

## PELL INSTITUTE DATA STORY OF THE MONTH

A focus on first-generation students



Welcome to the first of Pell Institute's Equity Indicators Data Story of the Month. This month we focus on First-Generation Students in honor of the celebration this week. The text and charts below are meant to provide a few basic facts about the past and current statistics of first-generation students. We hope this brief introduction will encourage you to visit the Pell Institute's Equity Indicators website: <http://pellinstitute.org/indicators/> and the Center for First-Generation Student Success <https://firstgen.naspa.org/> website. Both these sites provide additional information on first-generation students and related topics.

### Sources of the Information for the Data Story Charts

The statistics in the charts for this Data Story of the Month are from the Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS); and from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), longitudinal studies, specifically the National Longitudinal Study of High School Seniors of 1972 (NLS:72), the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study of 2016 (NPSAS:16), and the Beginning Postsecondary Study (BPS:12/17).

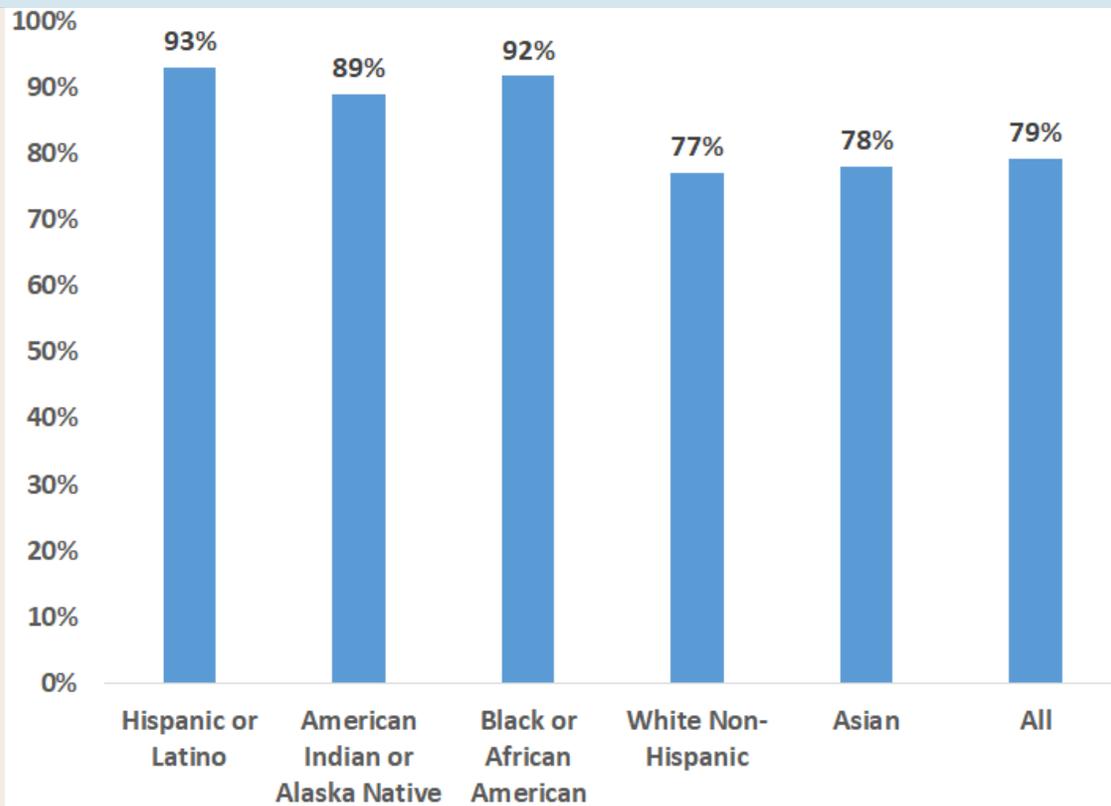
## Introduction: What is the Origin of First-Generation as a Key Concept Defining TRIO eligibility?

As we begin, we first provide an answer to an often-asked question about how we came to focus on first-generation students in TRIO and the college access and success community. When TRIO programs first began in the late 1960's and early 1970's, the eligibility criteria in the law was defined generally as "students who were disadvantaged." In the re-authorization of the Higher Education Act of 1980, the TRIO community worked with legislators to formally articulate more specific TRIO eligibility requirements in the law for the first time. Recognizing that students, who were the first in their families to attend college, would always be among those students most in need of college access and success services, the TRIO community defined first-generation college as those students from families in which neither parent had attained a bachelor's degree. COE recommended that the first-generation criteria, along with family income levels and disability status, become the major TRIO eligibility requirements. These recommendations were adopted by Congress and remain the cornerstones of TRIO eligibility.

## What percentage of children/youth in the United States would be first-generation college, should they enter postsecondary?

- The percentage of youth/children who would be first-generation postsecondary should they enter college has declined steadily over the last 50 years, but substantial gaps remain by race/ethnicity
- In 1972, the percent of high school seniors who would be first-generation, should they enter college, ranged from over 90 percent each for Hispanic and Black high school seniors to 77 percent for White non-Hispanic seniors. In 1972, the national percentage that would be first-generation among high school seniors was 79 percent.

**Percentage of high school seniors who would be first-generation college should they enter college, (defined as neither parent has a bachelor's degree) by race/ethnicity: National Longitudinal Study of High School Seniors: (NLS:1972)**

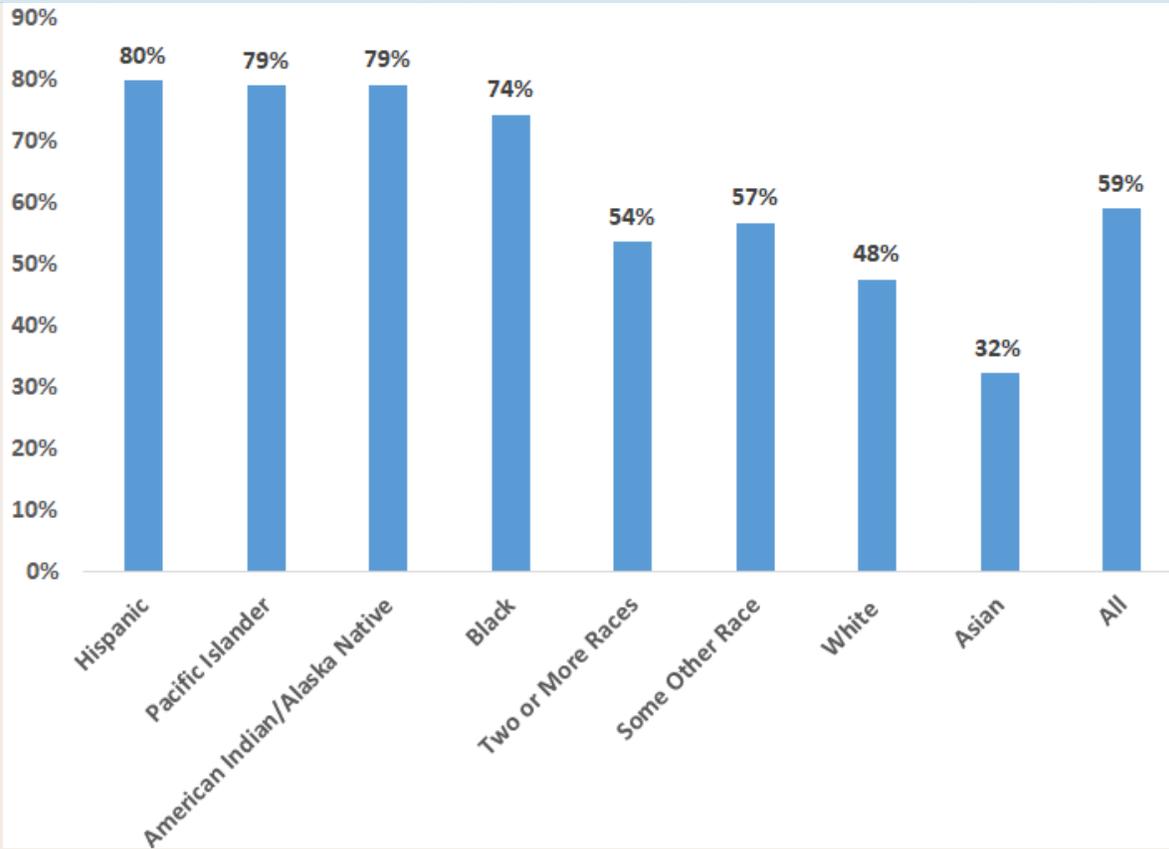


NOTE: Due to difference in the populations studied the 1972 in the National Longitudinal Study of High School Seniors 1972 (NLS-72) and the American Community Survey in 2017 (included in the chart below) these data are not directly comparable. The the 2017 estimates are based on all children under 18 and may overestimate first-generation status slightly as in some families parents may attain a bachelor's degree by the time their children are seniors in high school.

SOURCE: Tabulated from the National Longitudinal Study of the Class of 1972 (NLS-72); as included in the Pell Institute, Indicators of Educational Equity in the United States, 2020, Setting the Stage Indicator 7a.

- By 2017, among all children under 18, the percent who would be first-generation, should they enter college, ranged from 80 percent among Hispanic children to 32 percent among Asian children. The national percentage that would be first-generation college should they enter college was 59 percent.

**Percentage of children under 18 who would be first-generation college should they enter college, (defined as neither parent has a bachelors degree) by race/ethnicity: American Community Survey (ACA:2017)**



NOTE: Due to differences in the populations studied the 1972 in the National Longitudinal Study of High School Seniors 1972 (NLS-72) and the American Community Survey in 2017 these data are not directly comparable. The the 2017 estimates are based on all children under 18 and may overestimate first-generation status slightly as in some families parents may attain a bachelor's degree by the time their children are seniors in high school.

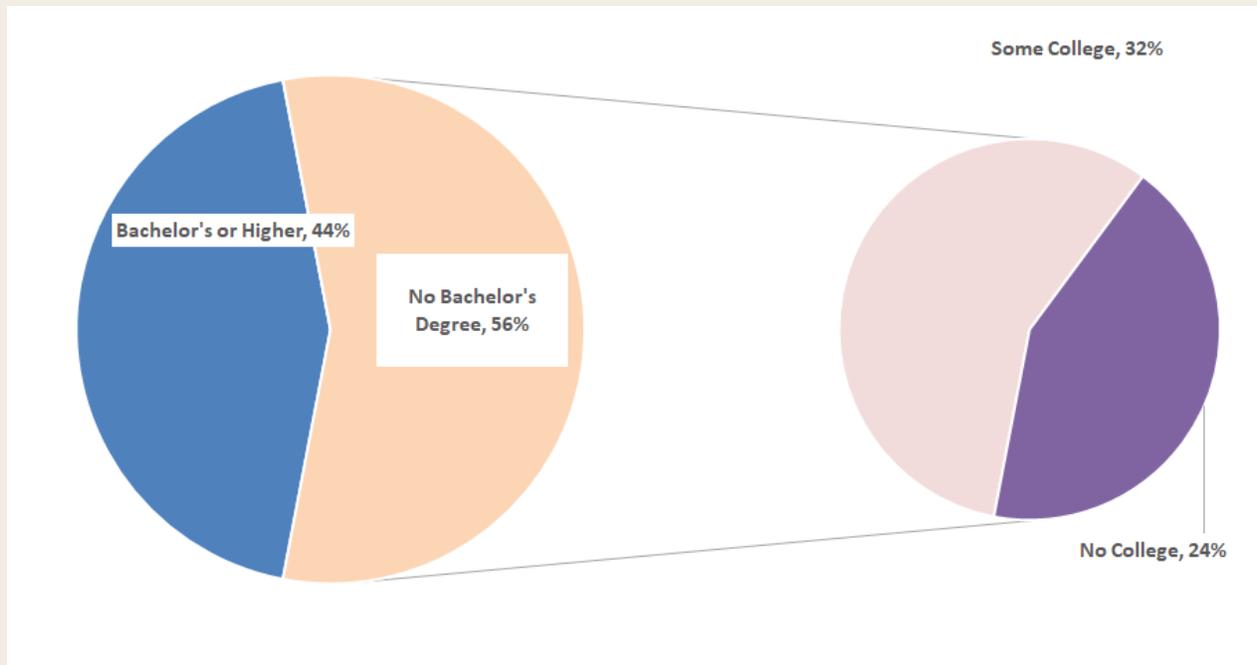
SOURCE: Tabulated from the American Community Survey (2017), as included in the Pell Institute, Indicators of Educational Equity in the United States, 2020, Setting the Stage Indicator 7b.

## What percentage of college students are first-generation students?

We know that not all individuals enter college and first-generation students on average are less likely to attend college. They are also less likely to attend right after high school. Using NCES National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) data, the chart below tells us what percent of undergraduate students are first-generation. Over time, this question has become more complex, as there are a growing number of students whose parents have some college but have not attained a bachelor's degree. The chart below breaks down all undergraduates by their parents' education status.

- Considering all undergraduate students, 56 percent were first-generation defined as neither parent having a bachelor's degree and 44 percent of undergraduates had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree.
- Breaking down the 56 percent of first-generation students, 32 percent were students who had parents with some college and 24 percent were students whose parents reported no college.

## Percentage distribution of undergraduate students by parent education: NPSAS:16

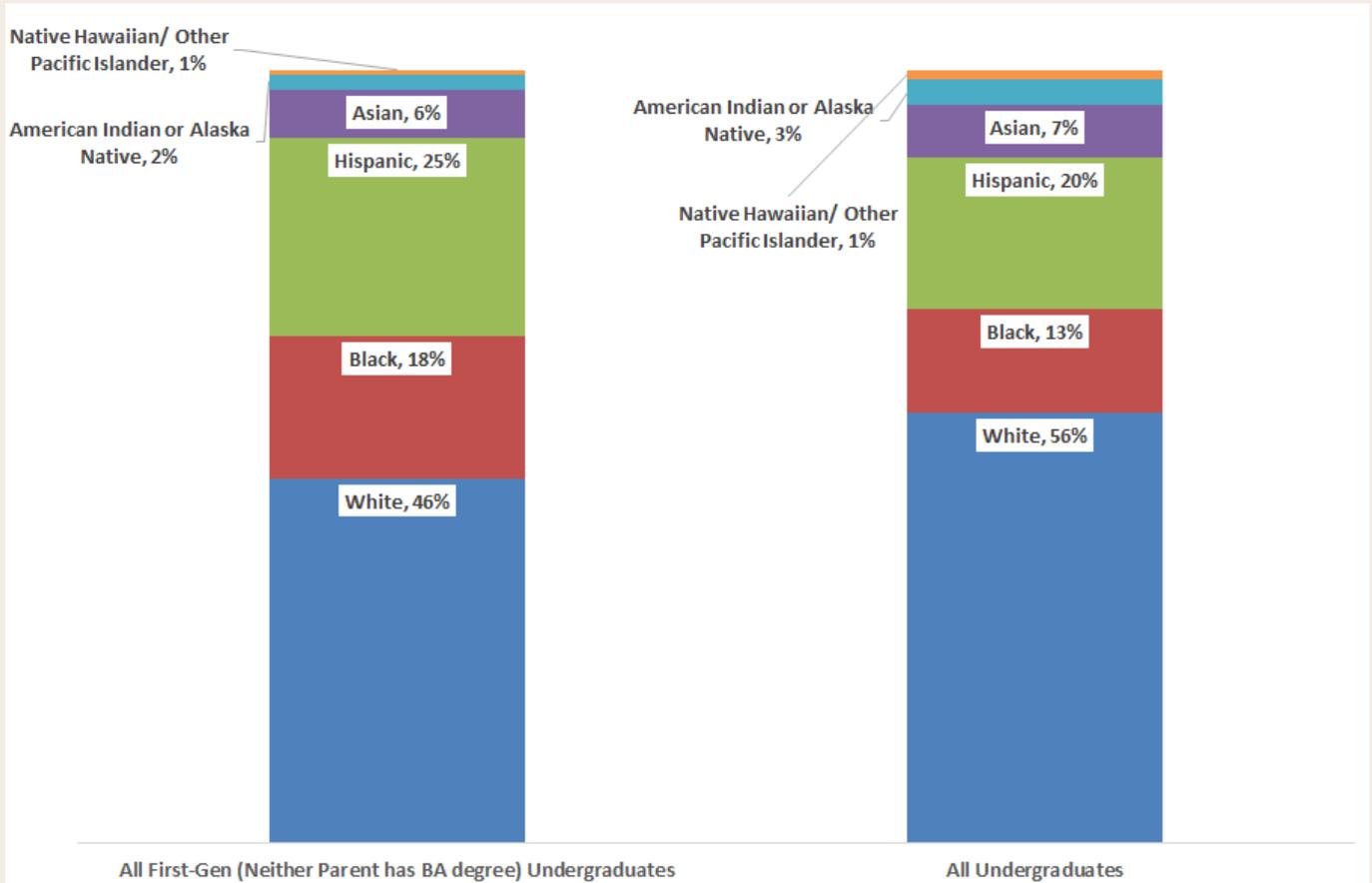


SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:16) as tabulated from information in the Center for First Generation Success <https://firstgen.naspa.org/factsheets>.

## How Many First-Generation Students are there in College? What is the distribution by race/ethnicity?

- Of an estimated 16.3 million undergraduates attending degree granting institutions in the United States, there are an estimated 9.1 million students who are first-generation students.
- Among first-generation undergraduate students, about 46 percent are White, 25 percent are Hispanic, 18 percent are Black, 6 percent are Asian, and about 1 percent each are American Indian or Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.
- Black and Hispanic students are somewhat over-represented among first-generation students and Whites and Asians are somewhat underrepresented.

## Percentage distributions of first-generation and of all undergraduate students by race/ethnicity



NOTE: Detail may not sum to 100 percent total due to rounding

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:16) and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), "Fall Enrollment Survey".

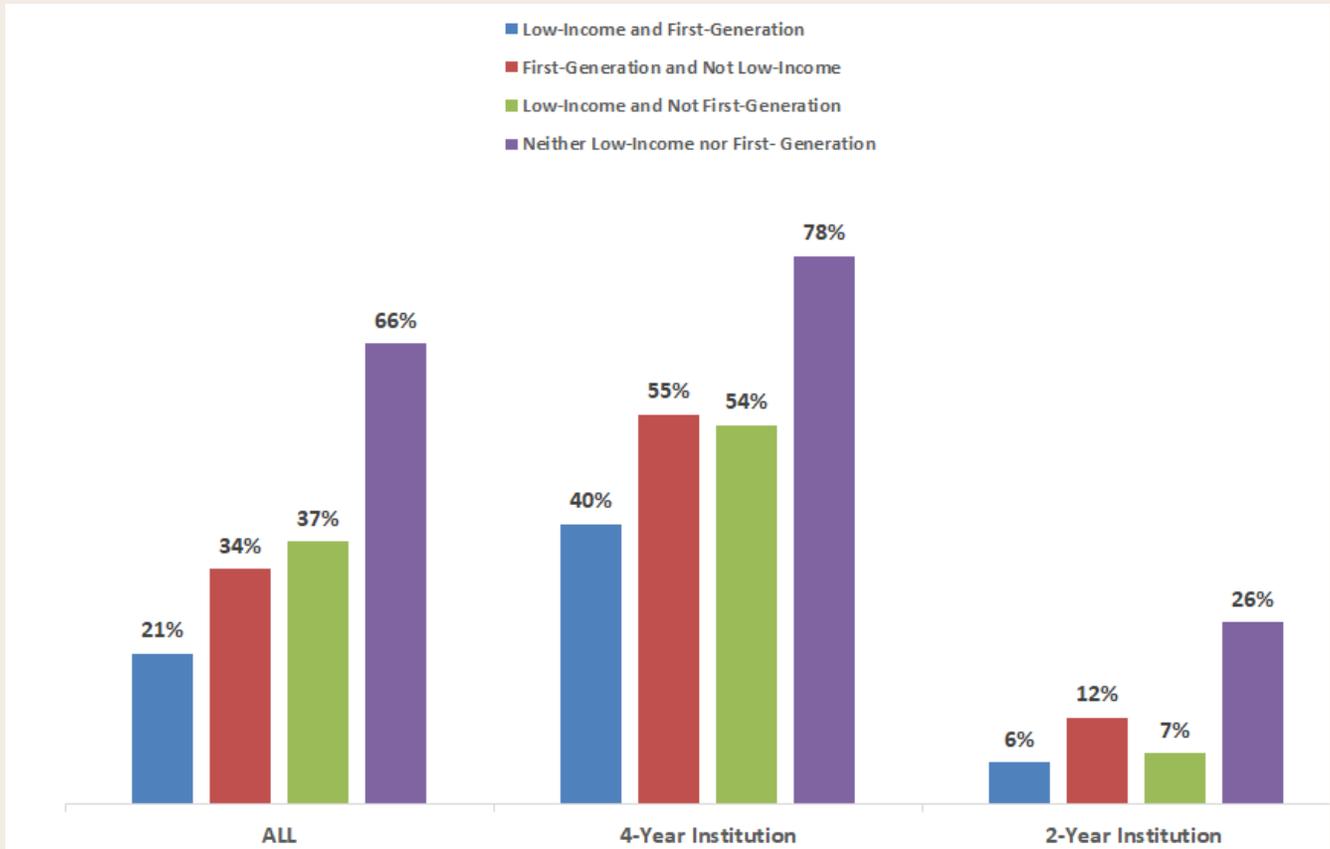
## What Percentage of entering first-generation students obtain a bachelor's degree within 6 years of entering postsecondary?

Most first-generation students entering college at both 2-year and 4-year colleges report they expect and hope to obtain a bachelor's degree; however, the reality is that the majority will not be able to attain their goal within 6 years. The NCES Beginning Postsecondary Study (BPS), follows beginning college students 6-years after entrance. Their findings are sobering. Within the U.S.'s higher education system there simply are too many systemic barriers to success for many first-generation students .

- The six year bachelor's completion rates for dependent degree seeking students entering a either a 2-year or 4-year college were:
  - 21 percent among students who were both low-income and first-generation,
  - 34 percent among students who were first-generation but not low-income
  - 66 percent among students who were not first-generation and not low-income

- The six year bachelor’s completion rates for students entering at a 4-year college were:
  - 40 percent among students who are both low-income and first-generation,
  - 55 percent among students who are first-generation but not low-income,
  - 78 percent among students who are not first-generation and not low-income,

**Percentage of dependent students who first enrolled in academic year 2011-12 who completed a bachelor’s degree or higher within 6 years, by low-income and first-generation status and institutional level of initial enrollment**



SOURCE: Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012/17 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study. Tabulated using NCES PowerStats and as included in Equity Indicator 5c(iii).