KNOWLEDGE TO SUCCEED:

How First-Generation College Students Learn and Utilize Campus Resources at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

OFFICE OF
ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

KNOWLEDGE TO SUCCEED:

How First-Generation College Students Learn and Utilize Campus Resources at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

Jeffrey K. Grim
Emma Bausch
Dr. Steven Lonn
Dr. Ann Hower
Dr. Stephanie Riegle
Office of Enrollment Management,
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

Adan Hussain
First-Generation Student Gateway,
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

June 2021

OFFICE OF
ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Contents

Executive Summary

Part 1: Introduction

Part 2: Focus Group Results

Part 3: Analysis

Executive Summary

Despite attention to the success of first-generation college students (FGCS), there continue to be gaps in experiences and outcomes between first-generation and continuing-generation college students. For example, at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, FGCS have a six-year 89% graduation rate compared to their continuing-generation peers of 94% (2014 cohort).

Research indicates FGCS have more difficulty navigating university structures, policies, and cultures that result in lower outcomes such as retention and time to degree (Cataldi et al, 2018). Understanding and assisting the success of first-generation students is essential in order to create more equitable campus communities and close existing success gaps.

Using focus group data of 62 first-generation students, the following report describes the experiences, perceptions, and ideas of how FGCS learn about and utilize campus resources in order to be successful.

RESULTS

Through qualitative analysis, we describe the results of the focus groups using two broad themes:

▶ **Resource Knowledge**
Student success begins well before students attend their first course or meet their first peer. We found that students learned about resources via multiple mediums such as pre-college programs, summer transition programs, summer orientation, and academic year transition programming. These experiences and programs had similar qualities: staff-initiated, targeted enrollment, and peer support.

▶ **Resource Navigation**
While there were a range of ways that students accessed campus resources, FGCS could often not rely on familial knowledge to navigate university

offices and policies as could their peers. Students relied on formal programming, informal peer connections, and past experiences with the university to utilize campus resources. Students who were not connected to formal campus programming or staff and/or lacked informal peer relationships relied solely on their own independent investigation which produced mixed results for navigational success.

STUDENT SUCCESS FRAMEWORKS

Based on these results, we have created two models that can be used as frameworks for researchers and practitioners to better understand the experiences of FGCS:

▶ **Model of Advisor Trustworthiness**
To summarize our understanding of how FGCS learn about and utilize campus resources, we offer a Model of Advisor Trustworthiness to provide a framework for campus leaders to hire, train, and assess staff for more effective student support.

▶ **Student Success Information Mapping Tool**
Using information-finding concepts, we created a model for campus leaders and departments to use to understand different ways FGCS access resources with varying degrees of comfort.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The report concludes with tools campus leaders can use to connect with FGCS along with points of consideration for offices to use when supporting FGCS success:

TOOLS FOR SUCCESS

▶ Micro-targeted and Personalized Marketing

▶ Contemporary Technological Communication Tools

POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

▶ Resource Connection and Interdependence

▶ Navigating Complex Circumstances

▶ Narrative Assessment and Crafting

▶ Peer Support

▶ Use of Trustworthiness as a Framework

Part 1: Introduction

> In February 2019, the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor (U-M) Student Success Task Force convened to identify gaps in student support services for first-generation students and low-income students. Over the course of five months, the task force discussed current support for these populations, and identified areas for improvement in the future. The task force produced a report that offered recommendations for practice and organizational change; it also identified gaps in institutional knowledge needed to improve support for these students.

Specifically, the recommendations called for a more nuanced understanding of how first-generation students and low-income students learn about and utilize campus resources within U-M's decentralized structure. In particular, the task force sought to understand not only how students were referred to resources, but why they chose to trust some sources over others. These knowledge gaps formed the foundation of the following study and report. As a product of the Office of Enrollment Management (OEM), the intention of this report is to inform stakeholders on empirical findings that can be used to reflect on and improve current policies and practices at U-M.

OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What resources did students remember and utilize during their transition into the university?
2. What experiences have students had using student success resources (e.g., health services, financial aid, academic advising, etc.)?
3. Why do students utilize and trust some resources and not others?

METHODOLOGY

Between February and April 2020, the OEM research team conducted 17 focus group interviews; participants consisted of 62 diverse first-generation college students (FGCS) (See Table 1 for demographic information). The sample demographics are largely representative of the wider first-generation student population, with slight over-representation of students of color and low-income students.

In order to recruit students for this study, all FGCS currently enrolled at the university were invited via email to sign up for time slots for a focus group based on their year in school (First Year; Second Year; Third/Fourth Year; Transfer)[1]. While there were six allotted slots for each focus group, the actual focus groups typically consisted of two to four participants.

---

1   Two waves of focus solicitation emails went out. The second was more focused, requesting participants who were currently underrepresented in the sample.

The interview protocol used to collect experiences was semi-structured. This format encourages participants to guide the conversation based on their unique experiences, but also allows for purposeful questions about academic, social, and financial transitions (Bhattacharya, 2017). We particularly focused on experiences with essential student services, which we define as academic advising, academic support, financial support, and health-related resources.

After all data were collected, each focus group was transcribed and thematically coded by a team of researchers (Charmaz, 2010). Each transcript was coded and reviewed by at least two researchers for trustworthiness (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After each code was discussed and reconciled by two researchers, codes were grouped into larger themes in order to create results ready for institutional reporting and scholarly publications (Charmaz, 2010).

Between February and April 2020, the OEM research team conducted 17 focus group interviews.

Part 2: Focus Group Results

The following subsections of this report detail first-generation college students' (FGCS) knowledge and perceptions of various campus resources, including how students learn and retain knowledge about different resources.

RESOURCE KNOWLEDGE

How students learned about, retained, and utilized resources during their transition to U-M.

> **KEY TAKEAWAYS**
> ▶ Students learned about campus resources from:
>   • Multiple sources before application
>   • During matriculation
>   • Through academic programming
> ▶ Those who felt most comfortable with campus resources learned about them before they matriculated.

PRE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS

Of those who participated, pre-college programs were cited as one of the most impactful transition resources. Students who were exposed to campus before their senior year of high school expressed that their transition and resource knowledge came from their previous experiences. These came in the forms of discipline-specific programming and even informal visits to Ann Arbor.

One student mentioned his participation in the **Big House pre-college program**, as well as his older brother's attendance at U-M, as providing him with the social capital to connect with resources and networks on campus. The upper-division student said,

> My big brother went here, so since middle school I had that connection to Michigan. My junior year of high school I did the Big House Program. From the Big House program, I found out about M-STEM so I actually started a semester early, I did ALMA, so I did all these early learn-about-Michigan programs. I also lived here for a whole summer, doing research. That was probably the biggest one that I forgot about....That made my transition very smooth I guess in terms of I know all of these people from all these different affiliations, and I also lived with the people of M-STEM, so I was physically in this space with people I knew. That was a big part of it.

While only about 16% of participants attended pre-college programs, all of these students emphasized the relevance and influence of their experience to their understanding, knowledge, and comfort with campus resources.

SUMMER AND ACADEMIC YEAR TRANSITION PROGRAMS

One of the most popular ways first-generation students learned about campus resources was through transition programs.

The most common programs mentioned included:

▶ **Comprehensive Studies Program (CSP)** (including **Summer Bridge**),

▶ **M-STEM Academies**

▶ **ALMA (Assisting Latin@s to Maximize Achievement)**

▶ **Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) program**

While these programs serve specific, yet overlapping, student populations, they share four common characteristics that were beneficial for students learning about campus resources:

1. **Targeted support**
2. **Community introduction**
3. **Peer mentorship**
4. **Advisor interaction**

Each of the programs targeted and supported first-generation students in ways that introduced them to staff, community, and campus resources before they started their official first semester.

For example, one upper-division student reflected on their transition and said:

> **I did summer CSP before my freshman year, so that was the best transition I could have ever asked for to Michigan. They also taught us about Sweetland (Writing Center) and they were always helping us with backpacking [course registration], things like that. I had my CSP advisor, she was really helpful and helping me figure out how I could best place myself to get on the BBA track and she also introduced me to CSP courses.**

CSP provided a continuity of care from the Bridge program into the first semester and beyond. This student was introduced not only to CSP resources (e.g., CSP sections within large classes), but also logistical assistance (registering for classes) and campus academic support.

The targeted support from a campus advisor was helpful for this student to be successful during the first few semesters and transition into their desired major.

Another first-year student who completed the M-STEM summer program just a few months prior to the focus group pointed to how the functionality of having an advisor in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA) and M-STEM was helpful for them to get multiple perspectives.

For students with marginalized identities, learning from experienced peers proved to be very helpful. For example, one upper-class student who participated in the ALMA program for new Latinx students shared his appreciation for the program because he was able to learn from peers. In turn, he had the opportunity to be a leader for new students later in his college career (Thelamour et al., 2019).

Students who were involved in programs during their first year often discussed advisors and staff they could go to with issues or for resources. What students recalled as most beneficial was community-building programming and peer support.

A transfer student explained how the **Women in Science and Engineering (WISE)** program was impactful:

> **I think that WISE as a whole was just really helpful in introducing me to things that Michigan has to offer. It just branched out from there through the people that I met through the program. I guess it was more peer-based because a lot of people who are in the (WISE) community were really involved in the (U-M campus) community.**

While those students in residential-based academic programs or living-learning communities shared positive experiences with developing a social community, almost no other student mentioned their residential community as a place where they found resources or support.

Most comments about resident assistants (RAs) were negative regarding their neglect of community-building, despite the fact that over 90% of first-year students live in residential housing during their first year and presumably have a high rate of contact with their RA.

SUMMER ORIENTATION

Students learned about many campus resources — especially **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)** and

Department of Public Safety and Security (DPSS) — during summer orientation. The most prominent activity students remembered was the peer theatrical performance through the U-M Educational Theatre Company.

Not surprisingly, upper-division students remembered less than their first year or transfer counterparts due to time elapsed. That said, most students seemed to be overwhelmed with the information they received throughout the 2.5-day summer orientation and communication from multiple offices of the university.

One upper-division student said:

> **I remember during orientation they did talk about a lot of different resources all at once, but not a lot of them stuck with me or we weren't really paying attention. I remember Safe Ride clearly. I do recognize that I get a lot of emails with resources on them. But I don't feel like I get direct outreach about each resource from a specific person, so if I didn't make the effort to look for that resource, I wouldn't know about it.**

This quote also captures the sentiment many students felt about the applicability of the orientation information. For example, engineering students recognized the information they received was different and could not remember if they learned about resources from general orientation or from their college-specific communications. While students recognized resources were given during orientation and some "stuck," the condensed time frame was generally overwhelming for them to remember resources for future use.

Transfer students learned about resources through orientation, but almost all of them commented about the shorter length of time they received than their first-time, first-year peers. Those who seemed frustrated with the shortened time had an unrealistic idea of what first-year orientation actually was. When asked, transfer students admitted they did not think they needed significantly more time or information from orientation, but had a sense of feeling like they received "less" than their first-time, first-year peers. In reality, first-year orientation is two and a half days while transfer orientation is one day.

RESOURCE NAVIGATION

How students utilized different types of information sources when seeking academic, logistical, and social resources.

> ### *KEY TAKEAWAYS*
> ▶ Personal relationships with advisors and peers became a main connection to learning about and seeking out campus resources.
> ▶ Students are searching for information from electronic sources:
> • Both institutional and non-institutional sources
> • Often don't provide enough information for efficient and optimal success

PEER SUPPORT

The use of peer support and networks to gain information was the most widely mentioned resource by FGCS, particularly when the students' goals included overcoming a perceived obstacle to their success. Students who were most likely to use peers were part of a specialized academic community (e.g., theatre), part of a formal program (e.g., CSP), or belonged to an identity-based student organization (e.g., La Casa). Specialized academic support programs were also smaller and had more unique processes and obstacles. For example, all of the students affiliated with the School of Music, Theatre & Dance (SMTD) or the School of Nursing utilized upper-division students to help them pick classes and "translate" general resources to their specific academic experience.

One first-year theatre student explained when asked where he gets information about resources:

> Honestly, other students. Because as much as professors and adults want to be helpful, it's more, at least for me, I am more willing to receive and more trusting of a source if it's somebody who just recently went through it. So for me it was other students, upper-division men... in SMTD in general.

Additionally, most of the Latinx students in the study received valuable student success resources through La Casa, a Latinx-focused student organization. Many students mentioned a summer pre-college program, called ALMA, that introduced them to Latinx upper-division students, faculty, and staff.

In addition, the students who were involved in La Casa heavily relied on the GroupMe[2] mobile communication application that gave

---

2   An application that allows students to send messages to multiple users at the same time.

students an opportunity to learn from peer conversations, receive announcements, and ask questions from both peers and advisors.

For example, a first-year student was one of the few people in her focus group who knew about emergency funds available for financial assistance because she received word through peers in a group chat thread. When asked how the La Casa group chat works to provide reliable information, she indicated students and advisors will challenge information in the chat and ask sharers to produce links of credible information supporting their resource. This was the most advanced, reliable, and targeted source of peer support shared from participants.

ADVISOR COMMUNICATION

Most of the participants indicated they had a positive relationship with at least one academic advisor on campus who could answer questions accurately and provide resources for their specific success needs. While there were students who had negative experiences with advisors and a few students who felt either a lack of support or were overwhelmed with support options, most students mentioned an academic advisor as a person on campus whom they could go to for assistance.

When posed with a hypothetical situation of transferring in courses from another university, a majority of participants indicated their first or second step to a resolution would be to seek advice from their advisor. This is an indicator that FGCS recognize the importance of academic advising and have a relationship with their advisor where they trust they will provide accurate and helpful assistance.

INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION

In addition to seeking out multiple sources of information when approaching a difficult academic situation, FGCS often utilized

One of the most common requested resources for first-generation students was a clearinghouse of resources and information.

their own internet searching and prior knowledge. Even though university staff encourage student independence and agency, FGCS may not always have the most accurate or efficient information, so additional advisor support is helpful.

One of the most common requested resources for first-generation students was a clearinghouse of resources and information. Most students participating in the focus groups were not aware of the **University of Michigan First-Generation website** which provides a great deal of the information students were requesting.

Part 3: Analysis

The following sections of this report synthesize the findings from the focus groups using two new frameworks with additional tools and points of consideration for practitioners on campus to think about when supporting FGCS.

▶ **Model of Advisor Trustworthiness (MAT)** which represents how students conceptualize trustworthiness of university advisors.

▶ **Matrix of Student Success Information (MSSI)** which organizes the ways in which participants learn about campus resources using information-finding frameworks.

▶ Next, we share specific tools mentioned by students that have the possibility to create broader outreach to FGCS. Lastly, the report concludes with a summary of questions and points of consideration for improving FGCS knowledge and utilization of campus resources

ADVISOR TRUSTWORTHINESS

Why students utilized different campus resources more than others

One of the unanswered questions from the 2019 Student Support Task Force Report was how and why students trust some resources more than others. Through the focus groups, we probed participants to reflect on what sources they used and why they used them. As a result of analyzing students' personal narratives and scenario-based answers, we created the Model of Advisor Trustworthiness (MAT; See figure 1). The MAT describes the qualities and behaviors from university personnel that students use to describe an advisor as trustworthy.

Participants identified three *qualities* and three *behaviors* as factors that made an office or individual trustworthy:

▶ **Qualities**
  • Knowledgeable
  • Holistic
  • Relational

▶ **Behaviors**
  • Advocating
  • Inviting
  • Informing

In addition to the main qualities and behaviors, some participants (especially women in STEM, students of color, and students from smaller/specialized academic majors) preferred or felt more comfortable connecting with an advisor who held similar identities/experiences as them. We labeled this phenomenon "identity-matching" to describe how trustworthiness was influenced by academic and social identity likeness (Winter & Kataria, 2020).

Figure 1 Model of Advisor Trustworthiness
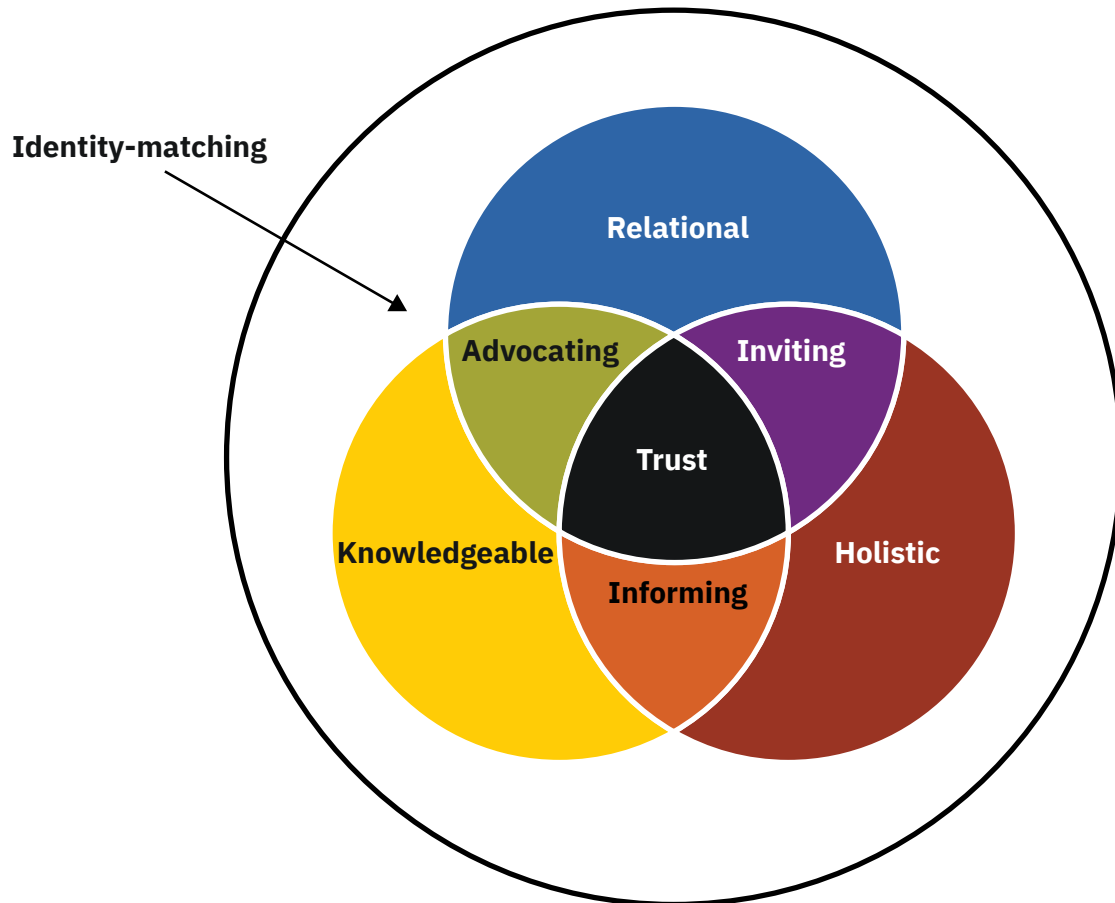
QUALITIES

Knowledgeable

Able to provide intricate, accurate, and nuanced knowledge of institutional systems, policies, and services.

Holistic

Proactively views students as whole people and willing to inquire and support students through their entire college or personal experience, rather than just the specific resource/office they represent.

Relational

Build formal and informal relationships that demonstrate care and compassion; students often mention individuals as being "real" or "caring."

Example: "If they give off a caring vibe that they are empathetic, or that they are just nice, I'm a lot more likely to go see them again, or ask for advice, or feel like the information they're giving me is actually correct." - Second year student

BEHAVIORS

Informing

Willing to assist students in problem solving and for numerous types of issues related or not related to their direct job function. Students often mentioned individuals referring students to other people or resources in order to be successful.

Advocating

Helping students through a process or difficult situation where the individual used their own social capital for the students' success, often going beyond relaying the specific knowledge of the appropriate resolution.

Inviting

Proactively communicating and spending time with the student such that they appeared to be genuinely interested in assisting the student; not treated as a "number" or "just doing their job."

Example: "So I think he was just really good at kind of giving me resources, ideas, walking me through ideas, not just like, 'Hey, look at that website,' but 'let's talk through this together. Let's look at classes you might like. Here's a suggestion I have from another student.' Yeah, I don't know how to describe it, but I think just more specific and not just brushing me off kind of thing." — Upper-division student

IDENTITY-MATCHING

Academic

Academic identity fell in two subcategories, disciplinary and programmatic. Disciplinary identities (e.g., theatre major, nursing major) were especially important for students in smaller, specialized majors that require unique academic and career advising in order to be successful.

Programmatic identities were formed with students who participated in a university-sponsored program (e.g., Women in Science & Engineering, CSP).

Social

Social identities are defined as personal-social identities such as race, gender, class, geographic location, or first-generation status.

Example: "So I think he was just really good at kind of giving me resources, ideas, walking me through ideas, not just like, 'Hey, look at that website,' but 'let's talk through this together. Let's look at classes you might like. Here's a suggestion I have from another student.' Yeah, I don't know how to describe it, but I think just more specific and not just brushing me off kind of thing." — Upper-division student

MATRIX OF STUDENT SUCCESS INFORMATION

There are many ways FGCS found and utilized campus resources in order to be successful. We combined two different concepts of information finding (information-seeking and information gathering) along with the concepts of hot, warm, and cold information sources to create the Student Success Information Mapping Tool.

INFORMATION-FINDING CONCEPTS

Our study revealed two ways FGCS find student success information:

1. **Information-gathering and**
2. **Information-seeking**

Information-gathering refers to the accumulation of knowledge that is collected over time through informal and formal sources (McKenzie, 2002). Often the information gathered is not needed or useful at the exact time of learning and is instead cognitively stored until needed for utilization. For example, continuing-generation students often learn about college-going and college success from their family members through stories about college experiences and through other networks. For FGCS, the gathering process is usually not acquired through informal familial networks, but through formal experiences like pre-college programming, college orientation, and student success programming in college.
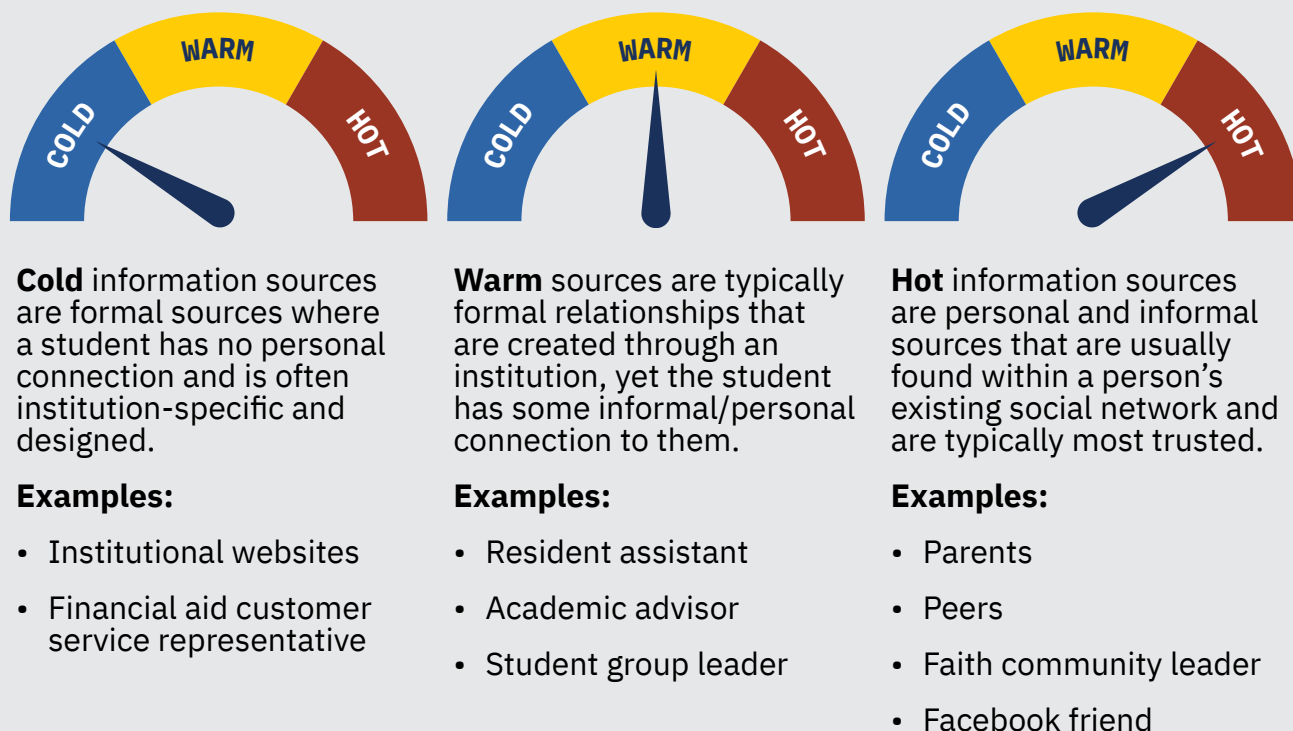
Information-seeking on the other hand refers to the more direct acquiring of knowledge through a specific purpose or question (Krikelas, 1983). In other words, information-seeking refers to the act of actively finding a solution to a problem. For FGCS, this may be calling the Office of Financial Aid to ask how to obtain additional funds because of a change in family income. Many continuing-generation students have a larger network of familial and social connections to ask questions and solve problems, but FGCS rely on advisor connections as the main point of contact for solving student success-related issues.

INFORMATION SOURCE CONCEPTS

When students are gathering and seeking information in order to be successful, they develop and maintain different relationships to sources of information. For FGCS particularly, their relationship to information sources impacts their ability to trust or utilize a resource.

We adopted the concepts of hot, warm, and cold information sources previously used to understand secondary school choice (Ball & Vincent, 1998) and university choice (Slack et al., 2014).

Cold information sources are formal sources where a student has no personal connection and is often institution-specific and designed.

Examples:

- Institutional websites
- Financial aid customer service representative

Warm sources are typically formal relationships that are created through an institution, yet the student has some informal/personal connection to them.

Examples:

- Resident assistant
- Academic advisor
- Student group leader

Hot information sources are personal and informal sources that are usually found within a person's existing social network and are typically most trusted.

Examples:

- Parents
- Peers
- Faith community leader
- Facebook friend

Using the information finding concepts (i.e., information-gathering and information-seeking) vertically and the information source relationship concepts (i.e., hot, warm, and cold, see inset above) horizontally, we mapped out the most common sources conveyed from our participants in the Matrix of Student Success Information tool below (participant data on information sources in the left column and common outcomes on the right for each relationship category).

Embedded in this understanding is that the "warmer" the source is, the more likely it is to be trusted and utilized by students, though those sources are also potentially the most expensive and/or time intensive. It should also be noted that cold, warm, and hot information sources are all necessary for students to be successful, and offices should think about the multiple ways students have access to multiple types of information and information sources.

Information Source Relationship					
Cold		**Warm**		**Hot**	
Information sources	**Common outcomes**	**Information sources**	**Common outcomes**	**Information sources**	**Common outcomes**
Information Gathering Orientation Newsletters Weekly emails	Information overload Unkown unknowns Temporal distance	Pre-college program Pre-matriculation program	Pre-cursor to Hot sources Builds self-efficacy Expands network	Outreach from advisor Student group communication	Most trusted Built self-efficacy
Information Seeking Web searching "Cold" calling and emailing	Often successful if question is simple Answer taken at face value	Academic advisor Peer mentor Living-learning coordinator	Most common Can lead to a Hot source Sometimes double-checked	Informal peer network Close relationship with advisor	Most helpful Most trusted

The matrix shows that students accessed a myriad of information that was helpful to their success. For example, many students received information about scholarships, internships, or campus resources through orientation and school-wide newsletters and were able to get answers to basic questions about financial aid through calling or visiting a website.

While those sources were helpful, as students needed assistance for more complex questions/situations, the more "hot"/closer relationships with the information source (e.g., an academic advisor or peer advisor), the more they trusted and utilized them in the future.

This is important for administrators to consider as they develop processes for students to access information and support, particularly as they assess the complexity and nuances of that information.

While the matrix above presents the results from our sample population, any office or department could use this tool (see blank version below) to chart where and how students find and gather information.

For example, an academic advising office could do a self-audit of what information students can find from websites (cold sources) and how accessible it is to talk to an advisor about a specific issue or concern (warm source).

This type of self-assessment can provide an opportunity for offices to highlight areas for improvement like providing more opportunities for "warm" interactions with staff or enhancing websites and departmental orientation that provide updated timelines and curriculum changes.

Information Source Relationship			Information Gathering	Information Seeking
Hot	Common outcomes			
	Information sources			
Warm	Common outcomes			
	Information sources			
Cold	Common outcomes			
	Information sources			

TOOLS FOR SUCCESS

MICROTARGETED MARKETING

One of the most frequently requested resources mentioned in the focus groups was a website that guided students to resources specifically for first-generation students. Fortunately, the First Generation Student Initiative maintains a page on the **First Generation website** that contains links to many of these resources.

Unfortunately, most students do not know about or access it. Since a first-generation identity intersects with so many other social identities (e.g., race, class, socioeconomic status, academic major, etc.) and is often not learned until college, it is sometimes difficult to build community and target first-generation students with this invisible and emerging identity.

That said, FGCS could be targeted through sub-communities. Some approaches already exist (e.g., **FirstEngin**, **Kessler Scholars**, etc.), but additional support could be targeted by utilizing cultural groups, additional academic unit

support, and other common experiences (e.g., Michigan Learning Communities, undergraduate research, orientation, etc.). Identity-matching between student and support system can be an efficient way of learning and utilizing campus resources.

CONTEMPORARY TECHNOLOGICAL COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Students involved in La Casa, a Latinx organization, mentioned an affiliated GroupMe thread that gave them proactive information as well as interactions with peers and advisors to receive relevant information.

They learned about emergency aid during the first few weeks of the COVID-19 transition in March 2020 by seeing students post and verify information for accuracy. This type of observation is similar to popular media sites like "Reddit'' or "BuzzFeed" that not only shares pertinent information, but allows for a transparent community engagement that readers can either interact with or passively learn from.

Identity-matching between student and support system can be an efficient way of learning and utilizing campus resources.

Using this information, there are three potential options for those offices dedicated to student success:

1. Departments could utilize different ways to engage and communicate with students through websites and electronic communication that is more engaging and interactive.

2. Administrators could also encourage GroupMe types of interactive communication tools for sub-communities to engage with, in order to share resources both actively and passively.

3. The institution, through units like the Center for Academic Innovation, could investigate and test a centrally maintained, peer-edited service where students could share their knowledge and experiences, while others could observe and learn from peers. That knowledge could then be shared in targeted messages and/or via websites like **Atlas** and Canvas.

POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION AND GUIDING QUESTIONS

In this section we offer points of consideration for student service leaders when improving support for FGCS. In addition, we provide guiding questions for student service leaders to think about when evaluating the resources, services, and programming offered to FGCS.

1. **RESOURCE CONNECTIONS AND INTERDEPENDENCE**

Students who had the most confidence and experience in navigating campus resources often had a personal relationship with a university advisor. For example, most CSP students had advisors who both knew them as whole people and provided them with individual support for their academic success. Other students not in CSP had connections with an academic advisor, student group advisor, or living/learning staff.

Instead of requiring students to develop relationships with a variety of university staff members across units and offices in order to be successful, if advisors had more intimate knowledge of broad university policies and resources, students may need to spend less time navigating and accessing essential services and more time utilizing them. When student services offices, and those in programs that are utilized by first year students (e.g., **UROP**), train staff, they could also think about what knowledge would be helpful for student success, even if it is not directly related to the office/program. Recognizing the interdependence of essential student services for the success of students could ultimately help create a different organizational structure and culture for advising and support at U-M.

Guiding questions:

- What information does my front-line staff know about essential services?

- What personal connections do front-line staff have with their peers in essential services?

2. NAVIGATING COMPLEX CIRCUMSTANCES

Students who had more nuanced or unique circumstances when accessing student services (e.g., financial aid) often had more negative experiences and interactions. In order to build a strong interpersonal reputation and provide more accurate and efficient information to students, offices could consider providing training with subsequent evaluation of opportunities/resources to ensure front-line staff not only have the requisite policy knowledge to assist students and their unique circumstances, but also critical customer service skills to convey empathy and individual attention. This is important for all student interactions, but especially for FGCS who may have limited access to additional information resources.

Guiding questions:

- How equipped are frontline staff at referring more complex issues to different people/resources?

- What service training exists for frontline staff to show empathy and care?

3. NARRATIVE ASSESSMENT AND CRAFTING

Many students held opinions and perspectives on offices/services based on little or no personal experience. Organizational narratives were passed through peer networks and "sagas." While there may be limited agency from offices/services, student narratives should be taken seriously because they are having an impact on the ways students engage (or not engage) with essential student services.

Guiding questions:

- What narratives do students have of a specific office/service?

- Do organizational narratives differ, depending on student identity/community?

- How can offices/services shape or alter student perceptions?

4. **PEER SUPPORT**

Peer support was the most utilized resource participants sought when they needed to overcome an obstacle. In particular, students who were in smaller schools (e.g., School of Public Health or the School of Nursing) utilized advanced students to access sage knowledge for navigational purposes. Similarly, students involved in organizations like La Casa utilized a peer group chat that they could follow along as students shared information and asked questions. Since peer networks and support are such a common medium used for gaining knowledge and solving problems, peer support could also be utilized more readily for academic advising and financial aid. Even though part of the success of peer support programs is from their informal nature, formalizing some peer support programs could be useful in crafting messaging and communication about complex subjects like financial aid, curriculum, and student success resources.

Guiding questions:

- How do offices offer peer support and guidance when providing and/or marketing services?

- In what ways can offices provide information to student organizations/communities?

- In what ways can offices create reciprocal partnerships with student organizations/communities?

Peer support was the most utilized resource participants sought when they needed to overcome an obstacle.

5. TRUSTWORTHINESS TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The types of relationships students develop with university staff are an important aspect of their experience and success (Felton & Lambert, 2020). Individual and group trustworthiness was an important factor in determining how students engaged with people and office/services. Student service leaders should think about how staff can, and do, develop relationships with students so they maximally support them.

Guiding questions:

- What capacity do staff have to develop relationships with students?

- How are staff interactions with students assessed?

- How can/should trustworthiness be incorporated into evaluation efforts of essential student services?

Acknowledgements

References

Bhattacharya, K. (2017). *Fundamentals of qualitative research: A practical guide.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315231747.

Cataldi, E. F., Bennett, C. T., Chen, X. (2018). *Stats in brief: First-generation students: College access, persistence, and postbachelor's outcomes.* U.S. Department of Education. nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2018421.

Charmaz, K. (2010). *Constructing grounded theory.* (2nd Ed.). Sage.

Felton, P., & Lambert, L. M. (2020). *Relationship-rich education: How human connections drive success in college.* Johns Hopkins University Press. doi.org/10.1353/book.78561.

Ishitani, T. T. (2016). "Time-varying effects of academic and social integration on student persistence for first and second years in college: National data approach." *Journal of College Student Retention, 18*(3), 263-286. doi.org/10.1177/1521025115622781

Merriam, S. B., &. Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation.*

Oswalt, S. B., Lederer, A. M., Chestnut-Steich, K., Day, C., Halbritter, A., & Ortiz, D. (2020). Trends in college students' mental health diagnoses and utilization of services, 2009-2015. *Journal of American College Health, 68*(1), 41-51. doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2018.1515748

Thelamour, B., Mqangi, C. G., & Ezeofor, I. (2019). "'We need to stick together for survival': Black college students' racial identity, same-ethnic friendships, and campus connectedness." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 12*(3), 266-279. dx.doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000104

Winter, F., & Kataria, M. (2020). "You are who your friends are? An experiment on homophily in trustworthiness among friends." *Rationality and Society, 32*(2), 223-251. doi.org/10.1177/1043463120919380

Appendix

Sample vs. Population Demographics

TABLE 1: RACE

	First-Gen Sample	First-Gen U-M Population
American Indian	1.7%	0.3%
Asian	16.9%	17.5%
Black	10.2%	10.0%
Latinx	25.4%	17.2%
Middle East/North African	3.4%	Not Available
Mixed Race	10.2%	6.0%
White	30.5%	47.3%
Non-Declared	6.8%	2.0%

TABLE 2: GENDER

	First-Gen Sample	First-Gen U-M Population
Male	37.3%	44.4%
Female	67.8%	55.6%
Transgender	3.4%	Not Available

TABLE 3: IN-STATE / OUT OF STATE

	First-Gen Sample	First-Gen U-M Population
In-State	69.5%	68.8%
Out-of-State	35.6%	31.2%

TABLE 4: ACADEMIC STANDING

	First-Gen Sample	First-Gen U-M Population
First Year	25.4%	28.7%
Sophomore	25.4%	27.1%
Junior	23.7%	22.3%
Senior	30.5%	21.3%
Transfer	18.6%	16.0%

TABLE 5: ACADEMIC SCHOOL

	First-Gen Sample	First-Gen U-M Population
Architecture & Urban Planning	1.7%	1.0%
Art & Design	1.7%	2.0%
Business	11.9%	4.4%
Dental	0.0%	1.0%
Education	3.4%	1.0%
Engineering	13.6%	18.2%
Information	3.4%	1.0%
Kinesiology	1.7%	2.7%
LSA	33.9%	33.0%
Music, Theatre, Dance	3.4%	1.9%
Nursing	3.4%	2.9%
Pharmacy	0.0%	1.0%
Public Health	3.4%	0.5%
Public Policy	0.0%	0.2%
Undeclared	23.7%	30.4%

TABLE 6: INCOME

	First-Gen Sample	First-Gen U-M Population
Less than $25,000	30.5%	22.4%
$25,000 – $49,999	32.2%	28.9%
$50,000 – $74,999	13.6%	16.5%
$75,000 – $99,999	13.6%	9.5%
$100,000 – $149,999	0.0%	8.2%
$150,000 – $199,999	1.7%	1.5%
More than $200,000	1.7%	2.9%
Undeclared	11.9%	9.9%

CONTACT US

Office of Enrollment Management
2300 Student Activities Building
515 E. Jefferson Street
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109

734-763-5837

enrollment.umich.edu

OFFICE OF
ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN