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## The Challenges First-generation Students Face

Being a college student is hard enough, but one thing that is certain is the fact that the challenges a college student might face are heightened when they're the first generation of students who are seeking an education in their family. In today's society, many people are looking to pursue higher education so that they can open their career opportunities in hopes to gain financial success and mobility. This shows, in 2014 it was reported that the rate of graduates that are unemployed is, in fact, lower than the U.S. unemployment rate as a whole. While reaping the benefits of getting a degree may seem great, the road there isn't always easy. First-generation students are known to face problems like a lack of readiness, financial abilities to pay for college, family support, and just the confidence to get there overall. First-generation students are often from low-income families and according to statistics they usually attend underfunded and low-performing schools. Today, there are many programs and scholarship opportunities that are made to help them but this isn't enough.

Not only do college students face things like stress, depression, sickness, debt, and poor habits, for first-generation students it gets worse. Many have to deal with even more debt than the average student, being without a family to help them out or feeling guilty that they aren't home working to help out the family members that they have. As a college student myself one thing that I can say is that with bad mental health, it's very hard to succeed. College isn't like high school, the importance of passing your classes is way more stressful than in high school as well as the content. According to research 1/4 of students have a diagnosable illness. 40% of them don't seek help for it, and 80% feel overwhelmed with their responsibilities. Everyone who's human knows that the minute you begin to feel overwhelmed and exhaustion settles in, plus guilt, just dropping out of college overall can be the result or considered. This is what first-generation students often face in their educational careers leading to their high dropout rates.

Studies show that one of the main things that hinder first-generation college students is their lack of confidence. This lack of confidence could be from their family situations, their schools, their environment, and etc. Many first-generation students deal with constant questioning whether or not they belong. With a lack of support and tools given to them, confidence can weigh very heavily on these students. On top of that, they're dealing with lots of pressures from family members, themselves, and peers. Many times when these students get to college they feel like outsiders or imposters, they don't really have a sense of belonging, not only that but just overall low self esteem can get to someone. After they get accustomed to living on campus or attending college, they then go home to families who may have resentment or their interactions with the family will change. A friend of mine who is also a first-generation college student once told me about how when she would go home some of her family members would automatically change in the way they talked to her, and she often heard things like "Oh, so you think you're better than us because you went to college." Or remarks such as, "While you're at school we're all here working to support the family." As a college freshmen, hearing things can be especially emotional and detrimental to that person. This reaction coming from family rather than a sense of pride and support can be a big factor on the student's mental health and morale.

Not only is mental health a highly ignored problem but so are racial disparities. This is nothing

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new in the U.S. According to an article I read named "Breaking Down Barriers: First-Generation College Students and College Success" Lauren Falcon states, 'Over several decades in the United States, African American, Hispanic, Native American, and low-income students have completed high school and attended college at consistently lower rates than their white and higher-income student counterparts' It's nothing new that racial tensions make an impact on the lives of ethnic minorities as well. This includes college and their ability to get there to that level. When someone grows up around a tough environment, the options and opportunity is greatly narrowed. How would someone who grew up around things like that even feel a sense of belonging in the academic world?

In terms of what can help fix this problem, there are a number of factors that pour into the struggles of first-generation students, so there can be a number of solutions. I think that it's up to everyone involved to help fix the problem. Not just one side. The family may be the reason for less success, but so can the curriculums at the high school the first-generation student may have attended. Or, it could also be the overall skill set/morale of the student involved. At the end of the day though, many face adversity, obviously some more than others, so the issue heavily relies on that one first-generation student to maintain the ability to be determined and persevere. It will also take for them to realize or acknowledge the importance of a college education in today's society. With trivial lives, some of the people in this group may face, according to studies that already have the problem-solving skills to navigate, self-esteem can be a big deal. Personal qualities play a huge role in the consistency of their educational careers. It's not just about getting to college, it's also about what can be done to continue and graduate. Naturally, we all know that you can't change a family someone is born in but what the government and school boards across districts can do to help us better prepare their students for college. Not just kids from privileged or wealthier areas. There should be a standard of curriculum added into academics and heavily enforced so that it can help build the confidence of underprivileged people who aspire to get to college and benefit them in terms of preparation. Confidence is a key aspect of getting into college, but also getting all the way to graduation. Schools can make an effort to start up more integrated and common college preparations for students. This can also be made to where parents may be involved so that they may see the opportunities that going to college can bring to not only that specific student but the entire family if need be. Communal support is one thing first-generation students could definitely use, the creation of preparatory programs can not only help with family dynamics but peer dynamics too. When students are surrounded by peers that are also striving for bigger and better, that influence can start a trend to increase determination.

Improvements in counseling should also be integrated into public schools and I think that schools could develop mentorship programs for students who want the help. Although I don't have too much experience myself with bad counseling, I have encountered people who do deal with this. Some counselor figures at low-performing schools can tend to be less informed therefore deterring students and making it seem like their chances are low. Improvements in advice and counsel first-generation students receive can not only help with their confidence, but it can also help with their lack of information that they might be dealing with depending on that area they're in. This is especially important because how else can these students access college-related information if they're the first in their family to do it? Obviously background knowledge wouldn't be their strong point in this topic. So it's up to their guidance figures to help put them on that road. This can also help by providing the student with the support they may not have had before. By building the students knowledge and overall awareness of opportunity it can increase their chances in pursuing higher education but also becoming more

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optimistic.

Overall, I think that when it comes to the struggles of first-generation students it's not only up to the community to help them overcome their obstacles, but themselves as well. Financial help and other things can be given but it's up to that specific individual to gather the strength and confidence to genuinely take advantage of such. At the same time it is also important that communities give a helping hand and extend opportunities to those who come from a wide range of backgrounds. It definitely takes a village to battle these types of things.