

McConnell, P. J. (2000). ERIC Review: What community colleges should do to assist first-generation students. *Community College Review*, 28(3), 75-87.

DOI: 10.1177/009155210002800305

Keywords: first generation students; college; success

The purpose of this review is to answer the global question: What should community colleges do to help first-generation students be successful? The review is based on an examination of the literature

relating to first-generation college students. The sources cited include studies of students at both two-year and four-year institutions; the majority of these are public, but a few are private. The studies span the years from 1982 to 1999. They include case studies that involve both students and institutions, small samples of students at two- and four-year institutions, focus groups, longitudinal studies, and research using national-level data. (Extracted from introduction)

McMillan, W. (2014). 'They have different information about what is going on': emotion in the transition to university. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 33(6), 1123-1135.

DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2014.911250

Keywords: first-year experience; higher education; professional education; student diversity

Most new students experience school to university transition as challenging. Students from backgrounds with little or no experience of higher education are most vulnerable in this transition, and most at risk of academic failure. Emotion appears implicated in the differential way in which first-generation students and students with family familiarity of university experience the transition. This article draws on the voices of first-year dental and oral hygiene students at a South African dental faculty regarding university transition experiences. It draws on the construct of capital and Archer's [(2002). Realism and the problem of agency. *Journal of Critical Realism Alethia*, 5(1), 11–20] understanding of 'competing concerns' to examine how emotion shapes students' experiences of university transition and how they position themselves with regard to these experiences. The article explicates the ways in which emotional commentary and classed locations intersect, exploring the extent to which this intersection shapes young people's framing of their concerns of 'being a student' and 'becoming a dentist'. The article identifies aspects of the university's material and cultural environments which shape students' emotional responses and which consequently are implicated in the perpetuation of class-based differential life chances. (Abstract)

Martinez, J. A., Sher, K. J., Krull, J. L., & Wood, P. K. (2009). Blue-collar scholars?: Mediators and moderators of university attrition in first-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(1), 87.

DOI: 10.1353/csd.0.0053

Keywords: parental education; first generation students; attrition

Many college entrants' parents do not have college degrees. These entrants are at high risk for attrition, suggesting it is critical to understand mechanisms of attrition relative to parental education. Moderators and mediators of the effect of parental education on attrition were investigated in 3,290 students over 4 years. Low parental education was a risk for attrition; importantly, college GPAs both moderated and mediated this effect, and ACT scores, scholarships, loans, and full-time work mediated this effect. Drug use, psychological distress, and few reported academic challenges predicted attrition, independent of parental education. These findings might inform interventions to decrease attrition. (Abstract)

Mathers, J., & Parry, J. (2009). Why are there so few working-class applicants to medical schools? Learning from the success stories. *Medical Education*, 43(3), 219-228.

DOI: 10.1111/j.1365-2923.2008.03274.x

Keywords: schools medical; education; medical; undergraduate; social class; multicentre study

Students from lower socioeconomic circumstances remain underrepresented in UK medical schools despite recent shifts in other demographic variables and specific policy emphasis on widening participation (WP). This study aimed to further understanding of the reasons for this. This study demonstrates how 'normal working-class biographies', constructed by the majority of students targeted by WP activity, result from the influences of socio-cultural context, as well as familial and institutional habitus. The resultant influence on habitus as identity and, in particular, the disjuncture between working-class perceptions of medicine and individual identities are key to understanding the reasons behind the low number of working-class applicants to medical school. (Abstract)

Mehta, S. S., Newbold, J. J., & O'Rourke, M. A. (2011). Why do first-generation students fail? *College Student Journal*, 45(1).

ISSN: 0146-3934

Keywords: first generation; attrition;

Previous studies have determined factors contributing to first-generation student success. This study finds that first-generation students are less involved, have less social and financial support, and do not show a preference for active coping strategies. First-generation students report less social and academic satisfaction as well as lower grade point average. (Abstract)

Morrison, A. (2010). "I Want an Education": Two Case Studies of Working-Class Ambition and Ambivalence in Further and Higher Education. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 15 (1), 67-80.

DOI: 10.1080/13596740903565376

Keywords: vocational education; social class; educational decision-making

Using data from in-depth individual interviews, this article discusses the educational experiences and ambitions of two young working-class full-time female students. The two studies are derived from a wider investigation into student post-16 educational experiences and decision-making, based on a sample of students and staff of an Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education in Travel and Tourism at a large further and higher education college in the West Midlands of England. The author considers the young women's stories in the light of governmental aims to widen participation in the post-16 sector. It is argued that, although the students' stories offer a positive account of determination and ambition, they also reveal ambivalences and struggles that reflect the nature of the barriers that working-class students can encounter within post-16 education. Such ambivalences and struggles reflect, in turn, the wider contradictions that the post compulsory sector faces within the 'market state'. (Abstract)

Moschetti, R., & Hudley, C. (2008). Measuring Social Capital among First-Generation and Non-First-Generation, Working-Class, White Males. *Journal of College Admission*, 198, 25-30.

URL: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ829418.pdf>

Keywords: first generation; college; social capital; adjustment

Entry into college can be a stressful transition that involves social, emotional and academic adjustments for many adolescents, and especially challenging for students from low-income backgrounds or those who are first in their families to attend college. Low-income and first-generation students may lack basic knowledge about college, including degree expectations and planning, expenses and funding, and career preparation (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2004), placing them at risk for poor adjustment and persistence. For example, students from working class backgrounds whose parents did not attend college are at high risk for dropping out of college, similar to their risk for dropping out of high school. (Abstract)

Noble, J., & Davies, P. (2009). Cultural capital as an explanation of variation in participation in higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 30(5), 591-605.

DOI: 10.1080/01425690903101098

Keywords: widening participation; cultural capital

Cultural capital is frequently referred to as a construct in the analysis of inequality in higher education. It has been suggested that variations in cultural capital contribute to social class differences in levels of participation, distribution of students between elite and other universities, and the likelihood of dropping out. However, recent analyses of quantitative data suggest that once students' attainments are included in analysis of levels of participation the effects of social class disappear. One possibility is that cultural capital affects the likelihood of participation in higher education independently of the common measures of social class variation (parental occupation and education). In this analysis we include a measure of students' cultural capital to investigate whether it exerts an effect on the likelihood of participation that is independent from students' attainment. We also present and evaluate a practicable method of measuring students' cultural capital. (Abstract)

Oikonomidou, E. (2013). *Sociocultural Boundary Formations in College Life and Intercultural Capital Development*. *Education and Urban Society*, 0013124513494778.

DOI: 10.1177/0013124513494778

Keywords: First Generation College (FGC) students, intercultural capital, sociocultural divisions

Based on selective findings from a qualitative study with first generation college students, this article presents the contradictory and complex ways in which the participants perceived sociocultural diversity on campus and their place within it. The students' narratives both affirmed existing boundaries of social belonging based on the conventional categories of race, ethnicity, and social

class and transcended them. Cross-border alliances were being built on campus at the same time that new boundaries were forming in unconscious ways. The discussion focuses on the implications of this study for intercultural capital development. (Abstract)

Olenchak, F. R., & Hebert, T. P. (2002). Endangered Academic Talent: Lessons Learned from Gifted First-Generation College Males. *Journal of College Student Development*, 43(2), 195-212.

ISSN: 0897-5264

Keywords: attrition; underachievement; first generation students

Two case studies of men from diverse cultures, African American and Vietnamese American, illustrate the potential for underachievement among first-generation gifted students at comprehensive universities. Amplifying previous studies, this research provides an examination of attrition and highlights influences on underachievement. Conclusions suggest methods for universities to curb the problem as it relates to high-ability students. (Abstract)

Olson, J. S. (2013). Opportunities, Obstacles, and Options: First-Generation College Graduates and Social Cognitive Career Theory. *Journal of Career Development*, 41(3) 199-217

DOI: 10.1177/0894845313486352

Keywords: first-generation college student; college to work transition; social cognitive career theory; college graduate

First-generation college (FGC) students often encounter a campus environment and set of norms that are substantially different from those they previously experienced. Although the literature exploring the challenges facing these students is growing, less attention has been given to their experiences as they graduate and transition from college to work. Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) has been suggested as a useful framework for helping individuals during the early stages of their careers by exploring the individual's self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. In addition, SCCT considers the influence of contextual supports and barriers, which may be influencing the ongoing career development of FGC students after they graduate. This article explores the ways SCCT may prove particularly helpful when working with FGC graduates. Several case studies highlighting key challenges facing FGC graduates are also presented. (Abstract)

Orbe, M. P. (2004). Negotiating multiple identities within multiple frames: an analysis of first-generation college students. *Communication Education*, 53(2), 131-149.

DOI: 10.10/03634520410001682401

Keywords: identity; identity negotiation; first-generation college students; communication theory of identity

This article draws from narratives, collected from 79 first-generation college (FGC) students across

several different campuses, to explore the saliency of FGC student status and the various ways in which it is enacted during interactions with others. Communication theory of identity serves as the study's theoretic foundation. Multiple points of analysis capture the complex nature of identity negotiation for FGC students. Findings warrant three conclusions: (1) the saliency of FGC status in their daily interactions varies considerably among students; (2) FGC status appears to be more important for individuals who also identify as co-cultural group members; and (3) FGC students appear to lack any significant sense of communal identity. (Abstract)

Orbe, M. P. (2008). Theorizing multidimensional identity negotiation: Reflections on the lived experiences of first-generation college students. In M. Azmitia, M. Syed, & K. Radmacher (Eds.), *The intersections of personal and social identities. New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 120, 81–95.

ISBN: 9780470372838; 0470372834

Keywords: student identity; first generation; academic success

Drawing from recent research on first-generation college (FGC) students, this chapter advances an interdisciplinary theoretical framework for understanding how these students enact multiple aspects of their personal, cultural, and social identities. I use dialectical and cross-cultural adaptation theories as a foundation to extend examinations of how diverse FGC students negotiate the alien culture of the academy against that of home. In this regard, college is situated as a pivotal point of development, and successful negotiation of identity tensions is represented as a key factor in academic success. (Abstract)

Padgett, R. D., Johnson, M. P., & Pascarella, E. T. (2012). First-generation undergraduate students and the impacts of the first year of college: Additional evidence. *Journal of College Student Development*, 53(2), 243-266.

DOI: 10.1353/csd.2012.0032

Keywords: first generation; undergraduates; first year

Using longitudinal data from the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education, our findings suggest that first-generation students are at a significant disadvantage across cognitive and psychosocial outcomes compared to students whose parents have at least some postsecondary education. Furthermore, we tested for the conditional effects of good practices on first year outcomes and found that effects of good practices on both cognitive and psychosocial outcomes differed in magnitude, and sometimes in direction, for first-generation versus non-first generation students. (Abstract)

Pascarella, E. T., Wolniak, G. C., Pierson, C. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2003). Experiences and outcomes of first-generation students in community colleges. *Journal of College Student Development*, 44(3), 420-429.

URL:

[http://muse.jhu.edu.ezlibproxy.unisa.edu.au/journals/journal\\_of\\_college\\_student\\_development/v044/44.3/pascarella.html](http://muse.jhu.edu.ezlibproxy.unisa.edu.au/journals/journal_of_college_student_development/v044/44.3/pascarella.html)

Keywords: academic achievement; college students; community colleges; first generation college students

This study sought to estimate net differences between first-generation and other college students in their academic and nonacademic experience of college, and to estimate the net differences between first-generation students and their peers after two years of college in select cognitive, psychosocial, and status attainment outcomes. (Abstract)

Phinney, J. S., & Haas, K. (2003). The process of coping among ethnic minority first-generation college freshmen: A narrative approach. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 143*(6), 707-726.

DOI: 10.1080/00224540309600426

Keywords: college students, coping, ethnic minorities, stress

Using a narrative approach, the authors explored the process of coping among ethnic minority college students. Participants were 30 freshmen, predominantly the 1st members of their families to attend college, who wrote journals once a week for 3 weeks on their ways of coping with stress. They also completed a survey of background information. Those who were more successful in coping, compared to those who were less successful, expressed a greater sense of self-efficacy and did not feel that they lacked needed social support. However, those who were more successful in coping did not differ on demographic variables, including ethnicity, gender, country of birth, and parental education. The narratives provide evidence of the complex and interactive process of coping among ethnic minority college students. (Abstract)

Pike, G. R., & Kuh, G. D. (2005). First-and second-generation college students: A comparison of their engagement and intellectual development. *Journal of Higher Education, 76*(3), 276-300.

URL: <http://www.jstor.org.ezlibproxy.unisa.edu.au/stable/3838799>

Keywords: first generation; second generation; college students; parental education

Although first-generation college students are less likely to persist and graduate, surprisingly little is known about their college experiences and the ways those experiences compare to the experiences of students who have college-educated parents. The present research addresses the gaps in the literature by examining the college experiences of first-generation and second-generation students to see how their experiences affect their learning and intellectual development. (Abstract)

Prospero, M., & Vohra-Gupta, S. (2007). First generation college students: Motivation, integration, and academic achievement. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 31*(12), 963-975.

DOI: 10.1080/10668920600902051

Keywords: college students; motivation; achievement; first generation

The study reported in this article investigated motivation and integration dimensions that influence college academic achievement of first generation students compared to non first-generation students. Participants consisted of 277 ethnically diverse students who were attending a community college. Bivariate and multivariate statistical analyses revealed that motivation and integration dimensions contributed significantly to academic achievement for first-generation students, but not for non first-generation students. Specifically, among first-generation students, academic integration contributed to higher grade point averages while extrinsic motivation and a motivation contributed significantly to lower grades. Implications of these finding and recommendations are discussed. (Abstract)

Purswell, K. E., Yazedjian, A., & Toews, M. L. (2008). Students' Intentions and Social Support as Predictors of Self-Reported Academic Behaviors: A Comparison of First-and Continuing-Generation College Students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice*, 10(2), 191-206.

DOI: 10.2190/CS.10.2.e

Keywords: social support; higher education; first generation students

The purpose of this analysis was to examine academic intentions, parental support, and peer support as predictors of self-reported academic behaviors among a sample of 329 first- and continuing-generation college freshmen. Regression analyses revealed that different variables predicted academic behaviors for the three groups examined (students whose parents had no college experience, some college experience, or a college degree). Specifically, all three independent variables—intention, parental support, and peer support—were predictive of self-reported academic behavior for students whose parents had at least a bachelor's degree. However, peer support was the only variable predictive of academic behavior for the students whose parents had some college experience and intention was the only significant predictor for first-generation college students. (Abstract)

Quinn, J., Thomas, L., Slack, K., Casey, L., Thexton, W., & Noble, J. (2005). *From life crisis to lifelong learning. Rethinking working class' drop out from higher education*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

URL: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/1859354130.pdf>

Keywords: leaving university; drop out; reasons; working class; higher education

University was traditionally considered a ladder out of poverty for young working class people; this report explores why so many are climbing down that ladder and 'dropping out'. 'Drop out' is seen as a threat to the government's widening participation policy and to its social justice agenda. This is the first report to explore 'drop out' in England, Scotland Wales and Northern Ireland and gain a qualitative picture of its meanings and implications. The report covers 'drop out' amongst young working class people under 25 from four post-1992 universities in disadvantaged provincial areas. It analyses what students, lecturers, student support staff, employers, employment agencies and community

representatives think are the causes and impacts of 'drop out'. The stories of 67 students who have 'dropped out' are explored. Careers, employment agencies and admissions staff are questioned to measure the levels of support and flexibility that exist. Drawing on commissioned international reports and a colloquium with policy makers and practitioners, it outlines a flexible university system which would accommodate withdrawal and re-entry, instead of the rigid model that now exists in the UK. (Extracted from abstract)

Reay, D., Crozier, G., & Clayton, J. (2009). 'Strangers in paradise'? Working-class students in elite universities. *Sociology*, 43(6), 1103-1121.

DOI: 10.1177/0038038509345700

Keywords: elite universities; habitus; working-class students

This article draws on case studies of nine working-class students at Southern, an elite university.<sup>1</sup> It attempts to understand the complexities of identities in flux through Bourdieu's notions of habitus and field. Bourdieu (1990a) argues that when an individual encounters an unfamiliar field, habitus is transformed. He also writes of how the movement of habitus across new, unfamiliar fields results in 'a habitus divided against itself' (Bourdieu, 1999a). Our data suggest more nuanced understandings in which the challenge of the unfamiliar results in a range of creative adaptations and multi-faceted responses. They display dispositions of self scrutiny and self-improvement – almost 'a constant fashioning and re-fashioning of the self' but one that still retains key valued aspects of a working-class self. Inevitably, however, there are tensions and ambivalences, and the article explores these, as well as the very evident gains for working-class students of academic success in an elite HE institution. (Abstract)

Reay, D., Crozier, G., & Clayton, J. (2010). 'Fitting in' or 'standing out': working-class students in UK higher education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(1), 107-124.

DOI: 10.1080/01411920902878925

Keywords: working class; university students; identity

Drawing on case studies of 27 working-class students across four UK higher education institutions, this article attempts to develop a multilayered, sociological understanding of student identities that draws together social and academic aspects. Working with a concept of student identity that combines the more specific notion of learner identity with more general understandings of how students are positioned in relation to their discipline, their peer group and the wider university, the article examines the influence of widely differing academic places and spaces on student identities. Differences between institutions are conceptualised in terms of institutional habitus, and the article explores how the four different institutional habituses result in a range of experiences of fitting in and standing out in higher education. For some this involves combining a sense of belonging in both middle-class higher education and working-class homes, while others only partially absorb a sense of themselves as students. (Abstract)

Reay, D., David, M. E., & Ball, S. J. (2005). *Degrees of choice: Class, race, gender and higher education*. Trentham Books: UK.

ISBN: 1858563305, 9781858563305

Keywords: widening participation; academic; institutional habitus; higher education

Degrees of Choice provides a sophisticated account of the overlapping effects of social class, ethnicity and gender in the process of choosing which university to attend. The shift from an elite to a mass system has been accompanied by much political rhetoric about widening access, achievement-for-all and meritocratic equalisation. This book gives a full and contrary picture, drawing on qualitative and quantitative data to show how the welcome expansion of higher education has also deepened social stratification, generating new and different inequalities. While gender inequalities have reduced, those of social class remain and are now reinforced by racial inequalities in access. Employing perspectives from the sociology of education and particularly Bourdieu's work on distinction and judgement, the book links school institutional habitus and family class habitus, with individual choice making in a socially informed dynamic. (Abstract)

Settle, J. S. (2011). Variables that encourage students to persist in community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 35(4), 281-300.

DOI: 10.1080/10668920701831621

Keywords: first year; students; socioeconomic; social capital

Studying how socioeconomic status affects year-to-year persistence may help to identify and assist those students who have socioeconomic profiles most likely to indicate challenges to year-to-year persistence. This study used data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS:96=98), a nationally representative survey, to provide additional information about the patterns of educational attainment and persistence for a subset of the more than 51,000 students included in the NPSAS:96 survey. The study used all students enrolled as first-time beginning students at two-year institutions. The purpose of the study was to develop and test a theoretical framework for describing the persistence of students at two-year institutions. The preliminary model included 39 literature-based variables grouped into seven factors: background, high school, college-entry, financial, social integration, academic integration, and college performance. The data were tested using descriptive statistics and logistic regression to determine the predictive value of the models for the students. Social capital variables, particularly student integration to the collegiate environment, were strongly associated with persistence of students. Contact between students and faculty outside of the classroom environment is critical to persistence. (Edited from abstract)

Shields, N. (2002). Anticipatory socialization, adjustment to university life, and perceived stress: Generational and sibling effects. *Social Psychology of Education*, 5(4), 365-392.

DOI: 10.1023/A:1020929822361

Keywords: first generation; second generation; university students

The purpose of this study was to compare anticipatory socialization experiences, adjustment to university life, and perceived stress of first- and second-generation university students, and first- and second-sibling students. The study employed a standardized questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and focus groups. As predicted, having a parent who had attended a university helped second generation students feel more prepared for the university experience. However, second-generation students felt no more successful than first-generation students. Likewise, neither generation nor sibling status had an effect on grade point average. However, having an older sibling who had attended a university was related to completing more credit hours, suggesting that siblings may play a role in persistence. Perhaps one of the most interesting findings of the study was that second-generation status had essentially no effect in reducing the stress levels of students. The advantage of being a second-generation student seemed to be counterbalanced by parental pressure for high academic achievement. (Abstract)

Soria, K. M., & Stebleton, M. J. (2012). First-generation students' academic engagement and retention. *Teaching in Higher Education, 17*(6), 673-685.

DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2012.666735

Keywords: first-generation students; academic engagement; retention; public universities

This study investigates differences in academic engagement and retention between first-generation and non-first-generation undergraduate students. Utilizing the Student Experience in the Research University survey of 1864 first-year students at a large, public research university located in the United States, this study finds that first-generation students have lower academic engagement (as measured by the frequency with which students interacted with faculty, contributed to class discussions, brought up ideas from different courses during class discussions, and asked insightful questions in class) and lower retention as compared to non-first-generation students. Recommendations that higher education faculty can follow to promote the academic engagement and retention of first-generation students are addressed. (Abstract)

Spiegler, T., & Bednarek, A. (2013). First-generation students: what we ask, what we know and what it means: an international review of the state of research. *International Studies in Sociology of Education, 23*(4), 318-337.

DOI: 10.1080/09620214.2013.815441

Keywords: first-generation students; higher education; educational mobility; working-class students

In the course of educational expansion, student populations have become more diverse. This paper represents an international literature review on the topic of first-generation students (FGS), i.e. students whose parents have not obtained a higher education qualification. On the basis of more than 70 research articles and reports on FGS from several countries, we find that the focal points in FGS research concern their pre-college characteristics, mobility factors, decisions about institution, degree and subjects, FGS' experiences at university, and academic outcomes. We recommend that structural changes such as making organisational structures in higher education institutions more transparent

are in order instead of offering special support programmes only for FGS. (Abstract)

Stebbleton, M. J., Soria, K. M., & Huesman, R. L. (2014). First-Generation Students' Sense of Belonging, Mental Health, and Use of Counseling Services at Public Research Universities. *Journal of College Counseling, 17*(1), 6-20.

DOI: 10.1002/j.2161-1882.2014.00044.x

Keywords: first-generation student; belonging; engagement

This study explored 1st-generation students' sense of belonging, mental health status, and use of mental health services in comparison to non-1st-generation students. Using the Student Experience in the Research University multi-institutional survey, the authors found that 1st-generation students tended to report lower ratings of belonging, greater levels of depression/stress, and lower use of services compared to non-1st-generation students. Implications for college counselors and suggestions for future inquiry are provided. (Abstract)

Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A., Markus, H. R., Johnson, C. S., & Covarrubias, R. (2012). Unseen disadvantage: how American universities' focus on independence undermines the academic performance of first-generation college students. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 102*(6), 1178.

DOI: 10.1037/a0027143

Keywords: social class, culture, higher education, first-generation students, social inequality

American universities increasingly admit first-generation college students whose parents do not have 4-year degrees. Once admitted, these students tend to struggle academically, compared with continuing-generation students—students who have at least 1 parent with a 4-year degree. We propose a cultural mismatch theory that identifies 1 important source of this social class achievement gap. Four studies test the hypothesis that first-generation students underperform because interdependent norms from their mostly working-class backgrounds constitute a mismatch with middle-class independent norms prevalent in universities. First, assessing university cultural norms, surveys of university administrators revealed that American universities focus primarily on norms of independence. Second, identifying the hypothesized cultural mismatch, a longitudinal survey revealed that universities' focus on independence does not match first-generation students' relatively interdependent motives for attending college and that this cultural mismatch is associated with lower grades. Finally, 2 experiments at both private and public universities created a match or mismatch for first-generation students and examined the performance consequences. Together these studies revealed that representing the university culture in terms of independence (i.e., paving one's own paths) rendered academic tasks difficult and, thereby, undermined first-generation students' performance. Conversely, representing the university culture in terms of interdependence (i.e., being part of a community) reduced this sense of difficulty and eliminated the performance gap without adverse consequences for continuing-generation students. These studies address the urgent need to recognize cultural obstacles that contribute to the social class achievement gap and to develop

interventions to address them. (Abstract)

Stevenson, J., & Lang, M. (2010). *Social class and higher education: a synthesis of research*. York: HEA.

URL:

[www.medev.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/EvidenceNet/Syntheses/social\\_class\\_and\\_higher\\_education.doc](http://www.medev.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/EvidenceNet/Syntheses/social_class_and_higher_education.doc)

Keywords: social class; higher education; undergraduates

Drawing on over a decade of research literature, this synthesis focuses on the evidence of the role of social class in access, participation, retention, success and non-participation in HE, with reference to how the effects of social class are mitigated by gender and ethnicity. The emphasis is on the undergraduate, rather than the postgraduate sector and primarily on full-time students undertaking bachelor degree programmes. There are two reasons for this. First, almost three-quarters of all HE entrants attend full-time undergraduate degree programmes (see for example, AGCAS Scotland, 2008; Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2009). Second, in most cases the literature reviewed focuses on young entrants to HEIs (although definitions of 'young' are themselves somewhat contested. For example, HEFCE classify those aged 18 or 19 as 'young', while the New Labour HE policy framework White Paper 'The future of Higher Education' (DfES, 2003) uses a definition of 18-30, and individual researchers often adopt different definitions – such as the Age Participation Index, which covers 18-21 year olds – see Aston, 2003). As identified by Gorard et al. (2006) limitations in the available datasets encourage analysts to focus on new, young and full-time students and to ignore non-participants. Thus there are few studies exploring non-participation, or the experiences of post-graduate, part-time or, for example, disabled students from low socio-economic groups. However, where possible we have included research relating to these groups. (Extracted from introduction)

Stuart, M. (2006). 'My friends made all the difference': Getting into and succeeding at university for first-generation entrants. *Journal of Access Policy and Practice*, 3(2), 162-184.

URL: <http://eprints.kingston.ac.uk/3926/1/Stuart-M-3926.pdf>

Keywords: friendship class, social capital, life histories, student success

This paper reports on research findings from first-generation entrants at university in the UK. It examines their reasons for taking on higher-level study and what enables them to succeed. It points out that the phrase 'first-generation entrants' has been used interchangeably with the term 'working-class students' when there is not always a direct relationship between the two. Drawing on life history methods to gather the data, the paper examines the different experiences of working- and middle-class students and highlights the role of friendship as a key determinant in deciding to study in HE as well as in creating student success once at university. The article argues that friendships should be seen as a form of social capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Coleman, 1994; and Field, 2005) which can operate to militate against the effects of middle-class cultural and economic capital but can also be seen, in certain circumstances, to cement taken-for-granted practices. (Abstract)

Stuart, M. (2012) *Social Mobility and Higher Education: the life experiences of first generation entrants in Higher Education*, Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books Limited

ISBN: 1858565081

Keywords: higher education; first generation; social mobility

At a time when the shape of society in the UK is changing, this book makes clear what social mobility is and explores what enables upward mobility. Education is seen as a key element in creating opportunities and life chances central to developing a more equal society, but the diminishing level of opportunity available to people from lower socio-economic groups is increasingly causing concern. Professor Stuart examines the role of higher education in supporting social mobility from the viewpoint of students who went to university during the last half century. Based on nearly 150 life history accounts from graduates who were the first in their families to enter higher education, she shows how individuals moved from their families, often in poor communities, to achieve at university and go on to work in academia. Through a life history approach, the author analyzes these graduates' perceptions of the changes to their lives, their social position and its effect on their identities. The stories reveal a pattern of movement and of flow, often locating the individuals between and within class, gender and ethnic identities, and linking theories of social mobility to the wider debates on an increasingly mobile world. The book tracks the impact of changes to policies for higher education from the 1950s to the present day through the lens of individual life stories and richly details the effects of political decisions on ordinary people's lives. (Abstract)

Stuart, M. Lido, C. Morgan, J. and May, S. (2009) *Student diversity, extra-curricular activities and perceptions of graduate outcomes*, Higher Education Academy: UK

URL: [http://gala.gre.ac.uk/3232/1/HEA\\_project\\_report\\_2007\\_8.pdf](http://gala.gre.ac.uk/3232/1/HEA_project_report_2007_8.pdf)

Keywords: diversity; characteristics; engagement

There is little research that examines the role of 'extra-curricular activities' (ECAs) on student life and their future prospects in Britain, (Little, 2006). Research undertaken in the US on high school students suggests that engagement in ECAs that are social or cultural can have a positive impact on grades. There is also evidence that different social and cultural backgrounds can have a significant effect on participation and type of extra-curricular activities (Brown & Evans, 2002). The research was therefore premised on a belief that students differ by background and experience; in particular in relation to their class, ethnicity, gender, disability and age. As well as recognising the possibility that activities outside of facilitated learning may differ according to students' social context and background, the research was interested to test if there were differences in participation in different types of institutions. (Abstract)

Stuart, M., Lido, C., Morgan, J., Solomon, L., & May, S. (2011). The impact of engagement with extracurricular activities on the student experience and graduate outcomes for widening participation populations. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 12(3), 203-215.

DOI: 10.1177/1469787411415081

Keywords: diversity in higher education; extra curricular activities; social capital; widening participation

This research examined extracurricular activity (ECA) effects on students' experiences, outcomes and future job prospects. A survey of diverse undergraduate students, along with alumni and potential employer interviews, revealed differences in students' engagement with ECAs beyond the classroom. Variations between 'traditional' and 'widening participation' student groups emerged, with older and ethnic minority students spending more time with non-university ECAs, engaged in family, religious and solitary activities. Lower socio-economic status (SES) students spent more time working, and less time engaging in ECAs. Alumni reflected ECAs as key to developing self-identity, social networks and career prospects/pathways. As (university-linked) ECAs were key for undergraduate outcomes and graduate employment prospects, emerging ethnic, age and SES patterns of engagement have implications for persistent inequalities in employment (despite widening participation agendas). (Abstract)

Stuber, J. M. (2011). Integrated, marginal, and resilient: race, class, and the diverse experiences of white first-generation college students. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 24(1), 117-136.

DOI: 10.1080/09518391003641916

Keywords: first-generation students; persistence; higher education; social class; whiteness; intersectionality

While first-generation college students are 'at risk', the majority do persist. Using in-depth interviews with 28 white college students I ask: How do white, first generation, working-class students understand their college experiences, especially in terms of their academic, social, and cultural adjustment? Moreover, what kinds of factors seem to help or hinder their adjustment to college life? I discovered three patterns of adjustment among these students: (1) about half expressed few feelings of marginality and appeared well integrated into campus life; (2) one quarter experienced persistent and debilitating marginality; and (3) another quarter overcame their feelings of marginality en route to becoming socially and academically engaged on campus, with some transforming their feelings of marginality into motivation for social change. I argue that these variations can be understood by looking at how working-class students' economic resources may function as an asset, while their whiteness may function alternately as an asset and a liability. (Abstract)

Sullivan, A., Parsons, S., Wiggins, R., Heath, A., & Green, F. (2014). Social origins, school type and higher education destinations. *Oxford Review of Education*, 40(6), 739-763.

DOI: 10.1080/03054985.2014.979015

Keywords: schools; inequalities; higher education; qualifications; cognition; longitudinal; BCS70

To what extent and why do social origins matter for access to higher education, including access to elite universities? What is the role of private and selective schooling? This paper uses the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) to analyse the trajectories of a generation currently in early middle age. We find that the influence of social origins, especially parental education, remains when both a wide range of cognitive measures and school attainment are controlled. Attending a private school is powerfully predictive of gaining a university degree, and especially a degree from an elite institution, while grammar schooling does not appear to confer any advantage.

Talebi, M., Matheson, K., & Anisman, H. (2013). Does being first in family matter? The role of identity in the stigma of seeking help among first and non-first in family university students. *International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 4(1)

DOI: 10.5204/intjfyhe.v4i1.137

Keywords: first in family; university; help seeking behaviour

The transition from secondary school to university is often perceived as stressful, perhaps more so for students who are the first in their family to seek higher education, as they might face challenges unique to their situation. Yet, the majority are less likely to acknowledge problems and are unlikely to engage in help-seeking behaviour. The present study, which focuses on first in family students transitioning from secondary school to university, examined relations between identification (private regard, public regard, compatibility) and the stigma (self and other) associated with help-seeking in different domains (academic and mental health), and the moderating role of first in family status. Implications for these findings are addressed within the context of stigma reduction initiatives. (Abstract)

Terenzini, P. T., Springer, L., Yaeger, P. M., Pascarella, E. T., & Nora, A. (1996). First-generation college students: Characteristics, experiences, and cognitive development. *Research in Higher Education*, 37(1), 1-22.

URL: <http://www.jstor.org.ezlibproxy.unisa.edu.au/stable/40196208>

Keywords: first generation; higher education; academic skills

This study sought answers to three questions: (1) Do the precollege characteristics of first-generation students differ from those of traditional students? (2) Do first-generation students' college experiences differ from those of other students? (3) What are the educational consequences of any differences on first-year gains in students' reading, math, and critical thinking abilities? Answers come from 2,685 students (825 first-generation and 1,860 traditional students) who entered 23 diverse institutions nationwide in Fall 1992 and who completed one year of study. First-generation students differ from their traditional peers in both entering characteristics and college experiences. Although traditional students make greater net gains in reading during their first year, the two groups gain to about the same degree in math and critical thinking skills. Those gains, however, appear to result from somewhat different experiences. (Abstract)

Thering, A. C. (2010). The Purpose of a College Education: Getting a Job: Narrations of First-Generation College Students. *NERA Conference Proceedings 2010*. Paper 27.

URL: [http://digitalcommons.uconn.edu/nera\\_2010/27](http://digitalcommons.uconn.edu/nera_2010/27)

Keywords: first generation; experiences; higher education

The purpose of this research focuses a specific group of first-generation college students: a group of white, working-class, undergraduate students who attend a large northeastern research university. This study focuses on how these students narrate their educational and social experiences within the college setting. (Abstract)

Thomas, L., & Quinn, J. (2006). *First generation entry into higher education*: McGraw-Hill International.

ISBN: 0335217907

Keywords: higher education; first generation; social class

This book examines the proposition that parental education is a key factor contributing to the access and success of students, but that insufficient attention is paid to this by researchers, national systems and institutional interventions. Analysis of research findings from 10 countries, plus a UK wide study, indicates that parental education is more important in determining access to higher education than parental employment or financial status. The book provides a clear conceptualisation of first generation entry, exploring its complex interrelationship with social class. Furthermore, it demonstrates that when first generation entry is used as a lens, it helps produce much more effective approaches to targeting access and supporting student success. (Abstract)

Tian, J. A. (2011). *Barriers to postsecondary education facing Aboriginal peoples in the North: spotting the knowledge gaps*. HRSDC: Canada

URL:

[http://dspace.library.uvic.ca:8080/bitstream/handle/1828/3799/tian\\_jing\\_mpa\\_2012.pdf?sequence=3](http://dspace.library.uvic.ca:8080/bitstream/handle/1828/3799/tian_jing_mpa_2012.pdf?sequence=3)

Keywords: higher education; aboriginal people; Canada

This study used a review of the literature and descriptive data analysis to identify what is known and unknown about barriers to access to post-secondary education (PSE) faced by Aboriginal peoples in the North. It involved an overview of barriers to PSE participation faced by the general population and Aboriginal peoples in particular to identify main factors affecting their access to PSE. The study also included a descriptive analysis of data from the 2006 Census to examine relationships between the identified main factors and PSE participation of Aboriginal peoples in the context of the North. The conclusions identified the knowledge gaps in barriers to PSE faced by Aboriginal peoples in the territories and recommended a study as the first step in closing the gaps. (Abstract)

Tight, M. (2012). Widening participation: a post-War scorecard. *British Journal of Educational Studies*,

60(3), 211-226.

DOI: 10.1080/00071005.2012.697541

Keywords: widening participation; higher education; United Kingdom; post-war

Widening participation – though it has only recently been labelled as such – has been a continuing concern for policy makers and higher education institutions in the United Kingdom since 1945 (and before). This article reviews the evidence for four key target groups – women, lower socio-economic groups, mature adults and ethnic minorities – to produce an overall assessment, a score card, of what has been achieved, and what remains to be done. It concludes that, while progress in the recruitment of women, mature adults and ethnic minorities has been substantial – though with some qualifications – it has been much less so for lower socio-economic groups. (Abstract)

Vignoles, A., Goodman, A., Machin, S., & McNally, S. (2008). Widening Participation in Higher Education: A Quantitative Analysis: *Full Research Report ESRC End of Award Report*, RES-139-25-0234. Swindon: ESRC

URL: [www.esrc.ac.uk/my-esrc/grants/RES-139-25-0234/outputs/read/ea0aa6c5-fbc3-40d0-b18b-bba9549f6102](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/my-esrc/grants/RES-139-25-0234/outputs/read/ea0aa6c5-fbc3-40d0-b18b-bba9549f6102)

Keywords: educational attainment; students; disadvantaged students; learning gap

Higher education (HE) participation has expanded dramatically in England over the last half century. Yet although participation has been rising, 'widening participation' in HE remains a major policy issue. Of particular concern is whether expansion of HE has led to improvements in the representation of previously under-represented groups, such as materially deprived students and ethnic minority students. (Extracted from introduction)

Vuong, M., Brown-Welty, S., & Tracz, S. (2010). The effects of self-efficacy on academic success of first-generation college sophomore students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 51(1), 50-64.

DOI: 10.1353/csd.0.0109

Keywords: first generation; higher education; academic success; self efficacy

The purpose of this study was to analyse the effects of self-efficacy on academic success of first-generation college sophomore students. The participants in the study consisted of college sophomores from 5 of the 23 California State University campuses. An online College Self-Efficacy Inventory was employed to measure participants' self-efficacy levels. The study explored four areas: the relationship between self-efficacy scores and academic success as defined by GPA and persistence rates, the academic success and persistence rates between first-generation and second-and-beyond-generation college sophomore students, the effects of the demographic factors of gender and ethnicity on self-efficacy, and the relationship between institution size and self-efficacy. Findings show that self-efficacy beliefs affect GPA and persistence rates of sophomore students and second-generation college sophomores outperform their first-generation peers. (Abstract)

Wainwright, E., & Marandet, E. (2010). Parents in higher education: impacts of university learning on the self and the family. *Educational Review*, 62(4), 449-465.

DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2010.487643

Keywords: social mobility; widening participation; parents' own learning

Intra- and inter-generational social mobility have been implicit to a wide range of UK Government policies aimed at promoting social inclusion through a focus on education and employability. Framed by these policy initiatives and a critical look at widening participation in higher education, this paper reflects on the impacts of university learning on the self and the family among students with dependent children. With emphasis on, and differences highlighted between, male and female undergraduate students' own (often gendered) constructions of the impact of their university experiences and aspirations for social mobility, the paper suggests that while these students face numerous and varied barriers to their learning, they are motivated by the impact their studying will have on themselves and their families. Of notable significance is how higher education is perceived to reverberate within the home, promoting a culture of learning among, and encouraging the educational aspirations of, children. The paper concludes that this potential and perceived social mobility necessitates a bridging of the rhetoric of access with a reality of accessibility and retention for those students with caring responsibilities and offers a number of recommendations to encourage this. (Abstract)

Wang, T. R. (2014). "I'm the Only Person From Where I'm From to Go to College": Understanding the Memorable Messages First-Generation College Students Receive From Parents. *Journal of Family Communication*, 14(3), 270-290.

DOI: 10.1080/15267431.2014.908195

Keywords: first generation; parental messages; college

The current study examined the memorable messages first-generation college students received from their parents about family. Accordingly, first-generation college students shared parental memorable messages during in-depth, semi structured, responsive interviews that encouraged participants to share their distinct set of experiences. Four hundred and sixty-seven pages of transcripts were analysed for emergent themes. First-generation college students' voices revealed five memorable messages themes including (a) remembering family, (b) focusing on family, (c) counting on family, (d) not worrying about family, and (e) setting a good example. (Abstract)

Wang, C. C. D., & Castañeda-Sound, C. (2008). The Role of Generational Status, Self-Esteem, Academic Self-Efficacy, and Perceived Social Support in College Students' Psychological Well-Being. *Journal of College Counseling*, 11(2), 101-118.

ISSN: 1099-0399

Keywords: first generation; self esteem; self efficacy; higher education

This study examined the influences of generational status, self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, and

perceived social support on 367 undergraduate college students' well-being. Findings showed that 1st-generation students reported significantly more somatic symptoms and lower levels of academic self-efficacy than did non-1st-generation students. In addition, students' generational status was found to moderate predictive effects of perceived family support on stress. Implications for professional practices, limitations, and directions for future research are discussed. (Abstract)

Warburton, E. C., Bugarin, R., & Nuñez, A.-M. (2001). *Bridging the Gap: Academic Preparation and Postsecondary Success of First-Generation Students*. National Centre for Education Statistics, Washington DC

URL: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2001153>

Keywords: academic achievement; academic persistence; college preparation; college students;

This report examines the high school preparation and post secondary persistence of first-generation students, those whose parents had no education beyond high school, and compares them with students whose parents went to college. The purpose of the study was to examine whether first-generation students who were otherwise equally prepared academically were comparable to students whose parents went to college in terms of their grade point averages (GPAs), number of remedial courses in post secondary education, and rates of academic persistence. The analysis focuses on a subset of 1995-1996 beginning students who started their postsecondary education at four-year institutions. Data are from the First Follow up of the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study for 1995-1996. Findings from the analysis indicate that students who were well prepared for post secondary education were likely to persist in four-year institutions. Students who took rigorous coursework in high school accounted for more than 80% of those students who stayed on the persistence track to a bachelor's degree or were retained at their initial institution. Parents' levels of education were found to be associated with rates of students' retention and persistence in college, even when controlling for measures of academic preparedness such as rigor of secondary curriculum and college entrance examination scores. (Abstract)

Ward, L., Siegel, M. J., & Davenport, Z. (2012). *First-generation college students: Understanding and improving the experience from recruitment to commencement*. John Wiley & Sons.

ISBN: 1118220277, 9781118220276

Keywords: first-generation; universities; capital

As more and more of the college-going population is made up of those who are the first in their families to attend college, institutions need to find ways to help these students succeed if they expect to maintain enrolments. This ground breaking resource explores the challenges and barriers to first-generation students and offers a wealth of helpful recommendations for helping these students succeed in their academic careers. This book helps leaders in academic and student affairs to understand these special challenges and how best to meet them. (Abstract)

Watson, J. (2013). Profitable portfolios: capital that counts in higher education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 34(3), 412-430.

DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2012.710005

Keywords: widening participation; capital; field; logic of practice

Under-representation in UK higher education of students from less privileged social backgrounds is an enduring problem. While there are examples of productive participation, the pattern of collective trajectories of this group differs sharply from that of traditional entrants. The onus falls largely on students to adapt to established practices that remain strongly oriented towards traditional white middle-class populations. Bourdieu's theory of practice informed the analysis of data emerging from a longitudinal case study, and empirical insights are offered into how students with non-traditional academic backgrounds experienced and negotiated the demands of studying in one of the UK's research-intensive universities. A new conceptual framework identifies academic, linguistic, social and professionally-oriented capital as underpinning the logic of practice of this sub-field of higher education, and their influence on the positional tendencies and trajectories of the students operating within it are highlighted. (Abstract)

Yorke, M., & Thomas, L. (2003). Improving the retention of students from lower socio-economic groups. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 25(1), 63-74.

DOI: 10.1080/13600800305737

Keywords: higher education; university students; low socioeconomic

Success in higher education for students from lower socio-economic groups and from disadvantaged backgrounds is becoming an increasingly important policy goal in the UK and abroad. An analysis of the HEFCE performance indicators identified six English higher education institutions performing above their benchmarks with regard to widening participation and also student retention and completion, and prompted an investigation of what these institutions had been doing that might account for their success. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior managers responsible for retention and completion, which focused on institutional strategy. Analysis of the interviews suggested that success in retaining students from lower socio-economic groups required a strong policy commitment to access and retention, backed up by practical action. A number of actions were identified as possible contributors to such success. (Abstract)

## Appendix B: Literature Sources

### Journals

Adolescence (ADOL)

Active Learning in Higher Education (ALHE)

Adult Education Quarterly (AEQ)

American Journal of Distance Education (AJDE)

Australian and International Journal of Rural Education (AIJRE)

Australian Journal of Adult Learning(AJAL)

Australian Journal of Teacher Education (AJTE)

British Educational Research Journal (BERJ)

British Journal of Sociology of Education (BJSE)

College Student Journal (CSJ)

Community College Journal of Research and Practice (CCJRP)

Community College Review (CCR)

Educational Leadership (EL)

Education and Urban Society (EUS)

The Family Journal (FJ)

Family Relations (FR)

Higher Education (HE)

Higher Education Research and Development (HERD)

International Journal of Education Research (IJER)

International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education (IJFYHE)

International Journal of Learning (IJL)

International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (IJQSE)

International Studies in Sociology of Education (ISSE)

Journal of Academic Language and Learning (JALL)

Journal of Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association (JANZSSA)

Journal of Career Development (JCD)

Journal of Case Studies in Education (JCSE)

Journal of College Admission (JCA)

Journal of College Counseling (JCC)

Journal of College Student Development (JCSD)

Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice (JCSR)

Journal of Education and Learning (JEL)

Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management (JHEPM)

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (JPSP)

London Review of Education (LRE)

Medical Education (ME)

New Directions for Teaching and Learning (NDTL)

Poetics (POE)

Research in Higher Education (RHE)

Research Papers in Education (RPE)

Research in Post-Compulsory Education (RPCE)

Sociology (SOC)

Social Psychology of Education (SPE)

Studies in the Education of Adults (SEA)

Studies in Higher Education (SHE)

Studies in Learning Evaluation, Innovation and Development (SLEID)

Systemic Practice and Action Research (SPAR)

Teaching in Higher Education (THE)

Undergraduate Research Journal at the University of Northern Colorado (URJUNC)

Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning (WPLL)

## Reports

AUSSE Research Briefings

EPRI working papers

LSAY Research Reports

Wider Benefits of Learning Research Reports

## Research Groups / Organisations

Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) – <http://www.aare.edu.au/>

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) – <http://acer.edu.au/highereducation>

Centre for the Study of Higher Education – <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au>

Economic and Social Research Council – <http://www.esrc.ac.uk>

First Year in Higher Education (FYHE) – <http://fyhe.com.au>

Higher Education Academy – <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources>

Higher Education Empirical Research Database – <http://heer.qaa.ac.uk/pages/default.aspx>

Higher Education Funding Council for England – <http://www.hefce.ac.uk>

Higher Education and Research Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) – <http://www.herdsa.org.au/>

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRESDC) – <http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/home.shtml>

Indigenous Teaching at Australian Universities – <http://www.indigenousteaching.com>

Institute of Education, University of London – <http://www.repec.ioe.ac.uk>

Institute for Research on Poverty – <http://www.irp.wisc.edu>

International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (ISSOTL) – <http://www.issotl.com/>

Joseph Rowntree Foundation – <http://www.jrf.org.uk>

National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES) – <http://nces.ed.gov>

National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) – <http://www.ncsehe.edu.au>

Office of Learning & Teaching (OLT) – <http://www.olt.gov.au/>

Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education – <http://www.pellinstitute.org>

Retention and Access for Non-traditional Learners in Higher Education (RANLHE) – <http://www.dsw.edu.pl/fileadmin/www-ranlhe/index.html>

Universities Australia – <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au>

## About the Authors

**A/Prof Sharron King** is the Academic Director and Deputy Head of UniSA College. The College provides a Foundation Studies Program and a range of Diplomas as enabling pathways to university degrees. Sharron has had a long-term engagement with student equity and as an Equity Representative on several university committees has worked to both raise awareness of equity issues as well as advocate for students facing educational disadvantage. Her research, which primarily focuses on health and wellbeing and the concept of thriving in learning environments, has been informed by this ongoing interest in social justice. Sharron has led a number of previous grants investigating the student experience at university and was a member of the Staff and Student Expectations and Experience (SSEE) project funded by the ALTC.

**Dr Ann Luzeckyj** is an early career researcher who achieved her Doctor of Education in 2011. Ann works in a Centre for University Teaching where her role focuses predominantly on supporting academic staff who teach first year students. She sees this role as an opportunity to develop and extend her commitment to supporting equitable access to higher education. She has experience in using qualitative research, especially critical discourse analysis and thematic analysis. She has developed surveys, interviewed research participants and run focus groups. Ann was also one of the original members of the Staff and Student Expectations and Experience research team and in 2013 led the team to win an extension grant which has funded the dissemination of the research funding to universities across Australia.

**A/Prof Ben McCann** is Associate Dean for Student Experience at the University of Adelaide and as such Ben works extensively with academic and professional staff across the University to support student transition to university and develop curriculum design and pedagogies that enable closer alignments with the University's key retention priorities. Ben's role also requires collaboration with both Hobsons to develop appropriate mechanisms for cohort tracking and identification of 'at risk' students and with the University's IT services to develop on-line and blended learning components for Level One curriculums. Ben was the co-leader of the ALTC funded project on Staff and Student Expectations and Experience. Ben has published widely and brings expertise in survey development and tertiary and secondary institution dissemination strategies.

**Ms Charmaine Graham** has over 15 years' experience working in human resource management and employment law in Australia and the UK. She is currently completing her final year of Bachelor of Psychology (Honours) and is involved in a number of research areas including the mental wellbeing of university students, access and equity in higher education and student experiences.

## Appendix C: Executive Summary of SSEE Survey Report

Analysis of the Effects of Age and Commencing/Continuing Status on First-in-Family and Non-First-in-Family Survey Responses

Conducted by: Dr Belinda Chiera and Ms Lisa Schultz, September 2014

### Executive Summary

This summary presents the key results of the secondary analysis of responses from a survey of university students. The data was collected through a previous research collaboration, the Staff and Student Experience and Expectations (SSEE) project, which the current researchers were involved in. The SSEE project collected survey responses from over 16,800 students. Of these, 5,301 identified as FiF and 11,569 identified as non-FiF. The objective of the analysis was to identify differences in responses between students who are the first in their family to attend university (FiF) and students who are not the first in their family to study at a tertiary level (non-FiF).

The survey respondents were first categorised according to Commencing/Continuing status as well as age relative to 21 years at the time of university commencement, as shown in Figure 7 below. Respondents under the age of 21 years were classified as School Leavers with respondents over 21 years old considered Mature Age students. The Commencing/Continuing respondents were then further categorised according to age (see Figure 1).

For each data category, the FiF responses were analysed in relation to the non-FiF responses to determine if differences exist according to whether a student is the first in their family to attend university.

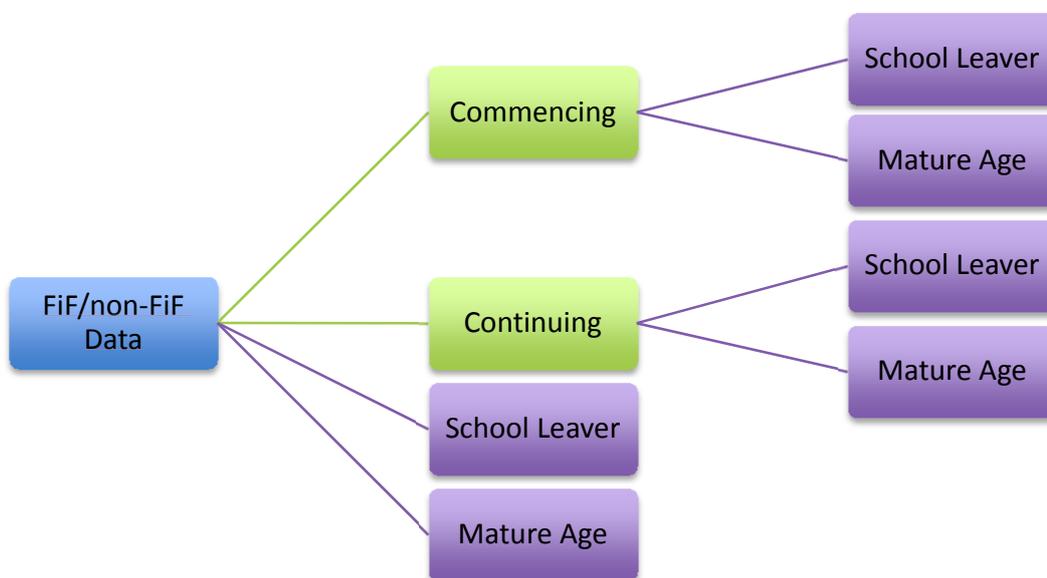


Figure 7: Data categories in the analysis design

Furthermore, differences were analysed between each data category in Figure 7 irrespective of FiF status, where possible. For example, the responses of the Commencing School Leaver students were

analysed relative to the Commencing Mature Age students. The survey questions were posed differently to the Commencing and Continuing students, with Commencing respondents surveyed on expectations whereas Continuing respondents were surveyed on their experiences. As such, statistical analysis directly comparing the Commencing responses with the Continuing responses was not possible.

### Analysis of the Non-Likert Scale Survey Questions

For each data category in Figure 1, estimates of the mean differences between the FiF and non-FiF per cent agreements in responses were obtained, along with 95% confidence intervals for the differences. The  $\chi^2$  test was used to determine whether the differences in the distributions of per cent agreements were statistically significant. A significance test was then used to determine if the differences between individual proportions of FiF and non-FiF responses were statistically significant. For the 5-point Likert scale questions, the Mann-Whitney test was employed to analyse the response differences for the FiF and non-FiF responses.

### Analysis of the 5-Point Likert Scale Survey Questions

Analysis of non-Likert scale survey questions involved the  $\chi^2$  test for a difference in proportions. This test is not appropriate for Likert scale questions however, as the perceived weights associates with response options may not necessarily be equally distributed (i.e. non-parametric). For example, a respondent may feel there is a greater difference between 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree' in comparison to 'Disagree' and 'Neutral'. As such, the Mann-Whitney Test was used to determine if a difference exists between the overall distribution of responses for the FiF and non-FiF students.

To analyse individual differences in proportions for each point in the Likert scale, a significance test for a difference in proportions was again employed.

Below is an overview of some of the key report findings. The full report containing more detailed statistical analysis is available upon request.

### Survey Instruments

Two surveys were used in the SSEE project. The first survey was given to Commencing students in order to measure their expectations. The second survey, of equal length and similar construction, was provided to students in the middle of the academic year and was intended to measure their actual student experience. The survey was administered to students across the three major universities in South Australia, i.e. the University of Adelaide, Flinders University and the University of South Australia, at the beginning of the 2010, 2011 and 2012 academic years, for Commencing students. A slightly modified version of the survey was given in the middle of Semester 2 of 2010 and 2011 for continuing students. Not all students in the Continuing students group were first years and not all had undertaken the Commencing student survey; however all students completing the Commencing student survey indicated they had only just started their university studies. Only undergraduate student responses were analysed in this work. Over 16,800 students responded to the survey indicating a response rate of 25%.

The survey consisted of four sections. The first section included demographic questions such as the students' path to university, the type of secondary schooling and their field of study. Student responses were matched to expected performance, as measured by Australian tertiary admission rank

(ATAR) (where available) and learning outcomes, as measured by grade point average (GPA).

Section two of the survey had multiple choice questions examining students' understanding of university such as the number of hours they needed to study per week, how quickly they expected to receive assignments back after submission and how much time university academics devoted to teaching. The third section consisted of 5-point Likert style questions examining students' conceptions of university life, influences on their decision to attend university and perceived differences between secondary school and university. The final section asked three open-ended questions regarding the reasons the student wanted to study, factors that made them feel better prepared and key factors that made their university experience successful.

## Key Results from the Analysis of Respondent Demographics

- Survey respondents were predominantly School Leaver students, with only 23.4% of non-FiF respondents and 15.3% of FiF respondents considered as Mature Age.
- The majority of School Leaver respondents attend Adelaide University (48.2% for the non-FiF students, 36.1% for the FiF respondents). UniSA typically attracted more of the non-FiF Mature Age students (39.4%) whereas Flinders University was the home institution for more of the FiF Mature Age respondents (40.4%).
- For both the FiF and non-FiF respondents, a greater proportion of School Leavers resided with their parents than Mature Age students.
- More FiF respondents attended a rural high school than non-FiF respondents.
- Mature Age respondents were more often enrolled in their first preference program.
- Non-FiF School Leavers were most likely to make the decision to attend university before Year 11. Conversely, the FiF Mature Age respondents were least likely to make this decision to attend university before Year 11.
- The non-FiF respondents typically had higher ATARs and GPAs than the FiF respondents.
- For both the FiF and non-FiF respondents, School Leaver students had higher ATAR and GPA scores than the Mature Age students.

## Key Results from Program Area Analysis

- Significantly more FiF students than non-FiF students enrolled in
  - Nursing
  - Education
  - Management and Commerce, and
  - Society and Culture.
- Significantly more non-FiF students than FiF students enrolled in
  - Mathematics
  - Science (for the continuing and Mature Age respondents)
  - Engineering

- Medicine
- Health Science, and
- Law and Legal Studies.
- These patterns persisted for the different data category breakdowns by age.
- There were significant differences in all data category breakdowns as well as in the School Leaver vs. Mature Age analysis and Commencing vs. Continuing analysis.

### Key Results from Program Area Analysis for the Commencing Respondents

- There were no significant differences in reasons for program choice between the Commencing Mature Age FiF and non-FiF respondents.
- The greatest proportions of FiF and non-FiF Commencing Mature Age respondents listed 'Interest' and 'Improving job prospects/earning potential' as their reason for program choice. Conversely, for the Commencing School Leaver respondents, 80.7% of the non-FiF students and 78.9% of the FiF students chose their degree based on interest.
- More of the non-FiF respondents also chose their degree to continue in an area already started.

### Key Results from Program Area Analysis for the Continuing Respondents

- In regards to individual differences in reasons for continuing in a program area:
  - Significant differences exist between the individual reasons for the **School Leaver FiF** and non-FiF respondents. In particular:
    - a greater proportion of the **School Leaver non-FiF** students gave their reasons for continuing in their program area as:
      - to continue in an area already started, and
      - other.
  - Conversely, a greater proportion of **School Leaver FiF** respondents gave their reasons for continuing in their program area as:
    - did not get first preference, and
    - changed initial program area.
- Significant differences exist between individual reasons for continuing in a program area for the Mature Age respondents. In particular:
  - A greater proportion of **Mature Age Non-FiF** respondents gave their reasons for continuing in a program area as:
    - expectations of family and friends
    - recommendations of teachers, and
    - other.
  - Conversely, a greater proportion of **Mature Age FiF** respondents gave their reasons for continuing in a program area as:

- Did not get first preference, and
- Improve job prospects/earning potential.

### Key Results from the Differences in Expected Study Times

- Typically Commencing **FiF** respondents **expected to study more** than the Commencing non-FiF respondents. This trend persisted when the data was broken down by respondent age.
- The greatest proportion of respondents **expecting to study the most** per week (i.e. 20+ hours) were the **Mature Age FiF** students.
- Conversely, the greatest proportion of respondents **expecting to study 1 to 3 hours per week** belonged to the **non-FiF School Leaver** students.

### Key Results from Reasons for Continuing in a Program Area

- A **greater proportion** of the Continuing **FiF** respondents reported **studying more than 20 hours** per week.
- A **greater proportion** of the Continuing **non-FiF** respondents reported studying either **0 to 1 hours** or **1 to 3 hours** per week.

### Key Results from Analysis of the Length of Time Considered Reasonable for Assignment Marking and Return

In regards to individual differences in the length of time considered reasonable for assignment marking and return:

- A greater proportion of the **Commencing Non-FiF** respondents considered **7+ weeks** as reasonable.
- Similarly, more of the **Commencing School Leaver Non-FiF** respondents considered **7+ weeks** reasonable.
- A greater proportion of the **Commencing School Leaver FiF** respondents considered having assignments marked and returned **within 1 week** was reasonable.

### Key Results from the Average Length of Time for Assignments to be Marked and Returned to the Continuing Students

- There were no significant differences in the overall distributions of responses for the Continuing FiF vs. non-FiF students.
- In regards to individual differences in proportions, the difference in the proportion of FiF and non-FiF respondents who received their marked assignments after 7+ weeks was significant.

### Key Results from Analysis of Whether the Continuing Respondents have Friends Attending the same University

- There were significant differences between the Continuing FiF and non-FiF respondents as well as between the FiF and non-FiF Commencing School Leavers and the Commencing Mature Age respondents.

- For the Continuing FiF vs. non-FiF analysis:
  - Significantly more of the Continuing FiF students do not have friends attending the same university.
  - **Significantly more** of the **Continuing non-FiF** respondents **have friends attending the same university** and enrolled in the same program or attending the same university but enrolled in a different degree/program.

### Key Results from Program Area Analysis

- There were **no significant differences** in the **overall distributions** of responses between the **Continuing FiF and non-FiF** respondents however, when considering individual differences in reasons for changing programs, (**borderline**) **significantly more non-FiF** respondents changed their degree as the **new degree was more suited to their job choice**.
- There were **no significant differences** in the **distributions** of responses for the FiF and Non-FiF **Continuing Mature Age** respondents. However, there were  $1.53\% \pm 1.27\%$  **more FiF respondents** who switched degrees as their **initial degree was not as they were told it would be**. This difference is significant.

### Key Results from Analysis of Expected Performance of the Commencing Respondents

- Significantly **more Commencing FiF** respondents expected to perform **much better** or **better** at university.
- Conversely, a **significantly greater** proportion of **Commencing non-FiF** respondents expected to perform **about the same** at university.

### Key Results from Reported University Performance of the Continuing Respondents

- There were **differences** in overall distributions of reported performances for the **Continuing FiF** and **non-FiF** students. In particular,
  - **More Continuing FiF** respondents reported their university performance as
    - Much better, or
    - Better.
  - **More Continuing non-FiF** respondents reported their university performance as about the same as at High School.

## Appendix D: Interview Questions

The 23 questions (with additional follow-on and sub-questions) were:

1. What influenced your decision to initially attend university?
  - When did you make the decision to come to university and why?
  - How did your family feel about you going to university?
  - What pathway did you use to enter university?
2. Did you feel well prepared were you for university life?
  - What were your feelings in the first few weeks at university?
3. What were your initial hopes dreams, aspirations and ambitions?
  - Are these being realised?
  - How? Or Why not?
4. What influenced your choice of university?
  - What were your reasons for choosing your particular course?
  - What has been your primary mode of study over your degree?
  - Would you choose differently if you could choose again now?
5. What have been the costs of attending university?
  - Financial? (Give a range) where do you place yourself on this financial scale?
  - How have the university fees (HECS) influenced your decisions? E.g. To enrol, Program choice, progress etc?
  - Social?
  - Personal?
6. Do you think of yourself as a university student?
  - Did you feel that you adjusted easily to becoming a student? Why/ why not?
7. What type of student are you? (or How would you describe yourself as a student?)
8. Do you have a sense of belonging to the social or academic aspects of university life? Why/ why not?
  - Have you ever experienced a sense of loneliness or isolation at university?
  - Were there any aspects of your university experience that felt strange/ alien to you?
9. Tell me about the social networks (if any) you are part of at university?
  - Did any of your friends come to the same university?
  - Did you make friends in your course/ program?
  - Was your main support network internal or external to the university?
  - Did university impact on your relationships with friends/ family?

- Did you engage in any extra-curricular activities at university?
- 10. Has your experience at university changed over time?
- 11. Would you have liked things to be different? If so, how?
- 12. Can you use a metaphor or analogy to describe your university experience so far?
- 13. How do you maintain balance with other aspects of your life, e.g. family, friends, work commitments?
- 14. Has your life changed since becoming a university student?
  - Have you changed in any way since starting university?
  - Have your values or beliefs changed in any way?
- 15. What has been the impact on your family/friends/social networks?
  - Are you satisfied with your academic achievements so far? (or Do you feel successful as a university student?)
  - What feelings are associated with your academic achievements?
- 16. Did you ever consider leaving university, deferring or changing courses?
  - What influenced this decision?
- 17. Has anything (or anyone) helped you to thrive and flourish at university?
  - What strategies have you used to help you thrive and flourish?
- 18. What characteristics and qualities do you believe have helped you get this far?
  - What motivations do you draw on?
  - Do you seek help from anyone during difficult times? Who?
- 19. How would you describe yourself?
  - How has your family background shaped you?
  - Have other people had a significant impact on the person you are now?
  - What or who has influenced you to become the person you are now?
- 20. At this point in your studies what are you considering doing next? (or As a student completing your degree what do you intend doing now?)
- 21. Has your university experiences and qualifications benefitted you and others?
  - In what ways?
- 22. If you were starting university today, what advice would you give yourself?
- 23. What advice would you give to policy makers /lecturers and /or senior university staff in relation to FiF students?

## Appendix E: Narrative Case Study Cameos

### Alison's Story

Alison never really had an interest in continuing on to university as she did not particularly enjoy high school, and recalls having the attitude of just 'finish high school, stay in her rural home town and get a retail job'. Alison's future plans however changed when she met her current partner, who was brought up in a family in which going to university and getting an education was important. With her partner's encouragement and assistance from her Year 12 design teacher, Alison submitted her university preferences two days before they were due to close. Reflecting on her decision to go to university, Alison expresses that she doesn't regret her choice to attend university because of "the people I've met, what I've learnt and even just moving out of home and growing up."

Alison's comment of "growing up" relates to not only commencing university but predominantly the process of relocating from her rural home town and living independently, an experience that she describes as "scary":

*Especially coming from the country and having to move out, it might be uncomfortable at first but it's going to help you in the long run as you learn so many life skills such as budgeting, and cooking for yourself. The little things that you take for granted at home are suddenly huge once you move out.*

Alison recalls the transition to university as being a confusing and difficult process. Academically she felt prepared, and considered her creative skills and knowledge provided her with the basic principles for her course. However the social aspect of university was not as easy, particularly due to the absence of Alison's boyfriend, high school friends and support network. Alison reports that she began to feel really comfortable and part of the university community halfway through her first year, and despite briefly considering leaving university at that time, her experience improved and she began to increase her university social networks during second year.

Despite her feelings of social isolation Alison wasn't involved in any of the extra-curricular activities offered by the university, citing that she wished she had but didn't feel that she had the time in the first couple of years as she attempted to balance study and part time work, with working part time a necessity in order to meet her costs of living.

*Financially it was quite difficult. I did get a bit of money from Centrelink for moving out of home which helped a lot, that covered my rent for a bit and each fortnight I received a certain amount. My parents then started paying my rent and the money that Centrelink gave me went into food and bills.*

In addition to general living costs, Alison struggled with her course costs in graphic design which she describes as "huge" due to the significant amount of printing and sourcing materials required. She estimated that her last assignment alone cost approximately \$200 in printing costs, an additional expense that she was required to draw from a scholarship fund that her parents had invested on her behalf.

Due to the lack of friends located within Adelaide, Alison travelled back to her home town most weekends during her first year, an added expense not accounted for. Although Alison now describes her social network in Adelaide to be good, she still ventures back to her home town regularly and continues to play weekend tennis there. Unlike many students, Alison continued to engage in physical activity whilst at university, however admits that she didn't eat very well for most of her first year.

Her ties to her home town continue to be strong and are evident in her future ambitions:

*One day I want to own my own business just so I'm freelance because eventually I'll move back to my home town when I start to settle down and I want to do that full time if I can. I think I will eventually move back. Especially if I'm still with my partner at that stage he's got a family farm down there so he'll be there eventually, and my parents have got a business so I think I'll eventually move back.*

For now though university has broadened Alison's ambitions, wanting to finish university and then travel and work overseas. Explaining that she now wants to do so much more than she had ever wanted to prior to coming to university, Alison says:

*Probably it's just my ambition for life I think. Before when I was in high school I kind of had the mentality that finish high school, stay in my home town, get a retail job and just kind of be there forever and now I couldn't think of anything worse to be honest. Now I want to finish uni and I want to travel and I want to live overseas and work overseas and I just want to do so much more than I ever wanted to do.*

Alison compares her future directions to those of her friends who remained in the country town where they grew up and she remarks that these friends are trapped by the choices they made when leaving school.

*I feel like a lot of my friends who went straight out of high school into jobs in my home town are a bit stuck there almost and they don't love it but they can't afford or have the time to study or do anything else now. It's like I'm lucky that I've done what I've done.*

For Alison, university has resulted in a significant transformation in herself, not only in the knowledge learnt through her course but also the life skills that she has acquired through the process of becoming independent and leaving home.

Although looking forward to completing her studies, it is a bitter-sweet prospect:

*I'm just so glad that I've done it and I'm relieved to be finishing but at the same time I don't want to finish just because I won't get to see these people every day and won't get to be in the same environment as we are every day.*

In considering her future options Alison hasn't ruled out more study, but for now she is looking forward to completing her degree and is focused now on working in her chosen field.

## Brendon's Story

Brendon recalls intending to go to university from the young age of 12 or 13 years. Although no one from his family had previously been to university, it was always an option presented to him. In fact Brendon's parents actively encouraged higher education as a positive choice, reiterating throughout his younger years that he "didn't have to settle with what had been done by the family in the past." Brendon identifies his father in particular, as a driving force in becoming a first in family university student:

*I think he'd be the first to admit, that he's not the happiest with his career. He dropped out of school at 15 or 16 and went to work to help support his parents. He said "Look we don't want you to have to live under the same pressure that we're under." Dad watches a lot of news and through where he works, saw that Law and Management provided good opportunities.*

Conversations between Brendon and his parents played a significant part of why he decided to continue with further studies, however personal determination to achieve a successful career was also a contributing factor. As an avid musician Brendon originally wanted to be a music teacher, however his drive to succeed in a valued professional career resulted in a decision to keep music as a hobby and focus on a specific profession.

Being a first in family student has had disadvantages for Brendon within his chosen undergraduate degree.

*I know a lot students who say "I asked my dad or my uncle about this because they're a lawyer," so they can get those first hand experiences but I don't know anyone else in the field. So I think that's the other part about going into something foreign for me and my background is that I haven't got the external support. I've got the support with the care, but just not the knowledge support.*

Despite the apparent disadvantage, Brendon's drive ensures that he overcomes these hurdles by remaining focused on his ultimate goals. Brendon's career aspirations include either being a corporate lawyer or senior manager within a high end business. He expresses a particular interest in leadership roles, reflecting his visionary qualities. Additional attributes that Brendon recognises as being beneficial include his persistence and down to earth nature. When quizzed about whether he considers if any of his attributes have changed as a result of university, Brendon states that his inner qualities hadn't really changed however his ability to handle of pressure, manage social relationships and workloads have changed dramatically.

*At school I didn't care as much, I always knew I wanted to go to university but I didn't put in as much effort as I would have liked to. I think going through university and doing the hard work to get accepted into Law after a semester of Management and achieving the required GPA, that's something that instigated the change. I should have been in Law in the first place if I had worked on those qualities a bit more.*

Transition into university proved to be more challenging than Brendon anticipated, with first year proving to be one of the "hardest years of my life." As a student commencing in a large cohort undergraduate degree in Management, Brendon vividly recalls feeling like "a fish out of water".

*It can be isolating ... because I do think I'm a bit foreign to it all and if I'm not in classes I'm just sitting there on my own or studying on my own. I see the cliques and I often feel like maybe I'm not suited to the environment. Sometimes I struggle and sometimes it gets you down a little but I don't let it affect me too much.*

Being successful in obtaining a place in the undergraduate Law program has assisted Brendon in feeling more comfortable in the university setting, reporting that the Law cohort is smaller and therefore provides a cosier environment. Lack of support within his chosen course partly explains Brendon's feelings of isolation, with many of his high school peers enrolling in other university courses. As a result Brendon has good friends at other campuses or universities, providing him with social support outside of his degree. Brendon credits the maintenance of these friendships as being critical in sustaining his happiness.

Another activity that assisted Brendon's mental health wellbeing during this difficult period was music, whether it was listening, playing or writing music. He regrets not being more physically active as he recognises the benefits that it would have provided and is aware that the amount of physical activity

he engages in has dropped since commencing university. Physical health however is not the only cost associated with studying, with Brendon reporting the effect on earning an income.

*I'm just working weekends because the week just gets packed up full of university and travel doesn't help either, it's about an hour trip each way.*

Although Brendon's family are happy to support him whilst he studies, providing a place to live, other study expenses dictate a need for Brendon to work part time, particularly as Brendon has discovered that "law textbooks are not the cheapest thing." Whilst university fees have been deferred through the HECS system until he is in a position to earn a higher income, an aim that he hopes to achieve in the near future. Brendon's goals of a more financially secure future have been sustained by the sentiments expressed by his parents since he was young, that he should explore all of the opportunities that higher education could provide. As Brendon observed,

*Growing up in, never 'financially struggling', but an environment where money goes on necessities rather than luxuries. I think financial independence and freedom would be good.*

## Brian's Story

Brian would be described as a high achiever, a trait evident in both his high school and university studies. Early on in his schooling Brian's high school maths teachers identified his academic capabilities and provided support and encouragement towards Brian continuing on into higher education. It is however Brian's father, to whom he credits as his primary influence to enrol in university:

*I think the main reason I wanted to come to university is because my dad always talked about the fact that he missed the opportunity to come to university and he always talked about regretting it ... So from an early age I had this idea that university is not the same as school, it opens up opportunities.*

As a result of positive influences in Brian's life he subsequently completed a Bachelor of Mathematics, with his hard work and persistence resulting in a scholarship to complete a Masters of Mathematics and is now considering further post graduate studies in the form of a PhD, qualifications which he hopes will contribute towards his ambition to conduct future agricultural research to assist farmers, an aspiration that reflects his rural background. Yet this highly successful student reveals a transition period into university as a more difficult process than his academic achievements portray, describing the first month as "hell":

*On the first night I got here I was crying in my room because I was just so scared and worried ... if you're feeling upset on your first night, or if you're feeling overwhelmed, it's really easy to forget the fact that most people go through that ... when a friend of mine came to Adelaide the following year, she was also crying a lot in her first week because she was just completely overwhelmed and I said to her "Don't feel bad, I did the same thing," sometimes it's good to just know that someone else understands it's a difficult experience to go through.*

Brian attributes what he describes as a "massive transition" to university, as partly being a result of the requirement to relocate from a small rural town to a major capital city and partly due to being a first in family student. Two support factors that Brian identified as assisting him navigate the transition, include living at the university residential college which provided valuable peer support, and involvement in a program targeted at first year students to assist them navigate university life. He acknowledges that if he had been able to talk with someone who had recently experienced university

transition, this would have provided invaluable support:

*Because from where I sit now everything I went through was all relatively easy, it was relatively simple, but at the time it can be completely overwhelming. You've got to apply, you've got to be accepted, you've got to move and it just seems like there is so much to do, but looking back it was all relatively easy.*

Brian's dedication to study and the pressure that he felt during the first year of university resulted in him having minimal involvement in activities external to his course work. His social life consisted of peers at the residential college, primarily due to his lack of social networks within his university course. Brian reported that as a result of the course work increasing in difficulty, second year saw him focusing on networking and establishing friendships within his university course. This emphasis on social networking was identified by Brian as contributing significantly to the transformation and development of him as a person, resulting in what he perceives as a more confident and outgoing persona. In considering his delay in establishing course friends, Brian reflected that not signing up for some of the university clubs may have contributed, indicating that he partially regrets not being involved more in social events during his first year.

Alongside the pressure of first year course work were financial pressures. For Brian it was being conscious that his parents were spending a lot of money investing in him attending university, resulting in pressure to win scholarships and prizes in order to help with finances. In addition to a scholarship Brian supplements his income through tutoring, initially at the residential college and now also within the university.

*In my first year I didn't work because I think it's probably good not work in your first year unless you absolutely have to as there is so much to learn including time management skills, learning how to organise yourself ... perhaps this is why I didn't even do sport or anything like that, as I had the idea of getting used to university first and then the other stuff comes later.*

Brian's focus in first year also led to a number of his lecturers "investing" in him by offering the opportunity to work with them on a summer research scholarship. Despite the involvement of university lecturers, Brian acknowledges that it took a lot of personal initiative, seeking out opportunities and doing a lot for himself in order to get these types of outcomes. These personal contributions are evident throughout Brian's story demonstrating that his commitment to learning and achieving career ambitions has led to multiple rewarding outcomes.

On reflecting on his achievements to date, Brian indicated a sense of contentment with his university experience.

*I'm absolutely happy with where I am. I've made most of the right choices or just been lucky with the choices. I don't think there's anything academically that I would regret all that much.*

Brian's father was influential in his commencement of his journey into higher education, and he reveals that both his parents are proud of everything that he has done at university but in particular they are proud of the independence and the manner in which Brian has built his own life for himself in Adelaide.

## Denise's Story

Engaged, keeping house and caring for both her partner and grandmother at 21 years of age appears

to be the life of somebody other than the mature age student being interviewed. After realising that domestic life wasn't for her, Denise left the relationship and entered the work force full time. It wasn't until the inception of 'Project 40' that further education came on to the horizon for Denise. With a 40th birthday approaching, Denise began to wonder about her future life direction and arrived at the decision that a university degree would be her exit strategy from her current employment role. With the ambition of a better job in her 40s, further education appeared to be the right vehicle to provide Denise with more financial security, but also the means to demonstrate to herself that she had the intellectual capacity to study at university.

A redundancy package initially facilitated the transition from full-time employment to full-time study, however the financial adjustment has been a big challenge. To meet her financial demands Denise now works in temporary full-time roles, regularly working on four or five week full-time assignments followed by periods of time where she doesn't work. During the periods that she works full-time, Denise reports that she wakes early and studies between 4 am and 7 am before heading off to work. Unfortunately the system doesn't always work for Denise, recalling a particular time when the juggling of both work and study was particularly difficult:

*I started a new job a few weeks before the last exam period and I was only supposed to be there for four weeks full time, but seven weeks in I was still working full time and trying to do exams, and they wouldn't give me any time off for exams, only for the day. I just sat in the exam room and I kind of cried because I thought I don't know anything, I didn't put in my six or seven hours a day, seven days a week. I didn't fail but it affected my GPA.*

With an ambition to continue onto honours and post graduate studies, Denise's GPA is a constant pressure for her, with the need to push for perfection always in the back of her mind. Denise's studious and organised nature has resulted in an alternate plan for future careers should she be unsuccessful in achieving her first preference of honours. These alternate plans demonstrate for Denise the benefits of university and the range of options that it provides.

The financial transition is not the only challenge that Denise has had to address based on her decision to go to university, describing a negative response received from her family particularly in relation to her choice of studying psychology. This disjunction between Denise and her family has continued to widen with Denise explaining how she feels that she has grown away from her family:

*Like having conversations that don't really stimulate me anymore but are on the family level, I function up here sometimes and I don't function well with the lower level stuff like making conversation. I'm spending six hours with my head in a text book and then I've got to go and talk about family members that I haven't seen for ages about babies and children, they're not conversations I want. I feel like I've moved on so much but they're back here, they're still stuck in their old ways, they're still first, second and third generation Centrelink recipients.*

Although Denise feels that she is growing away from her family, the same is not true for her long-term friendships, Denise credits her girlfriends for providing invaluable support and an avenue to talk about her studies. These external friendships remain key to Denise as she has so far been disappointed with how difficult it has been to break into the 'cliques' and make friends at university.

*It's kind of sad in a way, but I'm kind of grateful for not having a distraction. I'm really focused on the degree basically, I'm here for me. I thought about the mature age student society type of thing but with working I don't have time to meet up with people, I'm purely just either at work or at university, like*

*there's really no in-between, I guess I've alienated myself, I don't really have time. In lectures or tutorials I will talk to the person next to me, but we're not besties or going shopping the next day.*

Despite the lack of social networks at university, Denise feels a sense of belonging and talks about her strong affiliation with the university environment including the beauty of the architecture.

*Saturday, Sundays I'm in the library. I know I'm addicted and I just love the library, it's just gorgeous. The smell of the library takes me back to primary school, hanging out in the library in primary school and high school.*

Alongside the support of her external friends, Denise also credits the assistance of a tutor in providing support and guidance as being key to her understanding the importance of help seeking behaviours.

*I was struggling with an essay and because I'd asked for help he was able to help me. He said because I've asked for help he was able to help me, he said "I couldn't approach you and say do you want some help." That kind of inspired me to seek help more, including not to just accept a failure or a low grade. I didn't know that I could do that, I didn't know that was an option for me.*

In reviewing her university experiences to date and the transformation that has occurred within herself, Denise recognises that she is now a more disciplined and confident person. Most importantly however, Denise has achieved one of primary objectives of 'Project 40' having come to the realisation that she is "smart" and more than capable of achieving her ambition of attaining a university qualification.

## Jen's Story

It is hard to imagine that the confident and articulate 29 year woman being interviewed could have experienced any self-doubt in her abilities to succeed at university, but Jen reports that when she first started university, that was very much the case:

*I was nervous, incredibly nervous and I had no faith that I'd do well. There was an incredible absence of information, so I felt like I was in a vacuum but I pretty much muddled through. I went to an introductory workshop for mature aged students but it had nothing to do with being a mature aged student. I didn't see any connection at all ... I was a bright beaver, quite happy but nervous, I had no idea what to expect and I had no idea how to do the right thing ... I had no tools to write an essay ... But I flourished and I've enjoyed it, and I've now had a couple of years to practise it and it's pretty easy to write essays now.*

Despite Jen's initial uncertainty she has proven to herself that she can succeed at university in the same way that she has succeeded in other aspects of her life. Jen reports that she had been a good student during high school, but various stresses impacted her final year. Consequently Jen chose not to continue onto university, but instead focused on climbing the corporate ladder working in an industry primarily occupied by university educated colleagues. She recognised that she had gone as far as she could career-wise without university qualifications, and a timely suggestion by her boss prompted Jen to consider the option of university. An option that Jen had felt wasn't available to her earlier on her life, but one that would now foster her love of learning and assist with career advancement. As a result Jen chose to complete a Bachelor of Arts (Advanced) degree, a qualification that she anticipates will meet both of those requirements.

*A Bachelor of Arts (Advanced) is going to look good on my resume because it's got advanced next to*

*Arts. In fact I was given the opportunity to move to Canberra or Sydney for a job. I said no because I want to stick with the advanced degree which was based on a very rational choice, but going to university is also an emotional choice because I love to learn. I'm a big reader and from primary school I remember writing a lot so there has always been this engagement with text.*

As a high school student Jen's mother recognised her daughter's abilities and was very supportive of her continuing on to university. Jen reports that her mother's narrative had changed slightly when Jen told her about her decision to return to study, with Jen's mother stating that she thought that Jen's decision was fantastic but she also expressed concern regarding her ability to balance both work and study. Jen's mother's concern was well founded, and balance is an aspect that Jen works hard to maintain and not something that always manages to achieve.

*Technically I have made financial sacrifices, I've gone from a full-time well-paying job to a part-time role that is still relatively well paid. I can survive and I'm really lucky because I'm with a partner and we share finances, so that's not a pressure. My one cost that I regret is my fitness, I used to, before university, go to a gym about three to five times a week, I had personal training, and I ate really well. The first two years of university was really trying to understand what to do and being so frantic to understand meant I was either working or I was studying. That didn't leave a lot for going to the gym, for cooking healthy meals, for going to the shops. I went to the deli a lot to get my lunches so I could then rush back and do what I need to do, so I've gone from a size ten to a size fourteen, so it really has been a cost to my fitness. On the flip side I now have the tools to write. I've sacrificed fitness but I've gained other tools that I'm quite happy to use.*

In exploring how Jen manages to maintain balance in her life, she describes being strict in keeping different aspects of her life separate and being really focused when you needed. Jen's compartmentalisation of the different aspects of her life may also contribute to her reluctance to identify herself as a student.

*I often forget to tell people that I'm a university student and I have noticed it's usually my partner who pops in and says something. He usually brags about my grades which I actually don't like, but he's proud of me and that makes a huge difference in feeling encouraged to go to university. I usually just say what my work role is as I think of university students as 18 to 23 year olds, I'm a mature aged student so there's a separate classification, so I tend to think more about my work role when I'm speaking to people.*

Despite Jen not having an affiliation with a student identity, she confirms that she has a strong sense of belonging at university, feeling that it is the right path for her. A sense of belonging that is strengthened through the support she receives from her partner and extended family, as well as key academic staff.

*My partner is incredibly supportive, he went to university so I have someone to talk to about these things. It's made such a difference to just talk and have someone that I can chat with about this stuff. My partner's family are university educated and it's good, they've really shown an interest and encouragement but it's also helpful to be able to branch out to these networks I never had before.*

Jen's love of learning has led her to avail herself to all of the learning opportunities that university has offered. Consequently Jen recognises significant personal growth, including the provision of language that she'd not previously possessed, and an ability to view the world in a different way. Skills and abilities that Jen hopes will enable her to continue her journey of learning through the completion of honours and a PhD, combined with an ambition of career progression.

## Marg's Story

The powerful influence that families have on the lives of some individuals, including decisions made about education can result in negative or destructive outcomes. For Marg, it was her mother's active discouragement to continue on to university studies that resulted in her going directly into the work force after school, and not realising her aspiration to study until later in her life.

*When I was at school my mum thought well what's the point, it's just deferring the point of starting work and earning money. She couldn't understand why I would want to do that, so that was why I put it off at that point.*

*I've come from a very blue collar kind of family and growing up I didn't even really know what university was and then when I wanted to go my mum was saying "you should really go and get a job and start earning and buy a house." Our family saw university as being for rich people, not for us. We were not in that kind of class.*

The opportunity to return to study was presented to Marg through a work development program that supported study, leading her to think "it's now or never". As a result she commenced part-time study whilst balancing full-time employment, and is now delighted that despite her mother's initial scepticism her mother is now very supportive of Marg's progress and academic successes.

The transition into university was a nervous and apprehensive period, primarily as a result of Marg's uncertainty regarding her ability to study and the overwhelming nature of the unknown. She indicates that the university lecturers were very helpful in assisting her to overcome her initial concerns and sites two key lecturers as being critical in the support she received from the university.

*Both lecturers have a great deal of experience and empathy and offer huge amounts of encouragement. They were really good to bounce ideas off and talk to them about my academic career and what's going to get me to where I wanted to be ... helping me to filter out what I do and don't need.*

Working full-time enabled Marg to pay university costs upfront and avoid a HECS debt. Despite her financial position, Marg identifies that there has been a financial impact on her household regarding available resources but doesn't feel that it had been significant. Although the financial costs may not have had a significant impact, Marg recognises that a predominant cost associated with her studies has been the impact on her time resulting in her exercising less, having less time to be available to her family and not having family holidays. Consequently the time factor related to study has contributed towards Marg's decision to take a break from study before continuing on to complete her honours year. She acknowledges that she, but also her family, need a break from her studies. An additional consideration before Marg commences honours is the decision to do so by taking a sabbatical from work, which would mean that continuing her studies at this time would result in a significant financial impact on Marg and her family. By reconsidering her timing and through being organised and strategic, attributes which reflect Marg's personality and carer responsibility, she is planning to continue study at a later date so that she can minimise the effects on her family.

The underlying motivation to complete her current undergraduate degree and continue on with honours, is Marg's recognition of the benefits, both financial and personal that have resulted from her studying.

*On a work front work I'm presented with opportunities that I might not necessarily have been given if I hadn't embarked of studying. I've also had two promotions since I started my degree, which have*

*facilitated other lifestyle things to be better.*

*Personally, I'm more considered and able to disseminate lots of information to actually get to the crux of whatever it is I'm dealing with, so the research skills have been absolutely critical to changing the way I think. I analyse things differently and question things more. University has increased my value of education.*

In addition to the acquisition of new skills, studying has also proven to Marg that she has the intellectual capability to achieve something completely different from anything she had previously attempted. Both self-improvement and achieving something for herself, are two additional motivators for Marg to continue with her education. She discusses the importance of advice given to her, early on in her studies:

*Going to university is one of the few things that nobody else can do for you, it's one of the few things that no matter, nobody else can do it for you, you've got to do it yourself and the only person that will get you through that journey, you'll have support and stuff but when it comes down to it if you don't do the work you don't get it and I think that, it's really stuck with me.*

Marg's transformation and the value she now places on education, is reflected in her influence as a mother on her own children's choices to continue with further study.

*From a personal sense I think I've actually kind of forged a bit of a path for my kids that they might not have considered. So I've changed our family's attitude for my kids that university is not just reserved for the elite.*

*My youngest son was always going to go to university, but my oldest son has now decided to go to university which wasn't something that he was ever really going to do, it wasn't a part of his idea of where he would be going, so I think my studying has influenced him.*

Marg's comments are evidence that her experience of higher education has transformed not only her life, but that of her children. The unexpected but invaluable benefits that Marg has had were not envisioned when she initially thought – “study, it's now or never”.

## Roxie's Story

The personal transformation that occurs as a result of participation in higher education is clearly demonstrated through Roxie's story. Roxie recalls a pivotal period in her childhood during which she lived away from her parents and with her grandmother for a two-year period. During this time Roxie explains that she developed a strong sense of independence, resulting in a teenager who was rebellious and had a strong sense of wanting to make her own way in the world. Consequently Roxie's high school years saw a decrease in academic focus and an increase in drug use, escalating to a serious drug problem that she didn't recover from until she was 25 years of age. Today, Roxie presents as an articulate and streetwise person who is about to successfully complete her final honours year in Speech Pathology. Her achievement is well recognised by others and Roxie herself:

*All of my friends are extremely proud of me, I was always a real tearaway I had a really serious drug problem when I was a young woman. So to go from repeated drug overdoses and nearly dying to finishing university, my friends are astonished, they're really proud of me.*

*I have a lot more ambition than I used to, I have a lot more confidence in myself. I've always been a very confident person but now I'm ready to take on the world, my whole attitude has changed.*

Her initial motivation to attend university came from her boss who indicated that the company she worked for wanted to promote her and a prerequisite for promotion was working towards a relevant university qualification. Roxie clearly recounts the conversation with her boss as it included a compelling message pertaining to Roxie's father who had died six months earlier and who had wanted Roxie to go to university. The conversation carried with it an inspiring message as Roxie described her father as an extraordinarily intelligent man who had always wanted his children to utilise their natural intelligence.

Roxie reports that going to university provided her with a sense of legitimacy and worthiness in an employment role where she had previously felt like an imposter. Furthermore, seeing her mother struggle after the loss of her father has motivated Roxie to complete her studies so that she is able to help support her mother.

*My aspirations and ambition for studying include financial stability. Being able to get a job that paid my superannuation, that paid my tax for me, as a current sub-contracted person you're responsible for all of that stuff yourself and it's exhausting. I also wanted stability and security and to be able to help my mum.*

In striving for future financial stability, Roxie has had to struggle with the associated costs of study. Whilst the delayed payment of Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) did not influence Roxie's decision to study or not, she acknowledges that she would not have been able to attend university without it. Roxie describes the requirement to balance work and study as extremely difficult due to the combination of not working as many hours as she had previously been able to and as a result of a complex work arrangement which includes delays in receiving payment for her work. Consequently Roxie has had periods of time where it has been difficult to pay bills:

*My partner pays for our rent and our food, I pay for the bills but I can't pay our bills, phones are cut off, electricity hasn't been paid, internet's about to get cut off and my car might get repossessed in a couple of weeks.*

Together with financial costs, Roxie discussed additional factors affected by her university studies including her time, attention, mental health and relationships all having suffered while she has been studying. In particular, her relationships with partner and friends were described as having suffered, with Roxie explaining that she often feels "out of the loop" with her friends as a result of being so involved in her studies. A sentiment that Roxie echoed in relation to her partner:

*I've had a partner for 13 years now, we've certainly grown apart over the last four years, we don't have as much time to spend together and the time we do have together is often spent trying to manage the difficult things that are happening or I'm saying to him "Listen I'm sorry, but I need you to leave me alone for the next 48 hours." He's very involved in other stuff he does, I've got the stuff I'm doing and very rarely do we cross paths at this stage which is difficult. We spend 15 minutes in the car together in the morning and maybe 10 or 15 minutes in the afternoon, that's about it.*

*Seeing the way my partner has created this life that doesn't involve me, it's sad and it's awful but that just again makes me go, "oh just finish this thing get this done so that we can go back to having a life together."*

Despite these challenges, Roxie's determination and recognition of the benefits of university studies have seen her persist. To assist her in remaining focused on her goal Roxie often finds herself chanting the mantra "nearly there, you're nearly there, you're nearly there." Further to this internal

motivation, Roxie's strong sense of belonging and sense of inclusion in not just the social aspect of student life but also having been taken under the wing of the academics in the Department have contributed towards her motivation to stay the course. Aside from a difficult initial first few weeks when commencing university, Roxie describes feeling fantastic and doing really well within the first three months. Reporting positively about the support and resources she was able to receive:

*Being able to access healthcare up at the doctors and I see counsellors, I've seen a psychiatrist, these are all things that I wouldn't have been able to afford to do outside of the university environment. You have access to help with your resume, you've got access to financial help, you've got someone to help you with your assignments if you're not sure if they're good enough. And further to all that the people in the Department are incredibly supportive.*

For Roxie, the decision to participate in higher education has been a life changing event regardless of the challenges she faced prior to enrolment. Roxie's attitude has dramatically shifted from one of starting out as a non-believer in education institutions to now being one hundred per cent committed and suggesting that everyone goes to university because "it can change your life and just the way you feel about yourself, changes the way you can go forth and do things, it gives you opportunities."

## Sue's Story

The expectation to go to university was "drummed" into Sue not from her family but from her high school. Coming from a single family home, Sue's mother did not actively encourage her to consider university nor did she discourage higher education, rather Sue recalls her mother advocating that she would support Sue in whatever she wanted to do. For Sue, this consisted of taking a gap year after high school to work as a volunteer overseas before relocating from country Victoria to Adelaide to attend university.

Whether it was Sue's overseas experience, her personal attributes of being an organised but relaxed and very positive thinking person, or having a strong friendship base already going to university in Adelaide, the transition to university has been a relatively smooth one for Sue.

*I lived with my best friend and two other girls from back home. So it was nice having that little family to have in Adelaide because we're away from home. But I think even if I would have had to live in residential accommodation I would have made a different friendship group and I'm sure that would have been just as easy, it definitely helps by having people around you.*

Notwithstanding the smooth transition, Sue recollects thinking in her first few weeks that once her undergraduate degree was finished that she would not be continuing with any further studies, a plan that Sue appears to have forgotten, based on her current enrolment and near completion of a Masters in Teaching program.

*I kind of panicked in my last semester I was on exchange overseas and I kind of went "Oh what am I going to do next year, my degree's finishing?" And I realised that it's not going to be easy to get a job, so I thought, I'll do another degree to back it up, hopefully it will be more employable at the end of it.*

When asked if she had ever considered withdrawing or deferring from university, Sue reports that there was a brief period when the thought of deferring had crossed her mind as she was keen to go travelling. Discussions with university staff however, resulted in her subjects being arranged in a manner that enabled Sue to complete a number of electives overseas that contributed towards her Australian qualification. The support of staff at university and the opportunity to complete electives

overseas facilitated Sue to combine travel and study, and consequently removed her consideration of deferral.

Sue's age and pathway into university directly from high school classifies her as a 'traditional university student'. Despite this 'traditional' classification Sue doesn't actually identify with the notion of being a university student, stating that factors such as not living in residential accommodation or being involved in extracurricular activities has resulted in her not feeling like a "proper" university student.

*I didn't do the social side of the university scene, I had my own social side out of university and so I didn't really ever go to all the parties and do all the residential things or I didn't join events or university games. I look back and I wish I had done more of that. I never really had a lack of money so I've never felt like I was a proper university student, I've always got by and I had money so I'm not a proper 'poor' university student.*

Sue acknowledges that there a number of financial costs associated with attending university but considers the combination of work and Centrelink study benefits has enabled her to "get by pretty well." Having relocated from a rural town Sue has been required to support herself, living with three other house mates. But deferring her university fees to HECS has allowed Sue to not be concerned with the paying of university fees and could therefore focus on living expenses.

When asked about the impact of study on relationships, Sue responds that the combination of a strong support network in Adelaide, frequent visits and telephone conversations with her mother, plus her time spent overseas, assisted her in not experiencing homesickness or any other deleterious impacts on her relationships.

*Family no, for my friends I went to school with yes, because I've moved away from home and some of them stay there and they kind of don't change and then I feel like I've changed a lot because I've been overseas and I've been at university and I've had to be away from home. So there are a lot of people back home that I probably lost contact with, just because we're moving in different directions. But then there are a lot of people back home who obviously are my better mates because it doesn't matter how long it's been or where I've been, you know they're still there.*

In addition, Sue indicated that a number of high school friends remained in her hometown and had formed their own cliques, whilst those who went to university are "kind of like aliens" and as a result find it difficult to slip back in to those old friendship groups. Sue reiterated that she doesn't perceive this change in friendships as having had a negative impact on her university experience. Furthermore, Sue's mother regularly visits her in Adelaide, providing important family contact and support, with Sue reporting these visits as being "good for her and good for me."

What is evident through the conversation with Sue is that she believes she is lucky and that her positive outlook has set her up well. She attributes the development of her confidence and independence as transformations facilitated through her travel and her university experience. She believes these personal attributes will benefit her greatly as she continues to pursue her love of travelling and availing herself of opportunities provided by her university program such as spending four weeks in Nepal teaching. On asking about her future plans once she has returned from Nepal, Sue commented that she is hoping initially for teaching relief work in Adelaide and then intends seeing "where the wind takes" her.

## Todd's Story

One of the key purposes of higher education is to develop students' skills and knowledge so that they can be transferred to other aspects of their life, for example, employment. For Todd, the pivotal learning experience derived from his time at university, came not from the university itself but rather the opportunity that university provided him to participate in an overseas exchange. Todd's recollections of his first year at university were feelings of isolation and disjunction, until the overseas exchange experience changed that.

*I felt like I was out of my depth and like I didn't belong here. I've never really seen myself as a university student. I've always done really well academically but found the feel of university to be a bit pretentious. I didn't like at it first, it just wasn't really my thing. And so, unfortunately that had a bit of an impact on my attitude. I didn't really engage with people that much, instead I just did my degree. It wasn't until later years, that I tried to change that, and a lot of that had to do with going on an exchange overseas to Toronto, Canada. That was the best thing I've ever done in my life. It taught me a lot, including about taking risks and meeting people.*

Although Todd recognises the benefits that university has provided including increasing confidence, and an ability to critically analyse and develop deeper understandings of social issues, university hasn't quite met his expectations. In particular, Todd reports his disappointment surrounding the lack of career opportunities associated with having a university qualification, although he acknowledges that this may be a common perception amongst his generation of students.

*The impression I get from a lot of us is that we are a bit precious in this day and age. I think we have these great expectations and we've been built up to thinking it's going to be this wonderful thing, and it's a bit deflating when you find out perhaps this is not as idealistic as it's going to be, you're not going to get this massive job. And I think society, not that it's society's fault, it's just I think we're a bit soft and we just get beaten down really easily when we think things aren't going to be excellent ... It's like the popping of the bubble which you expected to keep inflating.*

For Todd being a university student is no more important than any other aspect of his life, he acknowledges that all of his other roles, for example, being a marathon runner, the eldest son in his family, and a sales assistant, are no less important in his identity construction.

*To say 'student', for me, I don't know, I find it a bit pretentious. I just find 'a student' gives these impressions of this 'lah di da life' and it's all very easy and that kind of stuff. And I don't really like having that perception because I think it takes away from the effort you do put into things.*

He does not feel that his experience of university life has matched that of the imagined or 'advertised' life of a uni student often depicted in the popular press. Todd feels that this portrayal may be the reality for some students who are perhaps more engaged in university life but for him it does not feel like a realistic representation of his experience.

*I just feel like when I see someone and their title is 'student', it makes you think of the uni ads where it's all just lying around on the lawns and then 'Oh I'll roll over and write my essay now.' But I don't know why, I just wasn't really comfortable with it. So essentially I don't really define, or describe myself as a student any more than I would anything else I suppose. University doesn't take precedence in my identity.*

When asked what instigated him to continue with further studies, Todd indicated that there was always

an implicit understanding within his family that he would continue into higher education. An assumption strengthened through his private schooling, which Todd perceived to promote the notion that it was “university or it was nothing”. Todd’s awareness and gratitude towards his parents for working hard to be able to afford a private education for him, coupled with his own desire as the eldest child to be a pioneer in the family, further contributed towards his motivation to continue on to university.

*I had always planned to come to uni. I guess as a first child you see yourself, in the image of being a bit of pioneer in the family and you want to be the one who goes into new areas. And I was always academically more skilled than I would be in any trade or anything else, and so uni was always going to happen.*

As for his degree choice, Todd elected to complete a journalism degree based on his enjoyment of writing and the perceived prestige attached to the qualification. Todd knew that at 17 he did not really have any idea of what he really wanted to do as a career but he had worked really hard in school to get a high TER score and therefore laughingly acknowledges that his choice of degree was probably related more to the fact that he could get into the course rather than it being the best course for him.

*I had a lot of trouble deciding whether to do journalism or information technology which is what I'd done really well in Year 12, and there's a lot more demand for those jobs ... but it was a low TER, and I didn't have to work hard to get there, so it was really just a bit of an ego thing. I got a high TER and it felt that there was more prestige attached to the journalism degree and that made the grandparents happy.*

Todd decided to complete his journalism degree despite his misgivings, though he still wonders about his decision, recalling that he momentarily considered transferring into information technology at the end of his first year at university. It was the thought of his accumulating HECS debt that prevented him from changing degrees, concluding that his HECS debt and his time were already lost and therefore he would be better off to stick with his original choice. Having now nearly completed his honours year in International Relations, Todd declares that he is feeling more confident in his skills and future employability.

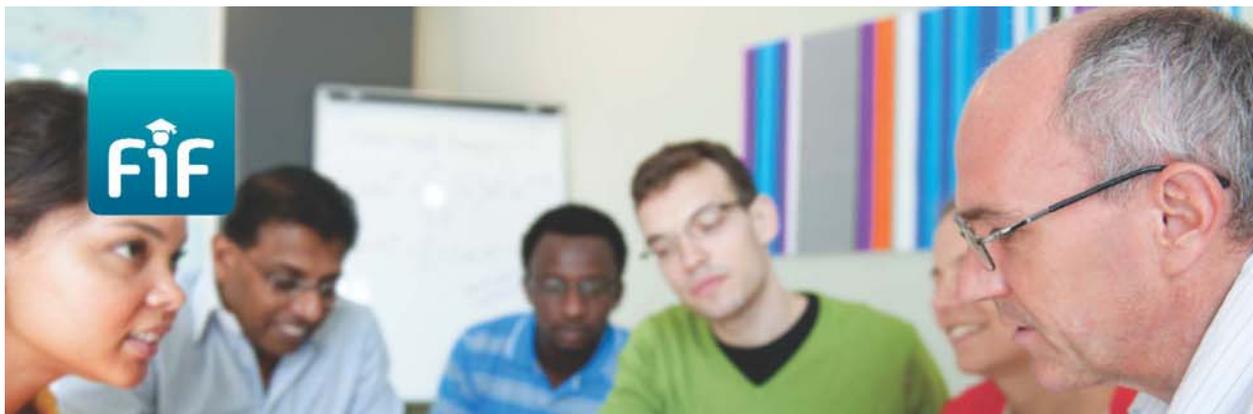
In regards to finances, Todd works part time and lives at home however he has decided to defer his university fees as he would prefer to put money towards a house as a future investment as opposed to paying his fees up front. Although Todd feels that he has not been impacted by the financial costs of university any more than other students, he has felt the pressure and stress of studying due to being a high achiever. The personal impact on Todd has been the sacrifice of his time and sleep, but he ensures that he continues to regularly see friends and participate in sport.

Throughout Todd’s story there is ample evidence of his admiration and respect for his parents, their hard work and support throughout his life. He often talks with his mother about his university experiences. As for the future, Todd is looking forward to establishing the next phase of his life of moving out of home and living independently, but has no firm convictions as to where his professional career may lead him.

## Appendix F: Key Findings Brochures

Below are the Key Findings fact brochure for:

- Educators of FiF Students
- Friends and Family of FiF Students
- Mature Age Students
- Students Entering University from School
- University Professional Staff.



## Key Findings for University Staff

### First in Family: Educators of FiF Students

#### FIF STUDENTS ARE HIGHLY CAPABLE WHEN GIVEN SUPPORT

Competing work and life demands can make studying at university hard for FiF students. However, FiF students also demonstrate that they are highly capable and do particularly well when given opportunities to participate and support to succeed.

Early engagement with the academic environment and developing a sense of identity as a student contributes to their success.

FiF students may find the transition to university more challenging given they are unlikely to have someone close to them to explain what it will be like and what will be expected of them.

*“Having someone I can lean on in my family to teach me or show me the way would have been a great help. When you’re the first of your family to do anything, you are essentially just exploring and learning the pitfalls and the traps. Once you’ve gone through, you can tell and teach other people what to do and what not to do.”*

Not having parents or older siblings to pass on advice about university systems and processes means that FiF students rely more heavily on friends and university websites to shape their understandings of what university is like.

Lack of time and money due to having other competing demands in their lives, such as work and family, are two factors continuously challenging FiF students. They may require more explicit and clearer instructions on course requirements, but providing explicit and clear instructions helps all students

#### What does this mean for you?

**Establish clear expectations from the outset:** You can play a critical role in assisting FiF students develop an understanding of what is required in your course and how they can be successful at university.

**Spell it out:** You may find it frustrating to have to explain your expectations and requirements in clear detail to FiF students in their first year but keep in mind that this will help ease their transition to university life. Also be aware that being clear and spelling things out may benefit other students also unsure but too nervous to ask.

#### BACKGROUND

- FiF students are the first member of their immediate family, including siblings, to attend university.
- This research explored the in-depth stories of eighteen FiF students across the three South Australian universities and analysed the expectations and experiences of over 5,300 FiF students
- FiF students attending university may find they need to take the time to get to know and understand the university environment and what is to be expected of them
- Many FiF students come from either a regional or remote or low socio-economic background, are mature-aged and/or are Indigenous
- Mature Age FiF students are likely to go to university to improve their job prospects and earning potential. Whereas, almost 80% of school leaver FiF students choose their degree based on interest
- As the government initiative to widen participation supports a greater diversity of individuals to access higher education more students who are FiF are likely to feel that university is an option for them



## EXPECTATIONS MAY BE MORE REALISTIC

FIF students are more likely to anticipate that the standard of work required at university will be different to High School. They are likely to anticipate that the approachability of staff at university will be different to High School.

Mature age FIF students typically expect to study more per week than other students: meaning they enter university with realistic expectations about how much study is required.

*"Understanding that, unlike school, a lot of learning must be done in your own time. Figuring out how to balance everything was the hardest part, but once it was balanced it made my experience more successful."*

### What does this mean for you?

**This is good news for educators:** If you set out your expectations clearly and spark their interest, you will get the most out of FIF students, and they will be more likely to succeed at university.

## UNIVERSITY LECTURES AND COMMUNICATION

Commencing FIF students are more likely to believe that it is important to attend lectures than non FIF students. Some FIF students found it hard to get used to the complex language used by educators.

### What does this mean for you?

**Use plain English as much as possible:** If your language is simple and easy to understand this will help keep first year FIF students engaged and enthusiastic.

*"I feel that many of the lecturers are incredibly helpful, and very willing to spend time explaining things to students that don't quite understand a concept or issue."*

## YOU HAVE THE POWER TO INFLUENCE

Our research has shown that over 70% of FIF students believe that having lecturers who are enthusiastic about teaching helped their learning. Evidence suggests that higher education strengthens FIF student's sense of competency and confidence, contributes towards broadening of their social experiences, and transforms perspectives.

Research suggests that although FIF students take longer to develop their academic skills and confidence, once their first year at university has been successfully navigated, their confidence and ability to succeed matches their non-FIF peers. However their growth as students is dependent on the support they received and the networks they established; FIF students identified that a bit of help from university teaching staff made a huge difference.

*"It has been important for me that my lectures are interesting, and that the lecturers actually care about and are interested in the content, because then it is more interesting to me and I am more motivated to work to my best ability."*

### What does this mean for you?

**Impact:** Don't underestimate the role you can play in shaping the experiences and developing the capabilities of FIF students.

**Patience:** Be patient with FIF students who may be taking time to adjust to university life and the associated demands.

**Support:** Provide extra encouragement and support to FIF students. Tell them where to find help if you think they need it. Any extra support you provide is bound to create a long term impact. Develop the First Year curriculum so that support is embedded whenever possible and learning is scaffolded.

*"I feel very much included in not just the social aspect of the student life, but very much taken under the wing of the academics in the Department as well, they've looked after us all so well, they love us, they look after us."*

## YOUR FEEDBACK IS HIGHLY VALUED

More FIF students, particularly school leavers, deeply value feedback from educators and strongly agreed that feedback on drafts and their submitted work would be important to their learning. The encouraging news is that many FIF students strongly agreed that sufficient feedback was provided on their submitted work.

### What does this mean for you?

**Focus on positive feedback:** Provide detailed constructive feedback on assessments to FIF students, knowing that this will assist them to improve their standard of work and overall learning and encourage them to persevere and thrive.

**Encourage and support:** Remember that FIF students may take six months to one year to adjust to university life and expectations so any encouragement and support offered will help them on their way to adjusting as quickly as possible.

An Initiative of the Exploring the Experience of being First in Family at University Project



## Key Findings for Friends and Family

### First in Family: Friends and Family of FiF Students

#### YOUR SUPPORT IS CRITICAL

FiF students place a huge emphasis on support from family and friends to get them through university. The encouragement of family and friends is crucial in helping FiF students decide to attend, and continue at, university.

*"I had friends who said 'Look you're smart enough, you should go to uni, you're actually a really smart guy, you should just go on and do whatever you want to do.'"*

If no one else in their family has been to University, your friend or family member is more likely to seek out information about university from other sources including their school teachers or university websites.

*"We've come from a very blue collar kind of family, growing up I didn't even really know what university was, our family saw university as being for rich people, not for people like us."*

#### What does this mean for you?

**Encourage:** If you are the parent/primary carer of a school age child who has shown an interest in going

to university, encourage them to go and speak to their school's career counsellor or their teachers regarding their university prospects.

**Support:** You could encourage your family member to think seriously about going to university. Go with them to the University Open Days to find out more and support them to make their decision about what to study.

**Have an open mind:** You may not agree with or understand why your friend or family member wants to go to university but if you try to see things from their perspective this may help them feel supported and you can also be a positive influence on them.

#### UNIVERSITY CAN CHANGE PEOPLE

*"I'm much more confident than when I started uni. I can talk and think to a lot deeper level than what I could back in high school. And my understanding of people, socially, has developed immensely."*

*"I think that my university journey has been about making me a more well-rounded adult."*

#### BACKGROUND

- FiF students are the first member of their immediate family, including siblings, to attend university.
- This research explored the in-depth stories of eighteen FiF students across the three South Australian universities and analysed the expectations and experiences of over 5,300 FiF students.
- Students who are the first member in their family (FiF) to attend university may find they need to take time to get to know and understand the university environment and what is to be expected of them.



Many students find that they experience positive change in their attitudes and beliefs and see things from different perspectives as a result of attending university. While most find their existing views become stronger and they may become better at expressing themselves, some may find their views actually change, and this can potentially create conflict with friends or family who may not agree with them.

*"I did keep in contact with my high school friends in the first year and part of the second year and quite regularly we'd catch up and that sort of thing. But then I guess as the degree progressed I became closer to people in the degree that had similar interests and just a bit more in common."*

*"My wife and I can converse at a different level now that I couldn't have done before. Not on science but on life, the universe and everything. We might even stop a TV program and discuss that point and this point – play with the drama and relate that."*

#### What does this mean for you?

**Learn from each other:** Knowing that your friend or family member may strengthen their personal views and opinions after going to university, and that this might mean you no longer see eye to eye on everything, means that you are half way there. You might even enjoy talking through the reasons why they feel more strongly about certain things and you can learn from each other in the process!

**Don't judge:** If your friend or family member has changed their perspectives, attitudes or beliefs, and if you show some understanding and take an interest in their new views and don't judge them for it, then it may be easier to remain close to each other.

### UNIVERSITY CAN BE CHALLENGING

In order to succeed at university students need to spend between 10-12 hours per week on each course they are studying. Hence doing a full time load of four courses requires the same time commitment as a full time job.

Many FIF students find it more difficult to balance their studies with existing demands of work, family and friends. Managing their time and staying healthy can be a big issue for many FIF students.

*"Initially I struggled because I couldn't find a 'healthy' balance between my employment, spending time with friends, eating healthy, study and exercise. After the first term I started to learn you have to say 'no' to your friends at times and remember your priorities. Attending as many lectures and tutorials as possible was also important."*



### UNIVERSITY MAY BE OVERWHELMING

FIF students may find the transition to university more challenging given that they are unlikely to have someone close to them to tell them what it will be like and what will be expected of them.

*"I felt isolated, and certainly felt like I was out of my depth, I did feel like I didn't belong here."*

*"I sort of started as a lone wolf, I suppose. So that was the tough side of things I think that I struggled with the most."*

The first six months are often the hardest, but once settled in most FIF students go on to be highly successful students.

*"In first year I didn't have that kind of support network behind me. It was probably half way through first year that I felt really part of uni and felt really comfortable. I made some great friends and then it was just so easy."*

#### What does this mean for you?

**Help if you can:** If you are able to help your friend or family member juggle their demands of work, family and friends, this will help them get through their studies. For example, you could offer to babysit if they have young children, go for a walk with them or make them a healthy meal.

**Keep an eye on them:** Your friend or family member who is studying may appreciate you keeping an eye on them and encouraging them to exercise or take some time out from study or work if they are feeling overwhelmed. This may also show them how much you care about their health and wellbeing.

*"If I didn't have my friends and family to lean on, I would have failed a long time ago."*

An Initiative of the Exploring the Experience of being First in Family at University Project



## Key Findings for New University Students

### First in Family: Mature Age Students

#### UNIVERSITY CAN INITIALLY BE A CHALLENGE

Many mature age and non-school leaver FIF students did not have friends attending the same university and they found the information provided by their friends did not help their transition to university life. While mature age students may find that the social side of university is not as important for them as younger students, they still need to find support to get through their studies.

*"I think in Week 2 or Week 3 I'd wondered what I'd walked into, and wondered how I was ever going to do it – with home and work and all the rest of it. So at that point I thought I've just made the biggest mistake ever. But then, I just went through it and soldiered through it, and... here I am."*

More mature age FIF students found that the difficulty of work at university was extremely different to high school. Many find that support for their university studies does not come from existing family and friends who often do not have a clear understanding of what they are doing at university or why they choose to be there.

#### What does this mean for you?

**You will need to find new mentors and develop new support networks:** Some students find a sympathetic tutor/lecturer or ask other students to help them understand what is required of them. Don't be afraid to ask for help!

**Develop peer networks:** Students found having the support of fellow students and friends crucial. And if your course or university has a peer mentoring scheme – join in if you can!

**Give yourself time:** Most FIF students find the first six months the hardest, but once settled in go on to be highly successful students.

*"My best advice to other students is to make friends with other people doing the same course as you, and stay organised and on top of your work."*

#### UNIVERSITY IS A JUGGLING ACT

Since mature age FIF students are more likely to go to university to improve their job prospects and earning potential, many find it a juggling act to manage the demands of their existing employment, family and personal needs, and getting used to meeting university expectations.

#### BACKGROUND

- FIF students are the first member of their immediate family, including siblings, to attend university.
- This research explored the in-depth stories of eighteen FIF students across the three South Australian universities and analysed the expectations and experiences of over 5,300 FIF students.
- Statistics show that 32% of FIF students are over 21 years and 17% are over 30 years.
- FIF students attending university may find they need to take time to get to know and understand the university environment and what is expected of them.



FIF students often tend to neglect their own health and wellbeing as they struggle to juggle their study and other responsibilities. However, FIF students, especially mature age students, are also likely to be more aware of how their commitments/activities outside of university affects their ability to study and plan accordingly.

#### What does that mean for you?

**Find a balance:** Be aware that it is going to be difficult to manage study and other responsibilities, prepare yourself for university life by working out in advance how you might achieve a balance.

**Be prepared:** Prior planning helps prevent poor performance. Be aware that it is going to be difficult to juggle competing demands, focus on planning your studies to succeed.

**Seek help:** University student services provide courses for students on aspects such as time management and study skills. Find out about these courses and participate whenever possible.

*"I'm quite organised, I am a compulsive list maker and I set myself targets and a time frame for everything because I have to, I've got teenage kids, got a house to run, I've got a full time job and all of those things, so if I'm not organised I just can't do it all."*

### MANAGE YOUR EXPECTATIONS

FIF students pride themselves on being hard workers. Mature age FIF students:

- Often have a high level of self-confidence/capability and expect to do well at university
- Typically expect to study more per week than other students: meaning they enter university with realistic expectations about how much study is actually required
- Often have high expectations of their own performance at university and can place a lot of pressure on themselves. Mostly, these expectations are met as students reported their performance as either better or much better than expected.

*"[studying] does take up a lot of time and I want to do it properly and to be honest my biggest thing when I first committed to it was I'm not just going to pass and so I've set myself pretty high goals and my family think I am insane but I have sort of set these personal goals for myself."*

#### What does that mean for you?

**Be realistic:** There's nothing wrong with reaching for the stars but try to develop goals that are reasonable and achievable. Don't be too hard on yourself if your performance does not always meet your own high expectations.



### TRANSITION INTO UNIVERSITY REQUIRES PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE

We know that FIF students are highly capable and do particularly well when given opportunities to participate and the support to succeed, but mature age FIF students also don't have family members who can help them understand what to expect from University so they may need to seek this information from other sources and sometimes feel like they don't really fit in initially.

While many mature age FIF students found the transition into uni life a challenge, all that were interviewed said it was worth it. As well as the potentially improved employment and career benefits of studying, many students focused on other benefits including making new friends with similar interests and beliefs and improving their communication and critical thinking skills.

*"I feel like I've walked up a really big mountain and I'm just at the very top now and about to come over the other side."*

#### What does this mean for you?

**Inform yourself:** Find out as much as you can about University before you start by attending Open Days, Orientation week, information and study sessions.

**Focus on the positives:** Remember that university will be worth it in the long run. The benefits you'll gain through the new skills you develop as a result of your studies are worth the hard slog!

An Initiative of the Exploring the Experience of being First in Family at University Project



## Key Findings for New University Students

### First in Family: Students Entering University From School

#### MAKING NEW FRIENDS AND NETWORKS MAY BE IMPORTANT TO YOUR SUCCESS

School leaver FIF students do not have family members who can help them understand what to expect from university and are more likely than non-FIF students to have made their decision to go to university based on talking with school teachers, careers counsellors and/or the University staff.

These students are less likely to have friends attending the same university than non-FIF students, and are less likely to consider that the information they got from friends accurately reflects what university life will be like.

All FIF students we spoke to identified that developing networks with other students was really important for their ongoing academic success

*"I think university clubs and societies are a really useful place to meet people, make friends, talk to students from other disciplines and gain lifelong skills along the way. This really helps to ground expectations."*

#### What does this mean for you?

**It's time to make new friends and find new support networks!** Some students find a sympathetic tutor/lecturer or ask other students to help them understand what is required. Don't be afraid to ask for help!

**Develop peer networks:** students found having the support of fellow students and friends crucial. Participate in unions, clubs, and activities and make the effort to make new friends. If your course or university has a peer mentoring scheme – join in if you can!

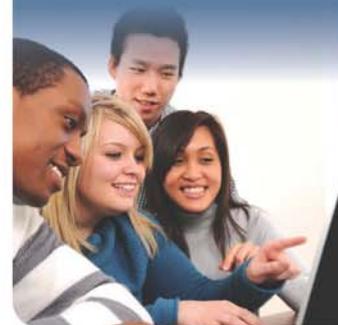
*"Friendships mean a lot, I feel it's important to form friendships in the first year and gaining a friendship group of close buddies really helped. I don't know what I would have done without them."*

#### IT TAKES TIME TO ADJUST

We know that FIF students are highly capable and do particularly well when given opportunities to participate and support to succeed, but more school leaver FIF students find university very different from school and consider that secondary education did not adequately prepare them for university study.

#### BACKGROUND

- FIF students are the first member of their immediate family, including siblings, to attend university.
- This research explored the in-depth stories of eighteen FIF students across the three South Australian universities and analysed the expectations and experiences of over 5,300 FIF students.
- Students who are the first member in their family (FIF) to attend university may find they need to take time to get to know and understand the university environment and what is to be expected of them.



FiF students often struggle to make the transition to being a student and may initially feel like they don't fit in. They also tend to neglect their own health and wellbeing as they struggle to juggle their study and other responsibilities.

*"Initially I struggled because I couldn't find a 'healthy' balance between my employment, spending time with friends, eating healthy, study and exercise. After the first term I started to learn you have to say 'no' to your friends at times and remember your priorities. Attending as many lectures and tutorials as possible was also important."*

#### What does that mean for you?

**Inform yourself:** Find out as much as you can about university before you start by attending Open Days, Orientation week, information and study sessions. Also research about potential careers and availability of jobs both online and through talking with careers counsellors.

**Give yourself time:** Most FiF students find the first six-months to a year the hardest, but once settled in go on to be highly successful students.

*"Uni is tough but worth it, the first couple of weeks are the hardest."*

**Find a balance:** Knowing that it is going to be difficult to manage study and other responsibilities, prepare yourself for university life by working out in advance how you might achieve a balance.

**Focus on the positives:** Remember that university will be worth it in the long run. The benefits you will gain through the new skills you develop and via the job you get as a result of your studies are worth the hard slog!

*"Don't take on too much and be kind to yourself, do everything the lecturers say to start with and be strategic about planning what you intend to do."*

### YOUR EXPECTATIONS MAY BE MORE REALISTIC

As a school leaver FiF student, you may find your expectations are closer to reality than you think. Most FiF students found the university learning environment to be significantly different to High School. For example, you are more likely to anticipate that the amount and difficulty of work at university will be different to High School.

*"Understanding that, unlike school, a lot of learning must be done in your own time. Figuring out how to balance everything was the hardest part, but once it was balanced it made my experience more successful."*

Some FiF students also commented on the unexpected costs of attending university – the textbooks, living expenses etc – and wished they had more savings when they started.

#### What does that mean for you?

**Be positive:** The good news is that having more realistic expectations of how different university will be from school will probably help you to make a smooth transition.

**Seek help:** University student services provide courses for students on aspects such as time management and study skills. Find out about these courses and participate whenever possible.

**Plan ahead:** Think about the potential costs of your course (textbooks etc) and plan how you will cover these costs.

*"It was important to learn to ask for help as soon as I didn't understand something rather than waiting too long and then not giving myself enough time to complete tasks."*

### KEEP UP THE MOMENTUM

Almost 80% of school leaver FiF students choose their degree based on interest, and school leaver FiF students are more likely to seek out extra information on class topics they find interesting and pride themselves on being hard workers.

#### What does this mean for you?

**Let your interest drive you to success:** Being interested or passionate about your subject area is a good start to driving you forward as you develop study skills and adjust to university life.

*"I have always been a maths/science person. I love it. I love a challenge and mining engineering is precisely what I can see myself doing in 4 years' time. The university is great, all the services and support available to students is more than enough."*



An Initiative of the Exploring the Experience of being First in Family at University Project



## Key Findings for University Staff

### First in Family: University Professional Staff

#### FOCUSING ON FIF CAN HAVE BROAD RANGING IMPACTS

Competing work and life demands can make studying at university hard for FIF students. However, FIF students also demonstrate that they are highly capable and do particularly well when given opportunities to participate and support to succeed.

Early engagement with the academic environment and developing a sense of identity as a student contributes to their success.

The FIF students in this study identified that accessing support from university transition and counselling staff and seeking help from financial services was really important. They may take longer to develop their academic skills and confidence, but once their first year at university has been successfully navigated, they match their non-FIF peers.

FIF students identified that university was about more than obtaining a degree as it helped them build other skills and improved their confidence.

Focusing on FIF students has broader impacts as FIF students may influence other family members to follow them into higher education.

*"I think it's good because I have a couple of cousins that will now be going onto uni too and hopefully my sister. I guess I've been able to help them with the experience as well."*

#### What does this mean for you?

**Focus on the first year:** By assisting FIF students to get past the initial 'culture shock' and settle into university life, you will help them move forward and succeed as students.

**Communicate:** Tailor university communications with prospective FIF students, families and the general public to focus on the economic and other benefits of higher education such as increased awareness and understanding of society.

**Identify and target:** Introduce methods of identifying FIF students early on so that targeted support, information and resources can be provided to promote retention of FIF students.

**Educate:** Provide information on FIF students (mature age and school leaver) to first year educators so they can also adapt their approach where possible.

#### BACKGROUND

- FIF students are the first member of their immediate family, including siblings, to attend university.
- This research explored the in-depth stories of eighteen FIF students across the three South Australian universities and analysed the expectations and experiences of over 5,300 FIF students.
- Students who are the first member in their family (FIF) to attend university may find they need to take time to get to know and understand the university environment and what is expected of them.
- Research suggests that universities do not necessarily compensate for a FIF student's lack of information on university life, leaving them to navigate educational pathways on their own.
- Many FIF students come from either a low socio-economic or regional or remote backgrounds, are mature-aged and/or are Indigenous.
- FIF students are more likely to be studying nursing, education, management and commerce, or society and culture than law, medicine and engineering.

**Inform:** Consider whether more comprehensive information needs to be provided to potential students, families and the public on the overall return on investment that participation in higher education provides.

*"Having a degree has benefitted me definitely. And I think having the degree, I hope would benefit others in my future work and life ... So I've got a big focus on the greater good I think. And I hope I can, I guess, contribute to that. At least that's my lifetime goal."*

## YOU CAN INFLUENCE THEIR CHOICES

Parents / primary carers are less likely to be the main influence on a FiF student's views, whether school leaver or mature age, on what to expect from university. School leavers are more likely to seek information from another source on what is to be expected from university, such as their school teachers or school careers counsellor.

FiF students are also more likely to be influenced by university websites and recruiting information in forming their views on what to expect from university.

### What does this mean for you?

**Focus on the school system:** It makes sense to focus recruitment efforts for school leaver FiF students on teachers and counsellors within the school system.

**Resources and information:** adapted to FiF students when promoting the University in schools and expos aimed at recruiting new students.

**Marketing:** Adapt existing marketing efforts, such as websites, TV, and brochures to meet information needs of FiF students.

**Clear Language:** Provide easy navigation on websites and use clear, straight forward language on all print material.

## UNIVERSITY WEBSITES AND RECRUITING STRATEGIES ARE KEY

A key source of information for FiF students are university websites. Commencing FiF students, especially school leavers, agreed that university websites helped to shape their views on what to expect from university. And, a greater proportion agreed that the information they got from university websites accurately reflected what the University life would be like.

FiF students, especially school leavers, are more likely to access university recruiting information (eg. open days, adverts) in developing their views on what to expect from university. And, a greater proportion of both school leaver and mature age FiF students agreed that the information obtained accurately reflected what university life would be like.

### What does this mean for you?

**Website:** Keep your University's website up-to-date, use images that realistically reflect the diversity of students backgrounds.

**Recruitment strategies:** Focus on the information needs of FiF students in all public recruitment strategies to help recruit and retain FiF students.

## UNIVERSITY SUPPORT PROGRAMS ARE CRITICAL TO SUCCESS

Many FiF students reported that attending university had resulted in significant personal costs, such as poorer health and eating habits. This was linked to their challenges of balancing the competing demands of study, paid work and family. When asked what would have made them more prepared for university, one student responded:

*"I think that I would have benefited from workshops on note taking in lectures and more specific course information and study advice sessions prior to commencing the year. For example - the benefits of tutorials, pre-reading, other study tips to help get us started on the right foot. I felt as though I started out being behind."*

### What does this mean for you?

**Encourage skills development:** Work with all teaching staff to embed time management and study skill development into the first year of curriculum so that it benefits all students.

**Promote study/life balance:** University support programs addressing student health behaviours and managing multiple life demands may improve the FiF student experience and help to alleviate some associated personal costs of university life.

**Targeted support programs:** FiF students would benefit from programs assisting them to make the transition to student life.

*"Even though the open days and information sessions were incredibly useful to prepare for university, there wasn't enough of these sessions to give a proper introduction to university life."*



An Initiative of the Exploring the Experience of being First in Family at University Project

## References

- Abbott-Chapman, J. (1994). The challenge of retention: raising and meeting students' educational expectations. *Youth Studies Australia*, 13(2), 17-20. <http://www.acys.info/ysa>
- Anders, J., & Micklewright, J. (2013). *Teenagers' expectations of applying to university: how do they change? Working Paper no. 13-13*. London, UK: Institute of Education, University of London.
- Aspelmeier, J. E., Love, M. M., McGill, L. A., Elliott, A. N., & Pierce, T. W. (2012). Self-Esteem, Locus of Control, College Adjustment, and GPA Among First-and Continuing-Generation Students: A Moderator Model of Generational Status. *Research in Higher Education*, 53(7), 755-781.
- Baker, S., Brown, B., & Fazey, J. (2006). Individualization in the widening participation debate. *London Review of Education*, 4(2), 169-182.
- Ball, S., & Vincent, C. (1998). 'I Heard It on the Grapevine': 'hot' knowledge and school choice. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 19(3), 377-400.
- Banks-Santilli, L. (2014). First-generation college students and their pursuit of the American dream. *Journal of Case Studies in Education*, 5, 1-32.
- Ballantyne, J., Madden, T., & Todd, N. (2009). Gauging the attitudes of non-traditional students at a new campus: An Australian case study. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 31(4), 301-313.
- Bamber, J. & Tett, L. (2001) Ensuring integrative learning experiences for non-traditional students in higher education. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 3(1).
- Banks-Santilli, L. (2014). First-generation college students and their pursuit of the American dream. *Journal of Case Studies in Education*, 5, 1-32.
- Barbour, R. S., & Schostak, J. (2005). Interviewing and Focus Groups. In B. Somekh & C. Lewin (Eds.), *Research methods in the social sciences*. London: SAGE.
- Barry, L. M., Hudley, C., Kelly, M., & Cho, S.-J. (2009). Differences in self-reported disclosure of college experiences by first-generation college student status. *Adolescence*, 44(173), 55-68.
- Benson, R., Heagney, M., Hewitt, L., Crosling, G., & Devos, A. (2012). Social inclusion and the student experience: what are the implications for academic support? *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 14(2), 11-28.
- Benson, R., Hewitt, L., Heagney, M., Devos, A., & Crosling, G. (2010). Diverse pathways into higher education: Using students' stories to identify transformative experiences. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 50(1), 11-28.
- Bennett, A., (2011). The post-subcultural turn: Some reflections 10 years on. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 14(5), 493-506.
- Bewick, B., Koutsopoulou, G., Miles, J., Slaa, E., & Barkham, M. (2010). Changes in undergraduate students' psychological well-being as they progress through university. *Studies in Higher Education*, 35(6), 633-645. doi: 10.1080/03075070903216643
- Bexley, E., Daroesman, S., Arkoudis, S., & James, R. (2013). *University student finances in 2012: A study of the financial circumstances of domestic and international students in Australia's universities*. Melbourne: Centre for the Study of Higher Education.

- Bitsika, V., Sharpley, C. F., & Rubenstein, V. (2010). What Stresses University Students: An Interview Investigation of the Demands of Tertiary Studies. *Australian Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 20(1), 41-54. doi: 10.1375/ajgc.20.1.41
- Bowl, M. (2001). Experiencing the barriers: non-traditional students entering higher education. *Research Papers in Education*, 16(2), 141-160.
- Brook, H., & Michell, D. (2014). Knowing students. In H. Brook, D. Fergie, M. Maeorg & D. Michell (Eds.), *Universities in Transition: Foregrounding Social Contexts of Knowledge in the First Year Experience* (pp. 229-244). Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press.
- Brinkworth, R., McCann, B., King, S., Burke Da Silva, K., Luzeckyj, A., Scutter, S., & McCann, J. (2013). Student and staff expectations and experiences, Office for Learning and Teaching Final Report. Online. Retrieved from <http://www.olt.gov.au/resources/good-practice?text=Student+and+staff+expectations+and+experiences>
- Bui, V. T. (2002). First-generation college students at a four-year university: Background characteristics, reasons for pursuing higher education, and first-year experiences. *College Student Journal*, 36(1), 3-11.
- Byrd, K. L., & MacDonald, G. (2005). Defining college readiness from the inside out: First-generation college student perspectives. *Community College Review*, 33(1), 22-37.
- Callender, C., & Jackson, J. (2008). Does the fear of debt constrain choice of university and subject of study? *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(4), 405-429.
- Cervini, E. (2013, August 2, 2013). When ATAR gets it wrong. *Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/when-atar-gets-it-wrong-20130802-2r37q.html>
- Chapman, A. (2013). A (re) negotiation of identity. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 14(3), 44-61.
- Chiera, B., & Schultz, L. (2014). Analysis of the Effects of Age and Commencing/Continuing Status on First-in-Family and Non-First-in-Family Survey Responses (pp. 1-197). *Unpublished report*. University of South Australia.
- Coffman, S. (2011). A social constructionist view of issues confronting first-generation college students. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 2011(127), 81-90.
- Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 98(2), 310.
- Collier, P. J., & Morgan, D. L. (2008). "Is that paper really due today?": differences in first-generation and traditional college students' understandings of faculty expectations. *Higher Education*, 55(4), 425-446.
- Crozier, G., & Reay, D. (2008). The Socio-Cultural and Learning Experiences of Working Class Students in HE: *Full Research Report-ESRC End of Award Report*. Swindon, UK: ESRC.
- Daniels, J., & Brooker, J. (2014) Student identity development in higher education: implications for graduate attributes and work-readiness. *Educational Research*, 56(1), 65-76.
- Daly, A., Lewis, P., Corliss, M., & Heaslip, T. (2015). The private rate of return to a university degree in Australia. *Australian Journal of Education* 0(0), 1-16.
- Deci, E. L., & Flaste, R. (1995). *Why we do what we do: Understanding self-motivation*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Della, M. A., Fazey, D. & Fazey, J. (2001), The Potential for Autonomy in Learning: perceptions of

competence, motivation and locus of control in first-year undergraduate students, *Higher Education*, 26, (3), 345-361

Dennis, J. M., Phinney, J. S., & Chuateco, L. I. (2005). The role of motivation, parental support, and peer support in the academic success of ethnic minority first-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(3), 223-236.

Devlin, M. (2013). Bridging socio-cultural incongruity: Conceptualising the success of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds in Australian higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(6), 939-949.

Devlin, M., Kift, S., Nelson, K., Smith, L., & McKay, J. (2012). *Effective teaching and support of students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds: Resources for Australian higher education*. Retrieved from <http://www.lowses.edu.au/>.

Devlin, M., Kift, S., Nelson, K., Smith, L., & McKay, J. (2012). *Effective teaching and support of students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds: Resources for Australian higher education. Final report*. Melbourne: Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

Devlin, M., & O'Shea, H. (2011). Directions for Australian higher education institutional policy and practice in supporting students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 33(5), 529-535.

Devlin, M., & O'Shea, H. (2012). Effective university teaching: Views of Australian university students from low socio-economic status backgrounds. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 17(4), 385-397.

DiGregorio, K. D., Farrington, S., & Page, S. (2000). Listening to our students: Understanding the factors that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' academic success. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 19(3), 297-309.

Dukhan, S., Cameron, A., & Brenner, E. A. (2011). The influence of differences in social and cultural capital on students' expectations of achievement, on their performance, and on their learning practices in the first year at university. *International Journal of Learning*, 18(7), 337-351.

Dumais, S. A., & Ward, A. (2010). Cultural capital and first-generation college success. *Poetics*, 38(3), 245-265.

Eccles, J. S., & Wigfield, A. (2002). Motivational beliefs, values, and goals. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53, 109-132.

Eckersley, R. (2011). A new narrative of young people's health and well-being. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 14(5), 627-638.

Edwards, R. (1993). *Mature women students: separating or connecting family and education*. London; Washington, D.C.: Taylor & Francis.

Engle, J. (2007). Postsecondary access and success for first-generation college students. *American Academic*, 3(1), 25-48.

Fass, M. E., & Tubman, J. G. (2002). The influence of parental and peer attachment on college students' academic achievement. *Psychology in the Schools*, 39(5), 561-573.

Fleming, T., & Finnegan, F. (2011). *Non-traditional students in Irish higher education: a research report*. UK: Retention and Access of Non-Traditional Learners in Higher Education

Forsyth, A., & Furlong, A. (2003). *Losing out?: socioeconomic disadvantage and experience in further and higher education*. Bristol, UK: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Fuller, A., Foskett, R., Johnston, B., & Paton, K. (2011). 'Getting by' or 'getting ahead'? Gendered

educational and career decision-making in networks of intimacy. In S. Jackson, I. Malcolm & K. Thomas (Eds.), *Gendered Choices* (Vol. 15, pp. 189-208): Springer Netherlands.

Gale, T., & Parker, S. (2013). *Widening participation in Australian higher education: Report to the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) and the Office of Fair Access (OFFA), England*. CFE (Research and Consulting) Ltd, Leicester, UK and Edge Hill University, Lancashire, UK.

Gale, T., & Tranter, D. (2011). Social justice in Australian higher education policy: An historical and conceptual account of student participation. *Critical Studies in Education*, 52(1), 29-46. doi: 10.1080/17508487.2011.536511

Garrett, R., Wrench, A., & King, S. (2012). Guessing where the goal posts are: managing health and well-being during the transition to university studies. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 16(6), 730-746.

Gibbons, M. M., & Woodside, M. (2014). Addressing the Needs of First-Generation College Students: Lessons Learned From Adults From Low-Education Families. *Journal of College Counseling*, 17(1), 21-36.

Glogowska, M., Young, P., & Lockyer, L. (2007). Should I go or should I stay? *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 8(1), 63-77. doi: 10.1177/1469787407074115

Godden, N. (2007). *Regional young people and youth allowance: Access to tertiary education*: Centre for Rural Social Research Wagga Wagga.

Gofen, A. (2009). Family capital: How first-generation higher education students break the intergenerational cycle. *Family Relations*, 58(1), 104-120.

Gorard, S. (2006). *Review of widening participation research: addressing the barriers to participation in higher education: a report to HEFCE UK*: HEFCE.

Goto, S. T., & Martin, C. (2009). Psychology of success: Overcoming barriers to pursuing further education. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 57(1), 10-21. doi: 10.1080/07377360902810744

Grayson, J. (2011). Cultural capital and academic achievement of first generation domestic and international students in Canadian universities. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(4), 605-630.

Hallett, J. D., Howat, P. M., Maycock, B. R., McManus, A., Kypri, K., & Dhaliwal, S. S. (2012). Undergraduate student drinking and related harms at an Australian university: web-based survey of a large random sample. *BMC Public Health*, 12(37). doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-12-37

Henderson, R., Noble, K., & George-Walker, D. (2009). Transitioning into university: 'interrupted' first year students problem-solving their way into study. *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development*, 6(1), 51-65.

Heywood, D., & Stronach, I. (2005). Philosophy and Hermeneutics. In B. Somekh & C. Lewin (Eds.), *Research Methods in the Social Sciences* (pp. 114-121). London: Sage.

Ishitani, T. T. (2003). A longitudinal approach to assessing attrition behavior among first-generation students: Time-varying effects of pre-college characteristics. *Research in Higher Education*, 44(4), 433-449.

James, R., Bexley, E., & Maxwell, L. (2008). *Participation and equity: a review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people*. Deakin, ACT: Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne for Universities Australia.

James, R., Krause, K.-L., & Jennings, C. (2010). *The first year experience in Australian universities*. Canberra, Australia: DEEWR.

James, R., Bexley, E., & Maxwell, L. (2008). *Participation and equity: a review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people*. Deakin, ACT: Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne for Universities Australia.

Jenkins, S. R., Belanger, A., Connally, M. L., Boals, A., & Durón, K. M. (2013). First-generation undergraduate students' social support, depression, and life satisfaction. *Journal of College Counseling, 16*(2), 129-142.

Johnston, H., Collett, D., & Kooyman, B. (2013). Enabling parents, partners and friends to collaborate in student transition and success. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning, 7*(2), A50-A61.

Karimshah, A., Wyder, M., Henman, P., Tay, D., Capelin, E., & Short, P. (2013). Overcoming adversity among low SES students. *Australian Universities' Review, 55*(2), 5-14.

Kift, S. (2008a). *Articulating a Transition Pedagogy, First Year Curriculum Principles*. Brisbane: Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd. Retrieved from [www.fyecd2009.qut.edu.au/resources/RES\\_KiftTransitionPedagogySixPrinciples.pdf](http://www.fyecd2009.qut.edu.au/resources/RES_KiftTransitionPedagogySixPrinciples.pdf)

Kift, S. (2008b). The next, great first year challenge: Sustaining, coordinating and embedding coherent institution-wide approaches to enact the FYE as "everybody's business". Paper presented at the *11th International Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference, An Apple for the Learner: Celebrating the First Year Experience*, Hobart, Tasmania.

Kift, S., Nelson, K. J., & Clarke, J. A. (2010). Transition pedagogy: a third generation approach to FYE: a case study of policy and practice for the higher education sector. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 1*(1), 1-20. <https://fyhejournal.com/article/view/13/60>

King, S., Garrett, R., Wrench, A., & Richardson, A. (2013). What does it take to thrive in this place?: An exploration of students' experiences of first year university. Paper presented at the *36th HERDSA International conference The Place of Teaching and Learning* Auckland, NZ.

Krause, K.-L. (2006). Transition to and through the first year: Strategies to enhance the student experience. *Inaugural Vice-Chancellor's Learning and Teaching Colloquium 2006*. University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne, accessed 1 November 2008 from [http://www.griffith.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/39275/USCKeynoteFinal2006.pdf](http://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/39275/USCKeynoteFinal2006.pdf)

Kypri, K. Y. P., Cronin, M., & Wright, C. S. (2005). Do university students drink more hazardously than their non-student peers? *Addiction, 100*(5), 713-714. doi: 10.1111/j.1360-0443.2005.01116.x

Lairio, M., Puukari, S., & Kouvo, A. (2011). Studying at university as part of student life and identity construction. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 57*(2), 115-131.

Leathwood, C., & O'Connell, P. (2003). 'It's a struggle': The construction of the 'new student' in higher education. *Journal of Education Policy, 18*(6), 597-615.

Leese, M. (2010). Bridging the Gap: Supporting Student Transitions into Higher Education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 34*(2): 239-251.

Lehmann, W. (2009). University as vocational education: working-class students' expectations for university. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 30*(2), 137-149.

Leppel, K. (2002). Similarities and differences in the college persistence of men and women. *The Review of Higher Education, 25*(4), 433-450.

Leslie, E., Owen, N., Salmon, J., Bauman, A., Sallis, J. F., & Lo, S. K. (1999). Insufficiently active Australian college students: Perceived personal, social, and environmental influences. *Preventive Medicine, 28*(1), 20-27. doi: 10.1006/pmed.1998.0375

- Lewis, C., Dickson-Swift, V., Talbot, L., & Snow, P. (2007). Regional tertiary students and living away from home: A priceless experience that costs too much? *The Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 42(4), 531-547. <http://www.aspa.org.au/publications/ajsi.html>
- Lohfink, M. M., & Paulsen, M. B. (2005). Comparing the determinants of persistence for first-generation and continuing-generation students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(4), 409-428.
- London, H. B. (1989) Breaking Away: A study of first-generation college students and their families. *American Journal of Education*, 97(2), 144-170.
- Lundberg, C. A. (2003). The influence of time-limitations, faculty, and peer relationships on adult student learning: A causal model. *Journal of Higher Education*, 74(6), 665-688.
- Luzeckyj, A. (2009). *Games played on Australian university alliance websites as they collaborate and compete*. Paper presented at the *Australian Association For Research In Education International Education Research Conference*, Canberra, ACT. [http://ocs.sfu.ca/aare/index.php/AARE\\_2009/aare\\_2009/paper/view/1200](http://ocs.sfu.ca/aare/index.php/AARE_2009/aare_2009/paper/view/1200)
- Luzeckyj, A., King, S., Scutter, S., & Brinkworth, R. (2011). The significance of being first: A consideration of cultural capital in relation to "first in family" student's choices of university and program. A Practice Report. *International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 2(2), 91-96.
- McCarron, G. P., & Inkelas, K. K. (2006). The gap between educational aspirations and attainment for first-generation college students and the role of parental involvement. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(5), 534-549.
- McInnis, C., James, R., & McNaught, C. (1995). *First year on campus: Diversity in the initial experiences of Australian undergraduates*. Canberra: AGPS.
- Mcleod, J. (2011). Student voice and the politics of listening in higher education. *Critical Studies in Education*, 52(2), 179-189.
- Mehta, S. S., Newbold, J. J., & O'Rourke, M. A. (2011). Why do first-generation students fail? *College Student Journal*, 45(1).
- Messinis, G. (2015, May 13, 2015). ATAR found to be a poor predictor of how well students do at uni. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com/atar-found-to-be-a-poor-predictor-of-how-well-students-do-at-uni-41677>
- Meuleman, A.-M., Garrett, R., Wrench, A., & King, S. (2014). 'Some people might say I'm thriving but...': non-traditional students' experiences of university. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(5) 503-517.
- Nicpon, M., Huser, L., Hull Blanks, E., Sollenberger, S., Befort, C., & Robinson Kurpius, S. (2007). The relationship of loneliness and social support with college freshmen's academic performance and persistence. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice*, 8(3), 345-358. doi: 10.2190/A465-356M-7652-783R
- O'Shea, S. (2007). Well I got here... but what happens next? Exploring the early narratives of first year female students who are the first in the family to attend university. *Journal of Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association*, 29, 36-51.
- O'Shea, S. (2011). Nomads in diaspora space: exploring women's identity work in the University. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 43(1), 61-77.
- O'Shea, S. (2013). Transitions and turning points: exploring how first-in-family female students story their transition to university and student identity formation. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* (ahead-of-print), 1-24.

- O'Shea, S., & Stone, C. (2011). Transformations and self-discovery: mature-age women's reflections on returning to university study. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 33(3), 273-288. doi: 10.1080/0158037X.2011.565046
- O'Shea, S., & Stone, C. (2014). The hero's journey: Stories of women returning to education. *International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 5(1).
- Orbe, M. P. (2004). Negotiating multiple identities within multiple frames: an analysis of first-generation college students. *Communication Education*, 53(2), 131-149.
- Pascarella, E. T., Pierson, C. T., Wolniak, G. C., & Terenzini, P. T. (2004). First-generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes. *Journal of Higher Education*, 75(3), 249-284.
- Portes, A. (2000). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. In E. L. Lesser (Ed.), *Knowledge and Social Capital* (pp. 43-67). Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Pratt, M., & Foreman, P. O. (2000). Classifying managerial responses to multiple organizational identities. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(1), 18-42.
- Quinn, J., Thomas, L., Slack, K., Casey, L., Thexton, W., & Noble, J. (2005). *From life crisis to lifelong learning. Rethinking working class 'drop out' from higher education*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Rasmussen, C. J. (2006). Effective cost-sharing models in higher education: Insights from low-income students in Australian Universities. *Higher Education*, 51(1), 1-25.
- Reay, D., David, M. E., & Ball, S. J. (2005). *Degrees of choice: Class, race, gender and higher education*. UK: Trentham Books.
- Reay, D., Crozier, G., & Clayton, J. (2009). 'Strangers in paradise'? Working-class students in elite universities. *Sociology*, 43(6), 1103-1121.
- Reeve, J. M. (2005). *Understanding motivation and emotion*. (4th ed.). Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.
- Riessman, C. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Los Angeles, Calif: Sage Publications.
- Sansone, C. and Harackiewicz, J.M. (2000). Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation – the search for optimal Motivation and Performance. Academic Press, California
- Scanlon, L., Rowling, L., and Weber, Z. (2007). You don't have like an identity. You are just lost in a crowd: Forming a student identity in the first-year transition to university. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 10 (2): 223–241.
- Schunk, D. H., & Pajares, F. (2002). The development of academic self-efficacy. In A. Wigfield & J. S. Eccles (Eds.), *Development of Achievement Motivation* (pp. 15- 31). San Diego: Academic Press.
- Shields, N. (2002). Anticipatory socialization, adjustment to university life, and perceived stress: Generational and sibling effects. *Social Psychology of Education*, 5(4), 365-392.
- Simmons, Omari Scott, (2010) Lost in transition: the implications of social capital for higher education Accessed (March 14, 2011). *Notre Dame Law Review*, 42(2010), Wake Forest Univ. Legal Studies Paper No. 1785528.
- Simmons, O. S. (2013). Lost in transition: the implications of social capital for higher education Access. *Notre Dame Law Review*, 87(4): 205-252.
- Smith, L. (2011). Experiential 'hot' knowledge and its influence on low-ses students' capacities to aspire to higher education. *Critical Studies in Education*, 52(2): 165–177.

- Stallman, H. M. (2010). Psychological distress in university students: A comparison with general population data. *Australian Psychologist, 45*(4), 249-257. doi: 10.1080/00050067.2010.482109
- Stebleton, M. J., Soria, K. M., & Huesman, R. L. (2014). First-generation students' sense of belonging, mental health, and use of counseling services at public research universities. *Journal of College Counseling, 17*(1), 6-20.
- Stone, C. (2008). Listening to individual voices and stories – the mature-age student experience. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 48*(2), 263-290.
- Stone, C., & O'Shea, S. (2013). Time, money, leisure and guilt-the gendered challenges of higher education for mature-age students. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 53*(1), 95-116.
- Stone, C., & O'Shea, S. E. (2012). *Transformations and Self Discovery, Stories of Women Returning to Education*. Champaign, Illinois: Common Ground Publishing.
- Swenson, L. M., Nordstrom, A., & Hiester, M. (2008). The role of peer relationships in adjustment to college. *Journal of College Student Development, 49*(6), 551-567.
- Talebi, M., Matheson, K., & Anisman, H. (2013). Does being first in family matter? The role of identity in the stigma of seeking help among first and non-first in family university students. *International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education, 4*(1), 47-58.
- Tinto, V. (2010). From theory to action: Exploring the institutional conditions for student retention In J. Smart (Ed.), *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* (Vol. 25, pp. 51-89): Springer Netherlands.
- Thomas, L. (2002). Student retention in higher education: the role of institutional habitus. *Journal of Education Policy, 17*(4), 423-442.
- Thomas, L., & Quinn, J. (2006). *First Generation Entry Into Higher Education*. London, UK: McGraw-Hill International.
- van der Meer, J., Jansen, E., & Torenbeek, M. (2010). It's Almost a Mindset that Teachers Need to Change: First-Year Students' Need to Be Inducted into Time Management. *Studies in Higher Education, 35* (7): 777-791.
- Von Ah, D., Ebert, S., Ngamvitroj, A., Park, N., & Kang, D.-H. (2004). Predictors of health behaviours in college students. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 48*(5), 463-474. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2648.2004.03229.x
- Vuong, M., Brown-Welty, S., & Tracz, S. (2010). The effects of self-efficacy on academic success of first-generation college sophomore students. *Journal of College Student Development, 51*(1), 50-64.
- Wallace, L. S., Buckworth, J., Kirby, T. E., & Sherman, W. M. (2000). Characteristics of exercise behavior among college students: Application of social cognitive theory to predicting stage of change. *Preventive Medicine, 31*(5), 494-505. doi: 10.1006/pmed.2000.0736
- Wakeford, N. (1994). Becoming a mature student: The social risks of identification. *Journal of Access Studies, 9*, 241-256.
- Wallace, L., Buckworth, J., Kirby, T., & Sherman, W. (2000). Characteristics of exercise behavior among college students: Application of social cognitive theory to predicting stage of change. *Preventive Medicine, 31*(5), 494-505. doi: 10.1006/pmed.2000.0736
- Wang, C. C. D., & Castañeda-Sound, C. (2008). The role of generational status, self-esteem, academic self-efficacy, and perceived social support in college students' psychological well-being. *Journal of College Counseling, 11*(2), 101-118.

White, R. and Wyn, J., (2008). *Youth and Society*. 2nd edition. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

World Health Organisation, (2006). *Constitution of the World Health Organization*. Basic Documents, Forty-fifth edition, Supplement, [online], available: [www.who.int/governance/eb/who\\_constitution\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/governance/eb/who_constitution_en.pdf). [accessed January 2015]

World Health Organisation, (2011). *Mental health: A state or well-being'*, [online], available: [http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental\\_health/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/index.html) [accessed January 2015]

Zeldin, A. L., & Pajares, F. (2000). Against the odds: Self-efficacy beliefs of women in mathematical, scientific, and technological careers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37, 215-246.