



# HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

230 South LaSalle Street, Suite 7-500  
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September 4, 2019

Dr. John Dunn  
Interim Chancellor  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
1265 Lincoln Drive  
Carbondale, IL 62901

Dear Chancellor Dunn:

Attached is the Quality Initiative Report (QIR) Review evaluation information. Southern Illinois University Carbondale's QIR showed genuine effort and has been accepted by the Commission. The attached reviewer evaluation contains a rationale for this outcome.

Peer reviewers evaluate all the QIRs based on the genuine effort of the institution, the seriousness of the undertaking, the significance of scope and impact of the work, the genuineness of the commitment to the initiative, and adequate resource provision.

If you have questions about the QIR reviewer information, please contact either Kathy Bijak ([kbijak@hlcommission.org](mailto:kbijak@hlcommission.org)) or Pat Newton-Curran ([pnewton@hlcommission.org](mailto:pnewton@hlcommission.org)).

***Higher Learning Commission***



FORM

## Open Pathway Quality Initiative Report

### *Panel Review and Recommendation Form*

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The Quality Initiative panel review process confirms or questions the institution's effort in undertaking the Quality Initiative proposal approved by the Commission. As indicated in the explication of the review, the Quality Initiative process encourages institutions to take risks, innovate, take on a tough challenge, or pursue a yet unproven strategy or hypothesis. Thus failure of an initiative to achieve its goals is acceptable. An institution may learn much from such failure. What is not acceptable is failure of the institution to pursue the initiative with genuine effort. Genuineness of effort, not success of the initiative, constitutes the focus of the Quality Initiative review and serves as its sole point of evaluation.

Name of Institution: Southern Illinois University Carbondale

State: Illinois

Institutional ID: 1156

Reviewers (names, titles, institutions): Dr. Kristin Mallory, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Wor-Wic Community College, MD and Dr. Mary Merrifield, Retired, Maryville University of St Louis

Date: 9/3/2019

### **I. Quality Initiative Review**

- The institution demonstrated its seriousness of the undertaking.
- The institution demonstrated that the initiative had scope and impact.
- The institution demonstrated a commitment to and engagement in the initiative.
- The institution demonstrated adequate resource provision.

### **II. Recommendation**

- The panel confirms genuine effort on the part of the institution.
- The panel cannot confirm genuine effort on the part of the institution.

### III. Rationale (required)

Southern Illinois University Carbondale successfully completed a quality initiative project to thoroughly examine four variables that characterize first-generation students at the university. The four variables were 1) Demographic; 2) Financial; 3) Academic; and 4) Self-reported challenges to completing college. They have achieved all four goals for the quality initiative project. This was a serious undertaking for the institution. Self-identified first-generation students made up 46% of the first-time full-time students admitted between 2009 and 2016, so the value of the study is substantial.

The first variable, demographics, characterized first-generation students by race, ethnicity, gender, college major, county of origin, and eligibility for financial aid. The second variable, financials, included both the cost of college attendance and college affordability. The third variable, academics, provided data on retention and graduation rates, GPA, ACT scores, credit enrollment, and likelihood of being on probation. The fourth variable examined challenges to completing college as reported by students themselves. The data from these variables was presented in the report.

The objective of the initiative was to 1) Identify barriers to retention and graduation of first-generation students; and 2) Establish a profile of the institution's first-generation students so that support strategies can be formulated, implemented and assessed. The most significant impact of the project will involve the Fall 2019 opening of the Saluki first-generation center for students. With this baseline data, interventions such as those at the center can be assessed. This demonstrated not only scope, but also impact

The university demonstrated a commitment to and engagement in the initiative. It included administrators, faculty and staff from areas such as the Office of the Provost, The Center for Teaching Excellence, the University Core Curriculum, Financial Aid, Admissions, Student Affairs, and the College of Education and Human Services. This was a broad group of individuals dedicated to the project.

The SIUC Foundation has committed \$500,000 to the First-Generation Program and Center over five years. The college also added a new position, the Assistant Dean of Student Services, who will be heading the effort. In addition to the resources made available during the initial phase of this project, this will sustain the initiative. This demonstrates adequate resource provision by the institution.

The Quality Initiative Report was comprehensive and communicated the goals of the project as well as the outcomes of the goals. The data presented in the report showed that the project was thorough and well executed. The plan is to disseminate the findings and to use them to establish interventions that can then be assessed using the model in place. This should provide Southern Illinois University Carbondale with a sustainable model for making the quality initiative an integral part of the campus culture.



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# HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

FORM

## Open Pathway Quality Initiative Report

*(Institutional Report)*

The enclosed Quality Initiative Report represents the work that the institution has undertaken to fulfill the Improvement Process of the Open Pathway.

*John M. Dunn*

*07/22/2019*

*Signature of Institution's President or Chancellor*

*Date*

John M. Dunn, Chancellor

*Printed/Typed Name and Title*

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

*Name of Institution*

Carbondale, IL 62901

*City and State*

**Date:**

**Contact Person for Report:** Lizette Chevalier

**Contact Person's Email Address:** Lizette.Chevalier@siu.edu

### Overview of the Quality Initiative

1. Provide a one-page executive summary that describes the Quality Initiative, summarizes what was accomplished and explains any changes made to the initiative over the time period.

It is not uncommon for first year first time students to struggle with the inimitable experience of transitioning from high school to college, but the challenges may be intensified for first-generation college students. They often don't have any family members with college experience to provide guidance. It is generally understood that first-generation students need targeted support to thrive in a competitive higher education atmosphere. Institutions that offer programs specifically for first-generation students have shown a significant impact on student success and retention.

Approximately one half of Southern Illinois University Carbondale's (SIUC) undergraduate student population are first-generation students. Over the years, SIUC has implemented numerous support services that align with best practices and are intended to improve the retention of first-generation and other under-represented students. However, these previous attempts were implemented without examining data that could identify specific needs of students on the SIUC campus. Identifying those needs would allow us to invest in areas of impact and provide a baseline for assessing the efficacy of initiatives targeting the success of first-generation students. In addition to identifying barriers, this study developed a profile of first-generation students that will inform the campus community.

The Quality Initiative Project examined four variables that intuitively define the profile first-generation students: 1) Demographic variables, including race, ethnicity, gender, college major, county of origin, and eligibility for federal aid; 2) Financial variables, including cost of college attendance and affordability; 3) Academic variables, including retention and graduation rates, GPA, ACT scores, credit enrollment, and likelihood of being on academic probation; and 4) self-reported challenges to completing college, as expressed by students themselves. Contributors to the Quality Initiative project include faculty, staff, administrators, and a campus wide working group, the First-Generation Community of Practice.

The analyses revealed gaps in academic indicators such as high school and college GPA, retention rates, and graduation rates between first-generation and non-first-generation students. In addition, a higher percentage of first-generation students were shown to have been placed on academic probation relative to non-first-generation students. Finally, first-generation students reported several financial challenges that impacted their success while in college. Specific details of these factors are presented later in this report.

For several years now the SIU community has been interested in creating a first-generation center for students, stemming in part from a \$1M grant from the Suder Foundation in 2010. Central to the grant was implementing the First Scholars program, which targeted full-time first-time first-generation students with solid academic abilities who might not meet the criteria for highly competitive merit scholarships. Numerous factors may be at play for first-generation students, ranging from bias in standardized exams, a lack of support in meeting the markers



used for admission, and hardships which may have affected their advancement in high school. First Scholars required students to live in a Living Learning Community as freshmen, and provided comprehensive academic, social, personal development, and financial support.

The First Gen Community of Practice was established with membership from faculty and staff to support the program. After the grant ended, the Community of Practice continued to advocate and provide resources for first-generation students. This committee also served as an advisory board for the Quality Initiative Project. The Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs supported a Provost Fellow through Fall 2018 to Spring 2019 to lead the Quality Initiative Project. The Fellow met regularly with the Community of Practice and solicited their feedback on all aspects of the project.

The Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs has been successful in obtaining financial support through the SIU Foundation to establish a specialized program for first-generation students. In Fall 2019, the First Saluki Center will open. The center will serve as a campus-wide collaboration dedicated to providing, social and emotional support, financial literacy, career readiness, and academic resources for first-generation students. The Quality Initiative Project promoted the awareness and interest on campus for this first-gen resource center. The findings from the project will also provide a baseline for assessing the effectiveness of the program and center.

The results of the initiative will be presented to various constituencies this fall to inform the campus community. Understanding the demographics and challenges of our students will influence the classroom environment and the services provided throughout campus. SIUC's commitment to provide students with an education that promises to be transformative is strengthened when we have the knowledge of who our students are.

*Note: This report uses the federal definition of a first-generation college student, which identifies a student as first-generation if his or her parent(s) or legal guardian(s) have not completed a bachelor's degree.*

## Scope and Impact of the Initiative

2. Explain in more detail what was accomplished in the Quality Initiative in relation to its purposes and goals. (If applicable, explain the initiative's hypotheses and findings.)

The objective of the Quality Initiative was to 1) identify barriers to retention and graduation of first-generation students and 2) establish a profile of the institution's first-generation students so that support strategies could be formulated, implemented, and assessed. Data were compiled from numerous sources and analyzed. Specific goals, generalized approaches to data collection and analysis, and summary findings are provided below.

**Goal 1:** Develop a demographic profile of first-generation students, including non-academic variables such as race, ethnicity, gender, and county of origin. Results showed that approximately half SIUC's admitted students are first-generation, with the majority identifying as White, followed by Black. Over half of the institution's first-generation students are female.

**Goal 2:** Develop academic profiles of first-generation students, detailing their incoming academic attributes, performance during freshman year, and which programs of study they typically choose. Results showed that mean high school GPA, ACT score, freshman year GPA,

number of credits taken, and academic standard were all lower among first-generation students compared to non-first-generation students. First-generation students most frequently entered the degree programs of Workforce Education and Development, Psychology, and Criminology & Criminal Justice.

*Goal 3:* Compare retention and graduation rates of first-generation versus non-first-generation students. Findings showed lower retention and graduation rates for first-generation students

*Goal 4.* Compare the amount of financial aid accepted by first-generation students relative to non-first-generation students. Results suggest higher percentages of first-generation students accept federal financial support, including grants and aid, in order to attend college.

*Goal 5.* Identify financial variables that affect students' academic success, including the progressive cost of college attendance compared to minimum wage. Findings suggest that students earning minimum wage struggle to afford tuition and housing costs.

*Goal 6.* Investigate the perspectives of first-generation students on the challenges they encounter over the course of their college experience. Results from student interviews and surveys suggest that first-generation students experienced a number of challenges before and during their college experience that affected their ability to persist to degree completion, including confusion regarding the application and admission process and balancing work and school.

*Goal 7.* Provide evidence that a specialized support center for first-generation students could improve the retention, persistence and graduation of first-generation students.

Prior to the completion of the Quality Initiative, the First Saluki Center was implemented by Student Affairs on July 1, 2019 and will begin serving students in Fall 2019. The Quality Initiative Project and the preliminary results supported the decision to establish the center. The Quality Initiative Project will provide baseline data for the assessment and evaluation of programs provided through the center.

3. Evaluate the impact of the initiative, including any changes in processes, policies, technology, curricula, programs, student learning and success that are now in place in consequence of the initiative.

The results of the Quality Initiative will be widely disseminated across campus constituency groups and administrative offices so that faculty, staff and administrators are educated on the unique needs and characteristics of the institution's first-generation students.

The project supported the implementation of the First Saluki Center by Student Affairs. The center will meet the needs of first-generation students who are not eligible for or served by TRiO Student Support Services. The center will be a campus-wide collaboration dedicated to academic, cultural, and social integration of first-generation students with university faculty, administration, staff, alumni, and the campus community. Outreach will include peer-to-peer mentoring program and guidance for family members. Students and their families will participate in a "Getting Started" campaign to orient them to the university and its services. Collaborators on the programs include New Student Programs, University Housing, Veteran

Affairs, Exploratory Students, Academic Advising, the McNair Scholar's Program, and the Career Development Center.

The SIUC Foundation has committed \$500,000 to the First-Generation Program and Center (\$100,000 per year for five years). During this time external sources of funding will be pursued. The Student Services building will house the center, headed by an Assistant Dean of Students appointed on July 1, 2019. The center set six goals for their first year of operation: 1) Provide first-generation students with support services that promote their successful integration into the academic, social, and cultural community of the University; 2) Improve student retention and completion rates; 3) Provide first-generation students with the opportunity to engage in research, creative activity, and service learning; 4) Enhance research, scholarly and creative productivity to the benefit of students, community and other University stakeholders; 5) Build and maintain a strong public image that reflects SIUC's commitment to student success, campus safety, knowledge creation and service to southern Illinois, the broader region, and the world; and 6) Enhance SIUC's value to and collaboration with the broader community toward the mutual goals of research translation, workforce education, and economic development.

#### 4. Explain any tools, data or other information that resulted from the work of the initiative.

The initial phase of this study involved collecting and evaluating descriptive data collected from the offices of Institutional Research and Financial Aid. Researchers collected academic reports from the institution's student information system. The second phase involved assessment of students' self-reported experiences that were obtained via student surveys and interviews. The quantitative data provide a baseline profile for the first-generation student population, whereas qualitative data provide subjective information about the student experience.

##### Student Demographics

From a total of 32,393 admitted first-generation undergraduate students at SIUC between 2009 and 2016, 48% (15,556) self-identified as first-generation students. Parsed as first-time full-time students (FTFT), 18,002 FTFT students 46% (8,325) self-identified as first-generation. Thirty-eight percent of first-generation FTFT students identified as White, 35% identified as Black, 10% identified as Hispanic, 2% identified as Asian, 3% marked Other, and 12% did not identify race. Fifty-five percent of the institution's first-generation students were female. Figure 1 shows the number of Asian, Hispanic, Black, and White first-generation freshmen for the years 2009-2015. The figure shows that most first-generation freshmen were Black or White, but the number of Hispanic/Latino students has increased over the course of this time span.

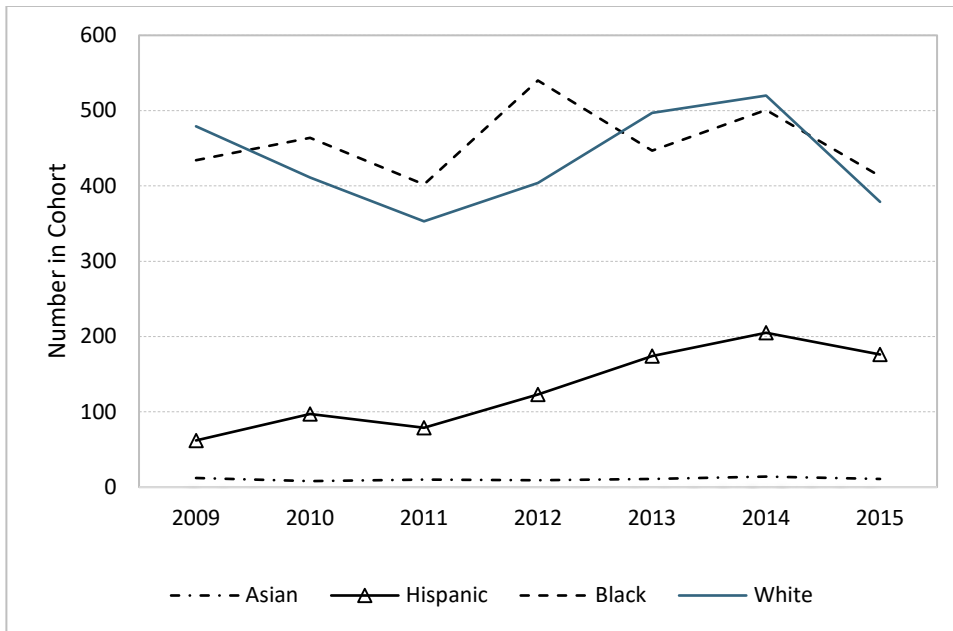


Figure 1 Number of first-generation freshmen by race/ethnicity for the years 2009-2016.

Tables 1-4 show the mean ACT scores and the number of first-generation FTFT students who continued onto their 2<sup>nd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> years of college by ethnicity, for the years 2009-2015. The figures also show the number of students who graduated within 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 years for each group. Collectively, the tables show that Black first-generation students had the lowest mean ACT scores for the four groups of students. All tables show that fewer students persisted toward degree completion the longer they remained in school.

Table 1. Numbers of first-generation Black/African American freshmen and mean ACT scores for the years 2009-2015, and numbers of students who continued or graduated, by year.

Cohort	N	ACT Avg	1st Year Retention	2nd Year Retention	Graduated within 4 years	Continued 5th Year	Graduated within 5 Years	Continued 6th Year	Graduated within 6 years	Continued 7th Year	Graduated within 7 Years	Continued 8th Year
2009	434	18.4	273 (63%)	188 (43%)	47 (11%)	97 (22%)	104 (24%)	21 (5%)	121 (28%)	6 (1%)	125 (29%)	6 (1%)
2010	464	18.2	276 (59%)	174 (38%)	49 (11%)	91 (20%)	102 (22%)	27 (6%)	122 (26%)	11 (2%)		
2011	402	18.3	190 (47%)	119 (30%)	35 (9%)	65 (16%)	72 (18%)	24 (6%)				
2012	540	18.1	239 (44%)	165 (31%)	51 (9%)	85 (16%)						
2013	447	18.6	246 (55%)	179 (40%)								
2014	501	18.6	251 (50%)	179 (36%)								
2015	413	18.7	173 (42%)									

Table 2. Numbers of first-generation Hispanic/Latino freshmen and mean ACT scores for the years 2009-2015, and numbers of students who continued or graduated, by year.

Cohort	N	ACT Avg	Continued 2nd Year	Continued 3rd Year	Graduated within 4 years	Continued 5th Year	Graduated within 5 Years	Continued 6th Year	Graduated within 6 years	Continued 7th Year	Graduated within 7 Years	Continued 8th Year
2009	62	19.8	35 (56%)	28 (45%)	7 (11%)	17 (27%)	15 (24%)	5 (8%)	16 (26%)	2 (3%)	16 (26%)	1 (2%)
2010	97	19.9	57 (59%)	40 (41%)	12 (12%)	17 (18%)	20 (21%)	9 (9%)	24 (25%)	6 (6%)		
2011	79	20.8	47 (59%)	34 (43%)	6 (8%)	21 (27%)	21 (27%)	3 (4%)				
2012	123	20.8	66 (54%)	51 (41%)	22 (18%)	20 (16%)						
2013	174	20.7	96 (55%)	75 (43%)								
2014	205	21.1	136 (66%)	103 (50%)								
2015	176	20.4	93 (53%)									

Table 3. Numbers of first-generation White freshmen and mean ACT scores for the years 2009-2015, and numbers of students who continued or graduated, by year.

Cohort	N	ACT Avg	Continued 2nd Year	Continued 3rd Year	Graduated within 4 years	Continued 5th Year	Graduated within 5 Years	Continued 6th Year	Graduated within 6 years	Continued 7th Year	Graduated within 7 Years	Continued 8th Year
2009	479	22.7	325 (68%)	281 (59%)	139 (29%)	104 (22%)	209 (44%)	23 (5%)	235 (49%)	6 (1%)	238 (50%)	4 (1%)
2010	411	22.5	270 (66%)	236 (57%)	129 (31%)	79 (19%)	181 (44%)	18 (4%)	194 (47%)	7 (2%)		
2011	353	22.7	222 (63%)	189 (54%)	94 (27%)	78 (22%)	135 (38%)	27 (8%)				
2012	404	22.6	280 (69%)	244 (60%)	135 (33%)	75 (19%)						
2013	497	23.3	365 (73%)	309 (62%)								
2014	520	23.9	385 (74%)	332 (64%)								
2015	379	23.7	277 (73%)									

Table 4. Numbers of first-generation Asian freshmen and mean ACT scores for the years 2009-2015, and numbers of students who continued or graduated by year.

Cohort	N	ACT Avg	Continued 2nd Year	Continued 3rd Year	Graduated within 4 years	Continued 5th Year	Graduated within 5 Years	Continued 6th Year	Graduated within 6 years	Continued 7th Year	Graduated within 7 Years	Continued 8th Year
2009	12	22.6	9 (75%)	5 (42%)	3 (25%)	1 (8%)	4 (33%)	0 (0%)	4 (33%)	0 (0%)	4 (33%)	0 (0%)
2010	8	21.9	7 (88%)	7 (88%)	4 (50%)	1 (13%)	5 (63%)	0 (0%)	5 (63%)	0 (0%)		
2011	10	19.8	6 (60%)	4 (40%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)				
2012	9	20.3	9 (100%)	5 (56%)	2 (22%)	3 (33%)						
2013	11	23.6	6 (55%)	4 (36%)								
2014	14	22.5	11 (79%)	10 (71%)								
2015	11	21.6	9 (82%)									

A majority of SIUC’s first-generation students were found to be from northern Illinois. The top five counties from which first-generation students’ families resided the years 2009-2016 include Cook (3785), Will (387), Lake (338), DuPage (294), and St. Clair (187), all located in the greater Chicago region. The top five counties from which non-first-generation students’ families were found to reside include Cook (2,539), Will (513), DuPage (507), and Jackson (328), the latter of

which is the county that includes the SIUC main campus. It is interesting to note that more of the institution's local students seem to be non-first-generation.

### Financial Indicators

Figures 2 and 3 show the percentages of SIUC's first-generation freshmen students who received financial aid relative to non-first-generation students for the years 2009-2016. The figures show that a substantially larger percentage of first-generation students received federal grants and loans relative to non-first-generation students. This difference is greatest for the students who received federal grants.

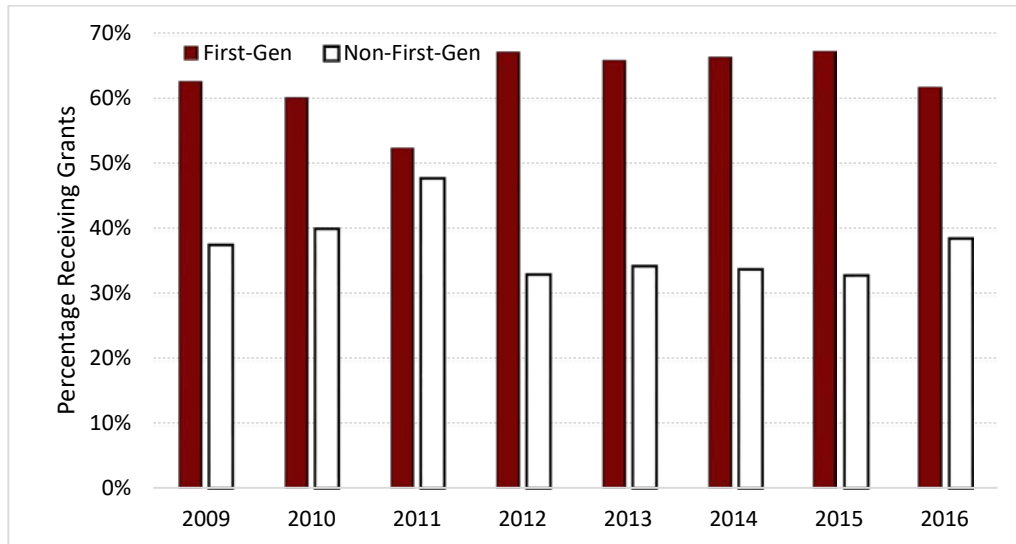


Figure 2 Percentage of first-generation and non-first-generation freshmen students who received federal grants from 2009-2016.

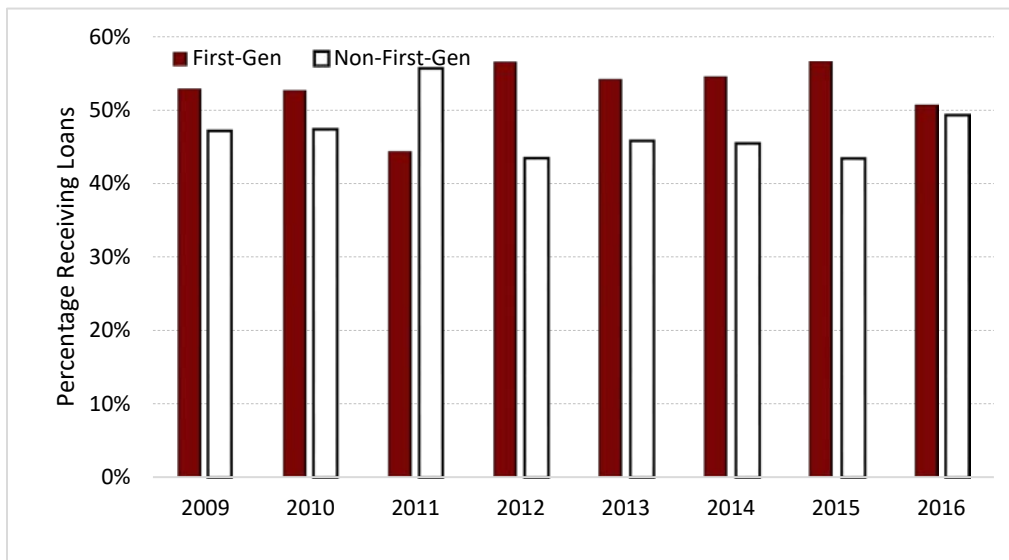


Figure 3 Percentage of first-generation and non-first-generation freshmen students who received federal loans from 2009-2016.

Table 5. Tuition and fee costs, minimum wage, and estimated earnings in minimum wage jobs from the years 2007-2018.

	FY07	FY08	FY09	FY10	FY11	FY12
<b>Tuition+Fee</b>	\$ 8,899	\$ 9,813	\$10,411	\$10,468	\$11,038	\$11,528
<b>Room, Board and other</b>	\$10,001	\$10,936	\$11,502	\$12,064	\$12,429	\$12,907
<b>Total Costs of Attendance</b>	\$18,900	\$20,749	\$21,913	\$22,532	\$23,467	\$24,435
<b>Min Wage</b>	\$ 6.50	\$ 7.50	\$ 7.75	\$ 8.00	\$ 8.25	\$ 8.25
<b>Potential Summer Earnings</b>	\$ 3,120	\$ 3,600	\$ 3,720	\$ 3,840	\$ 3,960	\$ 3,960
<b>Potential Earning During Academic Year</b>	\$ 4,680	\$ 5,400	\$ 5,580	\$ 5,760	\$ 5,940	\$ 5,940
<b>Estimate of Annual Student Wages</b>	\$ 7,800	\$ 9,000	\$ 9,300	\$ 9,600	\$ 9,900	\$ 9,900
<b>Ratio (Earnings/Total Costs)</b>	0.41	0.43	0.42	0.43	0.42	0.41
	FY13	FY14	FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18
<b>Tuition+Fee</b>	\$12,093	\$12,351	\$13,137	\$13,481	\$13,932	\$14,704
<b>Room, Board and other</b>	\$12,093	\$12,351	\$13,137	\$13,481	\$13,932	\$14,704
<b>Total Costs of Attendance</b>	\$13,316	\$13,735	\$14,037	\$14,227	\$14,663	\$14,663
<b>Min Wage</b>	\$25,409	\$26,086	\$27,174	\$27,708	\$28,595	\$29,367
<b>Potential Summer Earnings</b>	\$ 8.25	\$ 8.25	\$ 8.25	\$ 8.25	\$ 8.25	\$ 8.25
<b>Potential Earning During Academic Year</b>	\$ 3,960	\$ 3,960	\$ 3,960	\$ 3,960	\$ 3,960	\$ 3,960
<b>Estimate of Annual Student Wages</b>	\$ 5,940	\$ 5,940	\$ 5,940	\$ 5,940	\$ 5,940	\$ 5,940
<b>Ratio (Earnings/Total Costs)</b>	\$ 9,900	\$ 9,900	\$ 9,900	\$ 9,900	\$ 9,900	\$ 9,900
	0.39	0.38	0.36	0.36	0.35	0.34

Table 5 and Figure 4 show a comparison of the cost of attending SIUC and potential student earnings based on the minimum wage. The total cost of attendance data for universities are published annually and include tuition, fees, room, board and other costs of living expenses. To understand how expenses measure up to wages earned by most students, the total cost of attendance was compared to a typical student income. Student earning was based on the minimum wage in any given year. The data shown assumes full time employment in the summer (40 hr/wk for 3 months), and 0.5 time (20 hr/wk for 9 months). For example, in 2007, the minimum wage was \$6.50/hr. The total earning of a student was calculated as:

$$(\$6.50/\text{hr})(40 \text{ hr/wk})(4 \text{ wk/mo})(3 \text{ mo}) + (\$6.50/\text{hr})(20 \text{ hr/wk})(4 \text{ wk/mo})(9 \text{ mo}) = \$7800$$

The estimated cost of attendance for the fall and spring terms that year was \$18,900. Assuming a student lived with family during the summer (no cost of living), the hours work paid for (7800/18900) 41% of the cost of attendance. This analysis was carried through to 2018 in order to evaluate the extent students would be able to pay college costs in this scenario. It is important when viewing these results to recognize the financial challenges of supporting family, health care, transportation, and other costs students face, and how that gives context to why students depend on financial aid and other support.

In summary, the costs of attendance at SIUC has risen steadily. In 2017, the total cost was estimated at \$18,000, rising to \$29,367 in 2018. Student earnings, based on a reasonable estimate of working full time in the summer and part time during the school year at minimum wage, have not kept pace, decreasing from covering 41% of the costs in 2007 to 31% of the costs in 2018. Many of first-generation students need to work more than 20 hours a week is

important which keeps them away from learning activities that occur outside the classroom, such as volunteer design teams or guest lectures as well as social networking activities that promote mentoring and support.

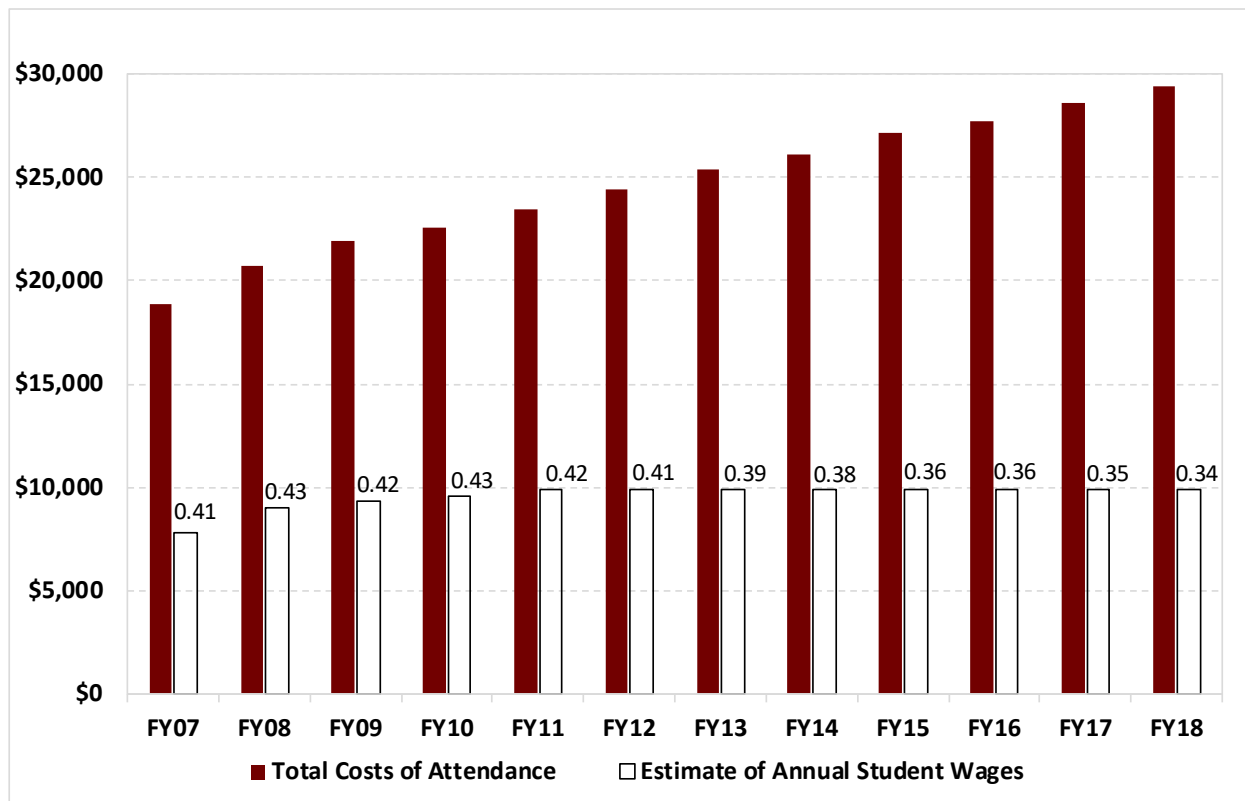


Figure 4 Total cost of attendance, estimated annual student wages, and ratio of minimum wages earned to attendance cost for the years 2007-2018

### Academic Variables

Table 6 lists several academic markers that are differentiated between first-generation and non-first-generation students. The data is averaged from 2009-2016. The table shows gaps in achievement between first-generation and non-first-generation students in all of the markers: retention and graduation rates; mean high school GPA; first and second semester GPA, mean ACT scores; mean number of credits enrolled in during the first and second semesters; and the percentage of students placed on academic probation during their first and second semesters. The most striking gap is the graduation rates between the two sets of students (48% vs. 57%, respectively), and the fact that first-generation students were more likely to be placed on academic probation (< 2.0 GPA) after their first semester (57% vs. 43% students respectively) and second semester (56% vs. 44% students, respectively).



Table 7 shows the retention and 6-year graduation rates for new student cohorts and the subsets of first-generation students within those cohorts for the years 2009-2016. This table shows that first-generation students transitioning from freshman to sophomore status were retained at an average of 60%, as opposed to an average 66.3% for all students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 64% of students in the United States graduate within six years, while only 50% of the nation's first-generation students accomplish this goal. Currently at SIUC, 34.6% of first-generation students graduate within six years.

*Table 6. Average values for academic markers for 32,393 first-generation and non-first-generation students between 2009 and 2016 (except for Graduation Rates which are for 2009 - 2012). Numbers in parentheses represent values for FTFT students only.*

Academic Marker	First-Generation	Non First-Generation
Retention	65.6% (60.0%)	72.3% (71.6%)
6-Year Graduation	47.9% (34.6%)	56.9% (49.8%)
(2009 - 2012 Cohorts)		
GPA High-School	2.87 (2.85)	3.00 (3.05)
GPA Freshmen 1st Semester	2.77 (2.52)	2.95 (2.89)
GPA Freshmen 2nd Semester	2.78 (2.48)	2.93 (2.85)
ACT	21.1 (21.1)	22.9 (23.3)
Credit-Hours Freshmen 1st Semester	12.7 (13.4)	13.3 (13.9)
Credit Hours Freshmen 2nd Semester	12.8 (13.1)	13.5 (13.8)
Academic Probation 1st Semester	56.9% (58.5%)	43.1% (41.5%)
Academic Probation 2nd Semester	56.1% (57.1%)	43.9% (42.9%)

*Table 7. Retention and 6-year graduation rates for first-generation students and their new student cohorts for the years 2008-2016. The table shows the number of first-generation students within each cohort and the percentage of cohort comprised by first-generation students.*

Cohort	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total FTFT	2328	2231	2318	2216	2517	2654	2155	1583
First Generation	1058	1040	915	1123	1179	1271	1049	690
% First Generation	45.4%	46.6%	39.5%	50.7%	46.8%	47.9%	48.7%	43.6%
Cohort Retention	69.3%	66.1%	60.1%	62.0%	69.3%	69.0%	65.2%	69.5%
First Generation Retention	64.8%	61.3%	52.8%	55.5%	63.6%	63.7%	57.0%	60.7%
Cohort 6-Yr Graduation	45.7%	44.0%	39.9%	42.0%				
First Generation 6-Yr Graduation	38.3%	35.3%	31.0%	33.6%				

Figure 5 shows rates of first year, second year, and third year retention and persistence rates for first-generation students, in five-year blocks. The figure shows that the percentage of students continuing systematically declined from first to second, and second to third year. First-generation students appear to be less likely to persist to degree completion the longer they attend school.

Figure 6 shows the percentage of first-generation and non-first-generation students who were retained for the years 2009-2016, displayed separately for White, Black/African American,

Hispanic/Latino, and Asian students. Similar results are shown in Figure 7 for six-year graduation rates for the four groups. The figures show that fewer first-generation students were retained and persisted to graduating within six years relative to non-first-generation students across all groups.

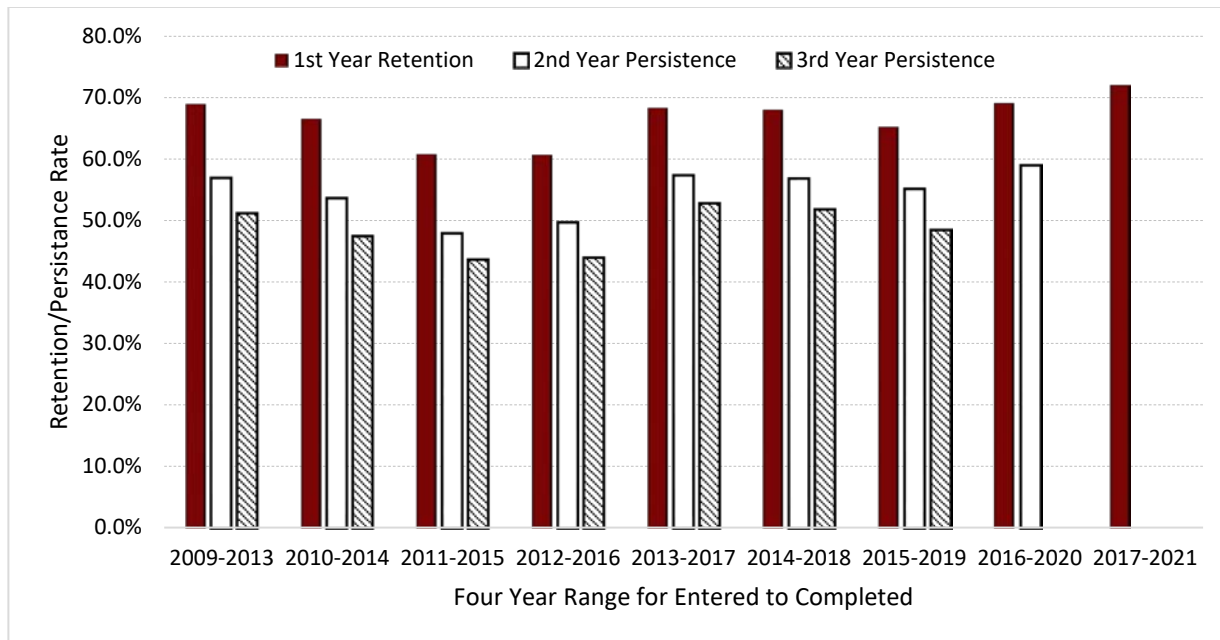


Figure 7 First-generation student retention and persistence rates by year.

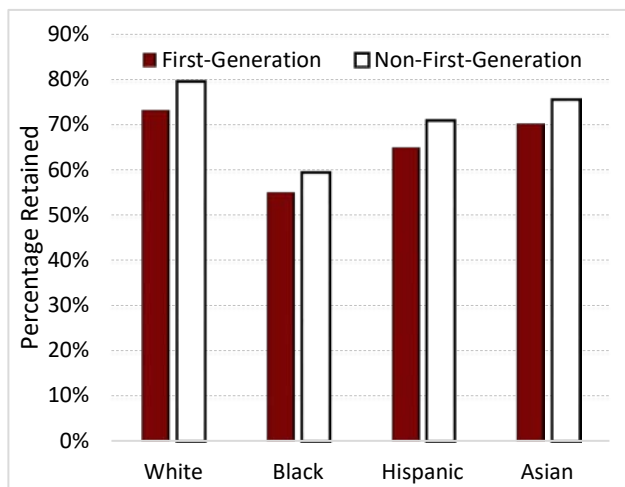


Figure 6 Percentage of first-generation students and non-first-generation students retained, shown separately for White, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian students for the years 2009-2016.

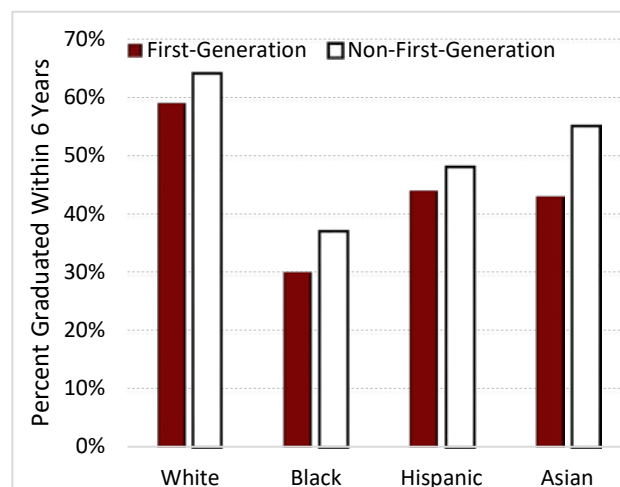


Figure 5 Percentage of first-generation students and non-first-generation students who achieved 6-year graduation, shown separately for White, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian students for the years 2009-2016.

Of note, the academic programs found to have the largest number of first-generation students were Workforce Education and Development, Psychology, and Criminology and Criminal Justice. The academic programs found to have the largest number of non-first-generation

students were Pre-Civil-Engineering, International Studies, and Pre-Foreign Language and International Trade.

### Students' Perspectives

SIUC's Student Affairs administered the EAB Campus Climate Survey (BE HEARD: A Sexual Misconduct Survey) during the 2018 academic year. Figure 8 provides a description of the survey respondents. Twenty-four percent of the total sample were first-generation students.

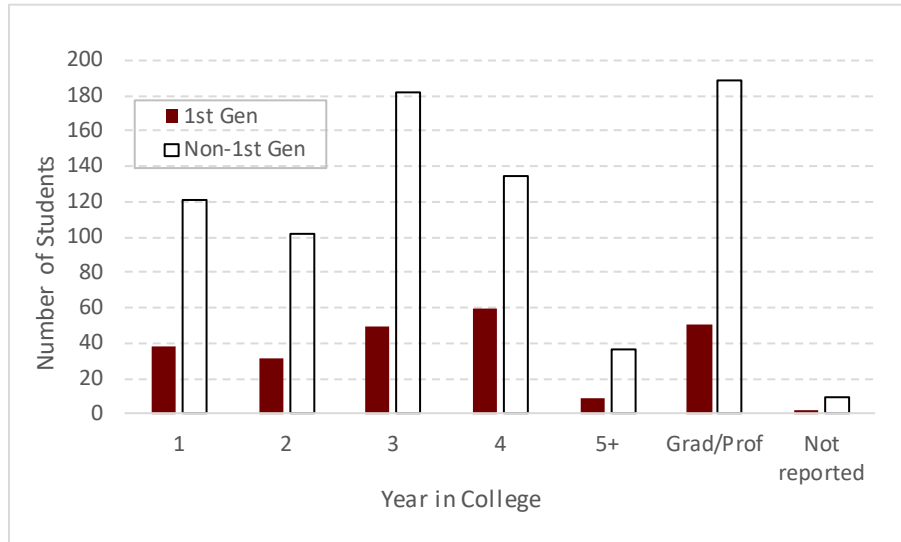


Figure 8 Distribution of first-generation and non-first-generation participants in survey by academic year

While financial struggles are a leading reason why students consider leaving college, it is also a significant concern for students even if they are not considering leaving. The struggle with food or housing insecurity between both first-generation and non-first-generation students shows a greater insecurity for first-generation students, as well as a statistic for non-first-generation students that should not be ignored.

- 40% of first-generation students reported skipping meals or eating less because of not having enough money, as compared to 26% of non-first gen students.
- 48% of first-generation students reported not being able to afford balanced meals, as compared to 38% of non-first gen students.
- 26% of first-generation students and 26% of non-first gen students reported being hungry and not being able to eat because of lack of money
- 12% of first-generation students and 12% of non-first gen students reported not being able to pay rent

Table 8 provides the survey responses to the top five reasons students leave SIUC. It is interesting to note the fact that the first reason for leaving within the first-generation group has to do with not feeling welcomed or supported whereas for non-first-generation the reason is wanting to transfer.

Table 8. Summary of top reasons for leaving SIUC based on EAB survey.

	Number of Students	
	1st Gen	Non 1st Gen
Didn't feel welcomed or supported	34	83
Experienced financial struggles	33	59
Wanted to transfer	30	94
Struggled with mental health challenges	29	77
Didn't feel close to anyone at school	24	70

It is assumed that first-generation students participate in fewer co-curricular activities due to financial and family obligations. This could possibly explain why some students do not feel welcome on campus. However, non-first-generation students reported similar levels of engagement in campus activities. Clearly, the group surveyed did not support this premise. Specific group participation for the two groups of students include the following:

- 13% of first-generation students reported participating in Greek Life, whereas 8% of non-first-generation students reported participating.
- 12% of both first-generation and non-first-generation students reported participating in Cultural Groups.
- 7% of first-generation students reported participating in performing arts groups, intramurals, sport clubs, and student government, whereas 5% of non-first-generation students reported participating in those same groups.

SIUC Applied Research Consultants (ARC) conducted the first-generation student survey study and student interviews in Fall 2018. ARC is a graduate-student led organization in the department of psychology that provides consultation on qualitative and quantitative data analyses for the campus community. The results are summarized below. There were only 28 participants, but despite the small size of the group, the results provide a view of the student perspective.

An overwhelming majority (90.8%) of the students interviewed worked one or more part-time or full-time jobs or internships, with 24.5% working more than 20 hours per week and 64.3% working 1-20 hours per week. About half of the participants reported working on-campus (57.1%), with the remaining working off-campus (21.4%) or having multiple jobs (10.7%). Most working participants reported that their work schedule was predictable (64.3%), and their workplace was very accommodating of their school workload (67.9%). 35.7% of participants reported that they contribute a portion of their income to their family. All students reported receiving less than \$35,000 per year in financial aid to attend SIUC, with 35.7% reporting receiving less than \$10,000 per year, 35.7% reporting receiving \$10,000-\$19,999 per year, and 25.0% reporting receiving \$20,000-\$34,999 per year (3.6% declined to answer).

The students identified several challenges during both the admission process and during their course of study. Most students (78.6%) did not have any older siblings that had attended or completed college. When asked about their motivation to apply for college, many participants reported wanting to attend college due to their personal drive (50.0%), their own or their family's expectations that they would go to college (42.9%), and their hopes of avoiding other outcomes (39.3%). The majority of students were drawn to apply to SIUC because of specific

programs or opportunities that SIUC provides (67.9%), as well as the school being a desirable distance from home (60.7%), cost-effective (42.9%), and a pleasant environment (46.4%).

When asked about the challenges they faced in preparing for college, most participants discussed that they learned about the application process at the same time as their parent(s) (82.1%) or all on their own (60.7%). Although many of the participants found the information on admissions and financial aid available on the university website to be helpful, others found the information to be confusing, difficult, or unhelpful (21.4%—35.7%). Participants suggested that more information about financial and academic resources (64.3%), more public outreach to their high schools and communities (28.6%), more support and resources for first-generation students (21.4%), and more scholarships (21.4%) would have been beneficial over the course of their college pursuits.

When asked about the challenges they faced while preparing for college, the clearest theme that emerged was having to learn the application, admission, and all of the initially steps together with their parents (e.g., “me and my mom just had to wing it”). Many students also lamented about a general lack of information (e.g., “no idea what it was going to be like”) and reported that they had to just “figure it out” on their own. Additional themes included a lack of financial information (e.g., “no idea that there was financial aid”), living away from home (e.g., “not being able to come home”), and stress (e.g., “it was stressful”). A few students also alluded to financial struggles (e.g., “wow, I really have to owe all of this”).

When students were asked about the challenges they faced once enrolled in college, the most frequently reported concerns were tied to finances, including worries about paying for school, lack of guidance from parents, and challenges maintaining a balance between academics and work. Students frequently commented on their difficulties with time management and their desire to have been better prepared. Nonetheless, several students referenced their own personal motivation in persisting to graduation and expressed pride that they were “relying on themselves” or “figuring things out on their own.” Some students reported that they worked as much as they possibly could. Students also reported that the university housing experience was helpful for their social adjustment.

##### 5. Describe the biggest challenges and opportunities encountered in implementing the initiative.

The goals of this Quality Initiative were:

- 1) Develop a demographic profile of first-generation students
- 2) Develop an academic profile of first-generation students
- 3) Compare retention and graduation rates for first-generation versus non-first-generation students
- 4) Examine the use of financial aid for first-generation students relative to non-first-generation students
- 5) Identify financial variables that could affect students’ academic success
- 6) Investigate first-generation students’ perspectives on their challenges
- 7) Provide evidence that a support center could improve the success of first-generation students

Although all the project's goals were achieved, there were some obstacles that warrant mention. Identifying students as first-generation assumes that students self-identified as such, yet many students or the parents assisting them with an application may not even know what the term means. In addition, older adults may be defined as both first-generation and non-traditional, making self-reporting unclear and the lines for data analysis difficult. Thus, it is possible that there are more first-generation students attending the institution whose data were not included in the analyses. With data available in several different offices across campus, it was at times difficult to locate the right source. The First-Generation Community of Practice was instrumental in streamlining these efforts.

## Commitment to and Engagement in the Quality Initiative

### 6. Describe the individuals and groups involved at stages throughout the initiative and their perceptions of its worth and impact.

A designated faculty member serving as a Provost Fellow, who worked under the supervision of the Associate Provost for Academic Programs, led this project. The First-Generation Community of Practice, which included faculty, graduate student instructors, advisors, and student affairs professionals, many of whom had been first-generation students themselves, provided guidance and oversight on the project. The Community of Practice was chaired by the Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence. A grant from the Suder Foundation, which provided scholarships for first-generation students in the First Scholars program, was used to support the Community of Practice. In addition to providing guidance on data collection and analyses, the Community of Practice held workshops intended to educate the campus community of the challenges faced by first-generation students. In these workshops, doctoral students presented research on the topic of first-generation students and cultural barriers, and Residential Life staff presented an overview of their Academic Peer Advocates Program and its relevance for first-generation students.

The contributing offices and authorities around campus included the Office of Institutional Research, Financial Aid, Admissions, the Vice Chancellor for Diversity, and the Center for Teaching Excellence. SIUC Applied Research Consultants (ARC), an organization composed of graduate students and faculty members housed within the Psychology Department, conducted the first-generation student survey study and student interviews. Funds from the Chancellor's office supported ARC's consultation. Student Affairs supplied additional qualitative data. The director of the University Core Curriculum and conceptual, methodological, and analytic support throughout the project. The Coordinator of HCL Accreditation supported the final analysis and report. A graduate student in Communications Studies, funded by the Associate Provost for Academic Programs, provided editorial assistance.

This project was executed by a large team of faculty, staff, and administrators across campus, all of whom recognized the need to learn about the institution's first-generation students so that specialized supports could be developed to improve rates of retention and completion.

### 7. Describe the most important points learned by those involved in the initiative.

In the analyses of data from the years 2009-2016, the team invested in this project obtained valuable information regarding SIUC's first-generation students. The team learned that approximately equivalent percentages of first-generation students are White or Black, and that majority of first-generation students come to SIUC from the greater Chicago region. The institution's first-generation students receive more federal grants and loans than non-first-generation students. The analysis of the ratio of minimum wage for part- and full-time work to the costs of attending college revealed that any student working full or part-time while attending college would struggle to afford the costs of attending the institution. The performance of SIUC's first-generation students is below that of non-first-generation students on every single academic measure examined, including graduation and retention rates, mean high-school and first-year GPA, mean number of credits enrolled in as freshmen, and percentages of students being placed on academic probation. The largest gap is the percentage of students on probation and the percentage of students who persisted to graduation. These results are consistent with the published literature on the characteristics and experiences of first-generation college students. That SIUC's first-generation college students, approximately half of the institution's student body, are experiencing considerably less success than other students warrant attention.

The University gained knowledge about the challenges experienced by SIUC's first-generation students via results from the one-on-one interviews and surveys conducted. An alarming percentage of students reported financial obstacles that interfere with their ability to meet their basic needs while attending college, and very few students reported participating in campus organizations or activities. Not surprisingly, a large percentage of students reported working one or more part-time and full-time jobs, with many providing money for their family. The students identified a number of obstacles during both the admission process and during their transition period over the course of their freshman year, including little guidance from parents or siblings, confusion regarding information presented on university websites, and a lack of preparation in how to balance their school and work obligations. These findings suggest that the experience of being the first from one's family to attend college, coupled with financial challenges, make the goal of persisting to degree completion onerous. Even with those challenges, many of the students interviewed reported that they were highly motivated to not only complete their undergraduate degree, but to pursue professional or graduate training as well. SIUC needs support mechanisms that will facilitate the students' realization of these goals. The newly implemented First Saluki Center has several goals for its first year of operation and will be monitoring its progress toward promoting first-generation students' transition into college and continuation from one year to the next.

## Resource Provision

8. Explain the human, financial, physical and technological resources that supported the initiative.

Administrators, faculty, and staff from the Office of the Provost, the Center for Teaching Excellence, the University Core Curriculum, Financial Aid, Admissions, Student Affairs and the College of Education and Human Services were dedicated to this project. Within these units, people assisted with data collection and analyses. Funds from the Chancellor's office supported



the student interviews and survey conducted by Applied Research Consultants, a graduate-student led organization in the department of psychology that provides consultation on qualitative and quantitative data analyses for the campus community.

To be more specific with respect to the team, the following faculty and administrators directly contributed to the Quality Initiative:

- Maria Claudia Franca, Provost Fellow, SIU Board of Trustees Diversity Excellence Award, Associate Professor, Communications Disorders and Sciences
- Elaine Jurkowski, Provost Fellow, Professor, Social Work
- Ruth Anne Rehfeldt, HLC Coordinator, Professor, Behavior Analysis and Therapy
- Reza Habib, Director of Core Curriculum, Associate Professor, Psychology
- Karla Berry, Director of Center for Teaching Excellence, Chair of First-Generation Community of Practice
- Jun Qin, Associate Professor, Electrical and Computer Engineering
- Lori Stettler, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
- John Massie, Advisor, Student Affairs
- Otis Duncan, Graduate Assistant, Communication Studies
- Lizette Chevalier, Associate Provost Academic Programs, Professor, Civil and Environmental Engineering

Technological resources included Desire2Learn, the university's online learning management system, and Banner, the university's student information database. Several computers were utilized for data gathering and analyses. Physical spaces included a designated office for the Provost Fellows as well as large meeting rooms in Morris Library.

### **Plans for the Future (or Future Milestones of a Continuing Initiative)**

#### 9. Describe plans for ongoing work related to or as a result of the initiative.

Results obtained from this project will be widely disseminated to campus constituency groups, administrators, and those centers and offices invested in promoting the success of the institution's undergraduate students. The team hopes to educate all aspects of campus on the prevalence and characteristics of the institution's first-generation students. The findings have already served to support the implementation of the First Saluki Center, a specialized support center for first-generation students, which began officially on July 1, 2019. The center will be supported by funds from the SIUC Foundation, and support the delivery of specialized academic, financial, and social supports for first-generation students for a five-year period. Some of the center's activities for this next academic year include providing academic coaching in collaboration with the Center for Learning and Support Services, seeking first-generation faculty and staff to serve as mentors, role models, and advocates, providing peer-to-peer mentoring, developing campus internship positions, and promoting student participation in research, creative activity, and service learning.

#### 10. Describe any practices or artifacts from the initiative that other institutions might find meaningful or useful and please indicate if you would be willing to share this information.



This work will be presented in professional conferences such as the upcoming Higher Learning Commission convention. At least one published article is also expected to result from the project. The most important outcome from this project is the creation of the First Saluki Center.

The results of the initiative will be presented to various constituencies this fall to inform the campus community. Understanding the demographics and challenges of our students will influence the classroom environment and the services provided throughout campus. SIUC's commitment to provide students with an education that promises to be transformative is more fully achieved when we have the knowledge of who our students are.

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### SIUC Mission

SIU embraces a unique tradition of access and opportunity, inclusive excellence, innovation in research and creativity, and outstanding teaching focused on nurturing student success. As a nationally ranked public research university and regional economic catalyst, we create and exchange knowledge to shape future leaders, improve our communities, and transform lives.