

Public Abstract

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Title:The Success of Traditional and Nontraditional First-Generation College Students in a TRIO Student Support Services Program: Application of the Theory of Margin

First-generation and nontraditional students represent significant segments of the undergraduate population in the United States, but graduation rates for both groups lag despite extensive outreach efforts. This study utilized a mixed-methods design to examine the influence of both characteristics on student experience. The study applied McClusky's (1963, 1971) margin in life theory to first-generation students in a TRIO Student Support Services program. The purpose of the study was to determine differences between first-generation student's margin in life scores based on traditional or nontraditional status, gender, age, employment, relationship status, and TRIO participation level; and to identify common load and power variables of first-generation students and how the TRIO program contributed to their power. Quantitative results indicated limited differences in margin in life scores, with the exception of higher parenting power scores among nontraditional versus traditional students, and higher health power scores among somewhat active students versus slightly active students. Qualitative results revealed family as both a load and power variable for first-generation students and that TRIO SSS program is relevant to both traditional and nontraditional first-generation students even when power and load variables differ.