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Understanding the First-Generation Graduate Student Experience

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First-Generation
students are in all
aspects of the
university.

Literature Review Overview



Research is still relatively new (as far back as 2016)



Focus on challenge, ways to navigate the graduate school space, and potential supports



Research is First Gen +

- A specific identity marker
- Focused on a specific discipline
- Focused on both an identity marker and discipline

What did we want to know?

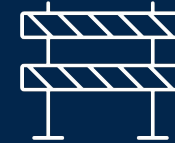


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How do we
define it?



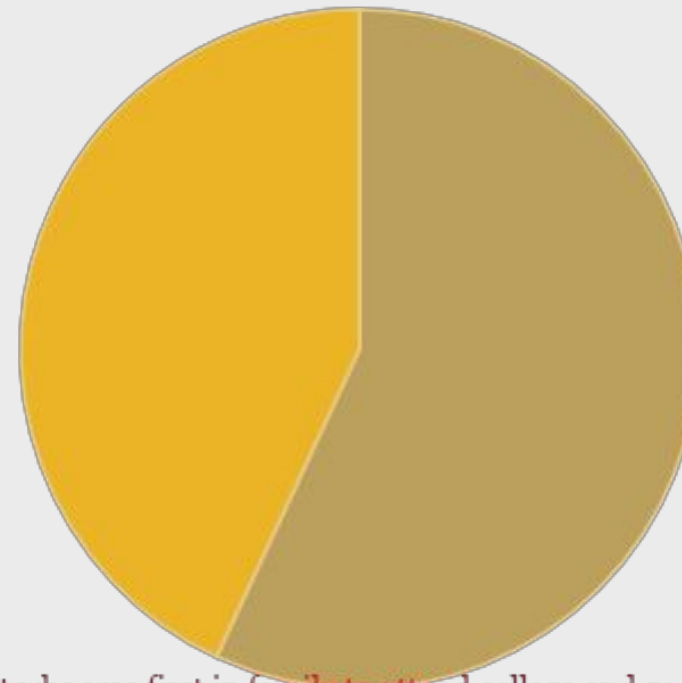
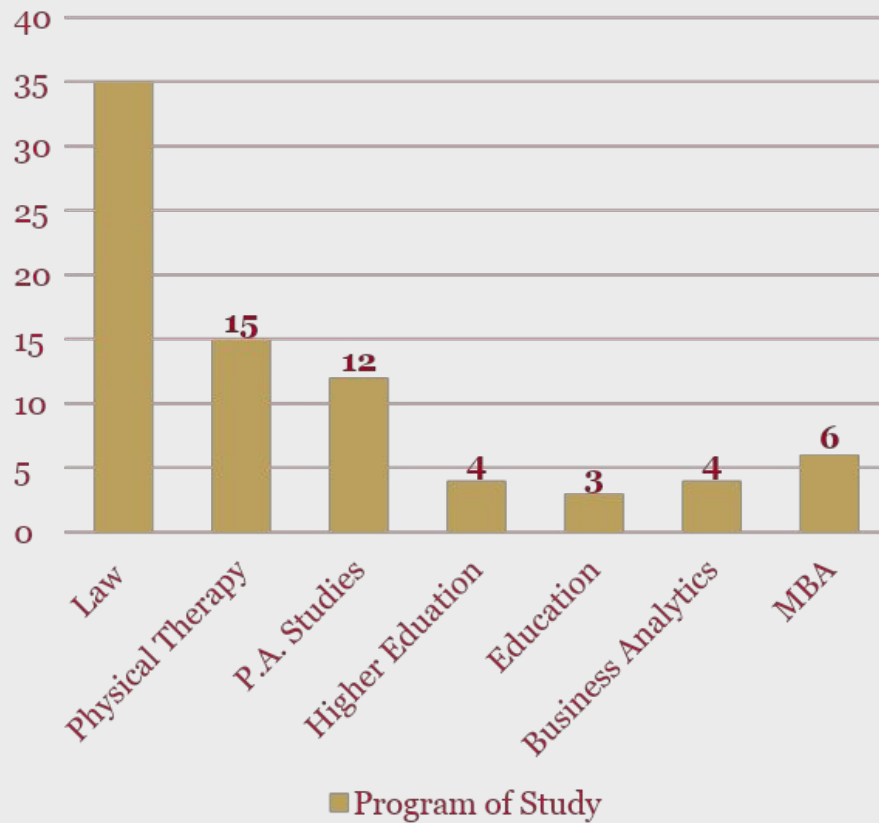
What are some
experiences



What are some
challenges

So, we did a survey

Definition/Experience



- FG grad student who was first in family to attend college and go to graduate school
- FG graduate student who is the first in their family to attend graduate school (those whose parent(s)/guardian(s) have not earned a master's or doctoral degree)

We also asked...

- 
- How first-generation undergraduate experience influenced your graduate school experience
 - How they came to understand being a first-generation graduate student
 - Challenges faced as a first-generation graduate student
 - Where do they find support?
 - Ideas around potential resources and supports

“My undergraduate experience allowed me to take pride in being a first generation, however, there were not many resources available in my undergrad and so I thought it would be the same in law school”

On how first-generation undergraduate experience influences graduate experience

“I hadn't ever really thought about being the first in my family to go to graduate school until I got to Elon. I think my understanding of its implications came from talking to other first gens”

“...but I've known I wanted to go through more school than only a bachelors degree for a long time.”

On understanding being first-generation

“There is a ***lot of struggle in terms of finding support*** and understanding of what I am going through with family members.”

“***No one in my family can truly relate to this level or intensity of education***, so their guidance was a bit unfounded. We did not know anyone that was in the medical field to begin with. Finances at this level are always difficult.”

“In terms of imposter syndrome, that has come and go several times throughout my experience. ***I would often think if I ready and able to be a PT***”

On challenges as a first-generation student

“That it may be more difficult in some ways, but that **doesn't make it impossible.**”

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Discussion Time

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1. What does belonging feel or look like for graduate students?
2. How does academic program and campus characteristics (e.g., composition of students: primarily white institution, HBCU; size of institution, type of institution: large research institution, liberal arts focused) play a factor in fostering belonging among first-generation graduate student?
3. How do institutions better facilitate the shift from undergrad to graduate experiences for first-generation graduate students?
4. In what ways do institutions support the graduate student community on your campus? In what ways do graduate students form peer-to-peer community? What are the successes of graduate student organization's efforts to create a stronger community?

Post-Session Action Steps

- Compare experiences of belonging of first-gen graduate students who attended the same institution for undergrad and grad vs. those who attend different institutions
- Review your policies and language to determine if **“all students”** mean graduate students, too.
- Anything else??

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**Thank you for
participating**
