First Generation College Students & Involvement in Service Activities

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CONTENTS

Abstract

This exploratory study seeks to clarify the impact of involvement in service activities on first generation college students a small Jesuit university in the Pacific Northwest United States. Focus groups and a demographic survey were utilized to gather data from students engaged in different categories of service, including service learning, volunteering, and student leadership groups. Results indicate first generation college students experience differing levels of comfort within the community outside of campus, recognize the reciprocal benefits of service activities, and acknowledge a value of educational attainment. Implications for policy, research, and practice are discussed, and recommendations are given for creating pathways for first generation student involvement in service activities.

Keywords: first generation, service, community engagement, retention, leadership

Background

First generation college students (FGCS) are defined differently across the literature; in general, FGCS are often defined as students whose parents did not earn a college degree. FGCS face unique challenges in accessing higher education and persisting to college as compared to their non-first generation peers. According to a longitudinal study conducted by Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini in 2004, "first-generation college students tend to be at a distinct disadvantage with respect to basic knowledge about postsecondary education (e.g., costs and application process), level of family income and support, educational expectations and plans, and academic preparation in high school" (p. 250). If FGCS overcome barriers to gain college acceptance, they still find themselves at a disadvantage when it comes to academic success, retention, and involvement on campus.

Issues of equity and access to education come into play when looking at FGCS success: FGCS are more likely to be Black or Hispanic and come from low-income families (Chen, 2005). Because FGCS tend to be members of populations underrepresented in higher education, it is crucial for educators to acknowledge the struggles they face and to seek solutions to improve the likelihood of academic and non-academic success. Pascarella et al. (2004) accurately describe the importance of access to higher education in that it "must be understood to mean not only admission to some postsecondary institution, but also 'access' to the full range of college experiences and to the personal, social, and economic benefits to which those experiences and degree completion lead" (p. 281).

Once in college, FGCS often struggle to perform academically. They tend to complete fewer credit hours, take fewer humanities and fine arts courses, work more hours per week, earn lower grades, need more remedial assistance, are more likely to withdraw from or repeat courses

they attempt, and are less likely to participate in honors programs (Chen, 2005; Terenzini et al., 1996). Though they may report higher expectations for earning a college degree compared with non-FGCS peers, these high expectations do not translate to attainment (Chen, 2005). According to one study, "the risk of attrition in the first year among first-generation students was 71 % higher than that of students with two college-educated parents" (Ishitani, 2003). While academic success can impact retention, other factors such as discrimination, feelings of alienation, difficulty adjusting to campus culture, work and family responsibilities, financial barriers, and lack of support create a situation in which FGCS are less likely than their non-FG peers to persist to graduation (Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1996).

Involvement in campus activities, student groups, and other programs are related to increased likelihood of retention and persistence to graduation (Astin, 1984). For reasons including those aforementioned, FGCS are less likely to live on campus than non-FGCS, and tend to have lower levels of extracurricular involvement and interaction with peers in non-academic settings; this places them at a distinct disadvantage regarding developmental benefits from attending college (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Therefore, FGCS are even more statistically unlikely to graduate due to a combination of academic and non-academic factors.

Service opportunities for undergraduate students can be found in many forms, including student club involvement, service learning courses, volunteering, and co-curricular leadership and K-12 mentorship programs. These opportunities can be meaningful learning experiences for all students; Astin & Sax (1998) found that participation in a variety of types of service activities enhance academic development, life skill development, and sense of civic responsibility. Service

activities also allow students the opportunity to move beyond the campus community and interact with others who might be different (Gallini & Moley, 2003).

There is reason to believe that the effects of participation in service activities have particularly significant effects on the college experience of FGCS, namely increased academic success and retention. With regard to persistence, FGCS participation in service learning during the first year in college is identified as a high-impact practice, increasing the likelihood of return for the second year (Gallini & Moley, 2003; Kuh, 2008). One reason may be that the opportunity to make a connection between academics and personal values; according to one study, FGCS who found a connection between their personal values and academics found greater meaning in their education, and were motivated to persist to graduation (Yeh, 2010). Faculty, particularly in service learning courses, can also play an important role in FGCS academic success and retention; one study revealed a strong relationship between quality of interaction with faculty in service learning courses and FGCS academic integration, social integration, and beliefs about accomplishing academic goals (McKay & Estrella, 2008). Finally, Williams and Perrine (2008) found that participation in civic engagement activities that promote leadership development can improve retention for disadvantaged students.   While the relationship between FGCS status, involvement in service, and subsequent impact on retention and persistence is not well-studied, it is clear that involvement in service has positive effects on academic success for many students.

In addition to academic impact, FGCS participation in service also impacts personal and social development. Involvement in campus programs and activities leads to increased positive outcomes for all students (Astin, 1984), but these experiences are particularly important for FGCS, who tend to be less engaged overall and are likely to perceive the college environment as

less supportive (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Additionally, research has shown that FGCS status and student race/ethnicity has a unique impact on student involvement and subsequent learning gains; therefore, a "one size fits all" approach to involvement is often not meeting the needs of all students (Lundberg, Schreiner, Hovaguimian, & Miller, 2007). There is little research demonstrating the unique effects of participation in service activities outside of service learning on personal and social development. One study points out that many times, as a part of volunteer or service learning requirements, students will participate in reflection sessions, orientations and training, and will travel to service sites; all of these activities promote peer interaction, many times interaction across difference (Gallini & Moley, 2003).

Emerging Practices

It is clear that FGCS are in need of targeted support both academically and non-academically if they are to succeed in college. Active involvement through summer bridge programs and targeted first-year experience programs are found to encourage more active involvement, which in turn leads to greater likelihood of persistence (Lundberg, Schreiner, Hovaguimian, & Miller, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1996). Programming can be particularly effective if faculty and staff can engage FGS in ways that validate multiple cultures and values (Rendón, 1994). Furthermore, participation in service related activities, including academic programs that require mentoring of first generation high school students, have proven to be an effective way to engage and develop college students with increased likelihood of retention. The following programs at Jesuit Universities indicate emerging best practices for engaging FGCS, leading to greater academic and personal development and persistence to graduation.

The Leadership Excellence and Academic Development (LEAD) Program at Santa Clara University engages 60 FGCS per incoming class, and aims to provide this necessary targeted

academic support while also exposing them to university culture and community. By participating in programming and academic preparation during the summer before entering, as well as continuing through first-year programming, LEAD students typically demonstrate a 96% persistence rate from first to second year (Kimura-Walsh). Furthermore, the students are required to be a member of a Residential Learning Community regardless of if they live on or off campus. Most relevant to this research, the LEAD program offers a course called "Creating College Going Communities" that fills a core requirement for students; in this course, students are actively engaged in learning about college access issues for underrepresented populations and are required to lead workshops for local high school students who are also first generation.

Through Washington Campus Compact, Gonzaga University hosts a program called Coaching for Academic Success. College students act as mentors to first generation peers who are struggling academically. Housed under the Office of Academic Services, the mentor-mentee pairs are required to meet for one hour per week ever week to provide academic and non-academic support.

Finally, Seattle University formerly provided a program entitled the First Generation Project, in which college students, many of whom identified as first generation, provided academic support for high school students who were also first generation (Seattle University Center for Service and Community Engagement, 2012). College students who participated in the program engaged in group personal and professional development activities facilitated by a graduate student coordinator.

Statement of the Problem and Purpose

Currently, there is a lack of literature regarding the FGCS experience with regard to participation in service activities. We know that involvement leads to positive outcomes, namely

increased retention and likelihood of academic success (Astin, 1984); however, we do not know

if participation in service activities has a greater impact on FGCS as compared with non-service

activities or with non-FGCS. Knowing that FGCS face barriers that their non-FG peers do not

face, does involvement in service mediate the effects of these barriers to prevent attrition while

also providing non-academic benefits? This exploratory study seeks to identify and clarify the

impact of service on personal, social, and professional development for first generation college

students. This study also builds on the work of a previous researcher who identified a conceptual

framework of service-learning experiences impacting academic growth, psychosocial growth,

personal and spiritual growth, and sociocultural and sociopolitical growth, all of which

contribute to persistence in college (Yeh, 2010).
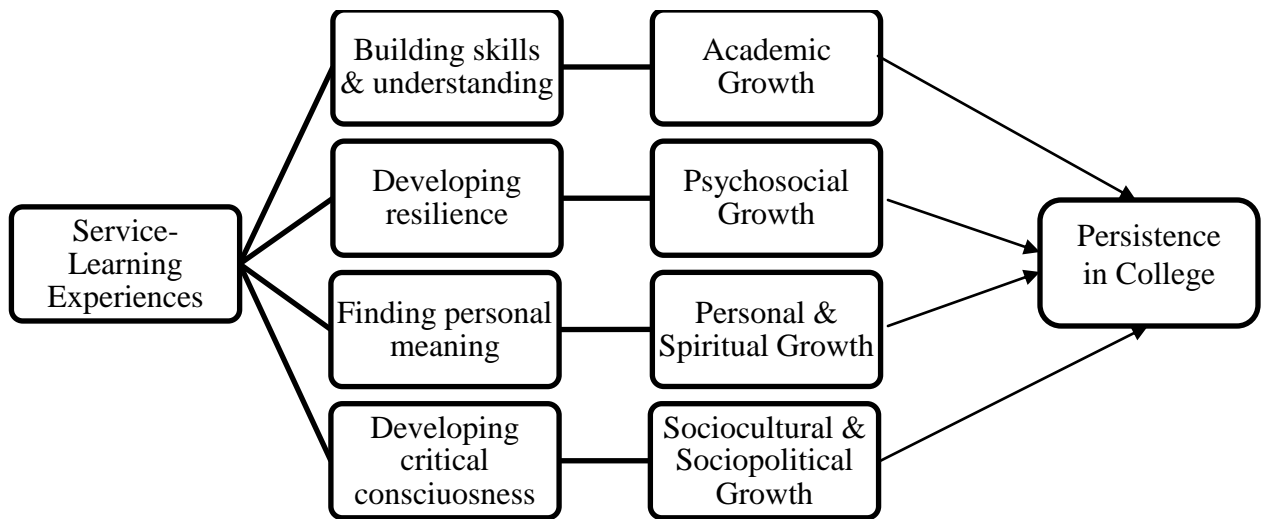
In keeping with much of the literature on FGCS in service, Yeh's (2010) study investigated the

impact of service learning experiences on growth and subsequent persistence. The current study

seeks to understand how participation in service outside of service learning courses, such as co-

curricular service programs and volunteerism, impact this framework; furthermore, the results of

the study will demonstrate the relationship between Jesuit higher education and participation in

service related activities as well as the subsequent outcomes. It is possible that Jesuit education

could differentially impact the outcomes of service participation for FGCS: many Jesuit

institutions are founded on values of service and social justice, and a strong emphasis is put on

professional formation and leadership for justice. Students who elect to attend a Jesuit institution

likely already possess values of service for others, and FGCS who attend Jesuit institutions may

experiences outcomes distinct from their non-FGCS peers. While this is not a comparative

study, it will contribute to the literature by laying a foundation for future research.

The results of this study will likely demonstrate the value community engagement offices

in higher education as a source of support for FGCS; furthermore, college access programs may

be able to point to community engagement offices and programming as a source of support for

FGCS in transition or throughout their time in college. Upward Bound, a TRIO program

designed to support high school students in their college process, may be more likely to

encourage alumni student involvement in Upward Bound programming if a positive relationship

is determined.

Methodology

Research Question

Knowing that FGCS face barriers that their non-FG peers do not face, does involvement

in service mediate the effects of these barriers to prevent attrition while also providing non-

academic benefits? This exploratory study seeks to identify and clarify the impact of

involvement in service activities on socio-cultural/socio-political and personal development for

first generation college students. In particular, what impact does involvement in service

activities have for students who are low-income, first generation students of color?

Site Description

Seattle University (SU) is a small, private, Jesuit institution in an urban setting in the

Pacific Northwest Region of the United States. Approximately 8,000 students are enrolled at the

institution, and about half are graduate students. Undergraduate colleges include Business &

Economics, Nursing, Arts & Sciences, Science & Engineering, and Education. As a Jesuit

institution, SU's core values include academic excellence, diversity, justice, care, and leadership;

though not listed as a core value, all students are encouraged to engage in service by way of

service learning courses, of which there are approximately 200. Approximately 20% of SU

undergraduates are first generation.

The Center for Service and Community Engagement (CSCE) at SU is home to the

Seattle University Youth Initiative (SUYI), a comprehensive pipeline program started in 2010

aimed at working in partnership with the neighboring community to provide academic support to

the youth in the neighborhood schools while simultaneously allowing learning and professional

development opportunities for SU faculty, staff, and students. The CSCE saw an increase in

volunteer and service learner engagement in SUYI programming by 150% last academic year,

and programming continues to expand.

Participants

This exploratory study depended on the self-identification of participants as first

generation college students. The sample included participants who demonstrate involvement in

service activities through participation in one or more programs or courses under affiliated with

the CSCE at SU. The primary method of recruitment for focus groups was via emails to SUYI

volunteers placed at the neighborhood schools. In-person recruitment also occurred during the

CSCE Leadership Retreat. Participation in the study was incentivized through entry into a raffle

to win an iPad in exchange for participating in the one-hour focus group and completing the

demographic survey.

The sample included nine total participants, six female and three male. Four identified as CSCE student leaders, four SUYI tutors, one work study employee. Eight of the nine identified as students of color (Latin@/Hispanic/Chican@, Asian/Pacific Islander, African American). Six identified as in-state applicants to SU, two out-of-state, and one international. (See Appendix A).

Data Collection

Participants who registered for a focus group session were asked to dedicate one hour of their time for filling out a demographic survey and participating in group discussion. Two focus group sessions were held on the same day, one in the afternoon and one in early evening to accommodate any scheduling issues. The focus group times were based on the experience of previous researchers conducting focus groups at SU, who noted that these times yielded the greatest number of available participants who qualified.

The researcher asked seven questions total: 1) what were key considerations in making your final choice to attend SU?; 2) how did your family influence your college access and college choice?; 3) what academic experience has had the most impact on you?; 4) what experience outside of the classroom has had the most impact on you?; 5) what impact, if any, has college had on your spiritual/religious beliefs?; 6) how have you experienced vocational discernment while at SU?; 7) Do you have anything else to share?   The researcher followed up with probing questions regarding involvement in service activities.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data was analyzed using an open coding system in which key quotes from each focus group were pulled and aligned with the appropriate question, which was subsequently entered into a coding chart. Emergent themes were then extrapolated from all the participants'

quotes and consolidated into three common themes by finding connections and grouping related topics (Creswell, 2009). Secondary analysis was conducted by comparing demographic data to qualitative data, indentifying patterns and deepening original themes identified through open coding.

Researcher Bias

The researcher's identity as a non-FGCS White woman posed both benefits and challenges to the research process. First, participant recruitment posed a potential challenge because the researcher's identity did not match the participants'. However, the researcher had previous working relationships with several participants in this study, which contributed to a diverse sample as well as openness and honesty in the data collection process.

In the data analysis process, the researcher's experiences at a large, public research institution at times colored the analysis of the experiences of students at a Jesuit university; because of this bias, the researcher took care to draw out the theme of Jesuit values in combination with access and equity.

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Findings

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The following key themes emerged from the data gathered through focus groups: 1) level of comfort in community outside of campus; 2) reciprocal benefits of service activities; and 3) value of educational attainment.

Level of Comfort in Community Outside of Campus

Participants reported differing levels of comfort when serving in the community depending on their geographic location before college. Students who attended Seattle Public Schools in high school indicated a depth of learning connecting their lived experience with their service activity. Emily, a SUYI tutor, states that her experience returning to her local high

school to tutor "… felt like coming back to my old home, but there were so many underlying problems that I didn't really notice when I was there…there were so many social issues going on, and by going through service learning, I was able to pick up on it." Emily's experience returning to her previous academic environment as a tutor likely deepened her experience because she was able to build off of earlier experiences, assumptions, and relationships, which helped her to think more critically about her work as a tutor.

Conversely, students who did not have previous interactions with the community outside of campus and who lived outside of a major metropolitan area previous to attending Seattle U reported that encountering difference in the community was a meaningful learning experience. Andrea, a Latina student from a small town in Washington, describes her time working with local high school students in her service group: "…Going into that environment was really weird for me. But I'm really appreciative that I got to do it because it's just like seeing different people, different places and…yeah. I'm in it again this year, so…and I'm on the same committee so that I can, like, keep going into that school and recruiting students." Andrea describes her experience as challenging her comfort level with difference, yet she states that she is excited and thankful for the opportunity to keep working in this new environment.

Sean, a student of color also from a small town, reports his experience in the local schools as "a bit of a shocker" due to differences in communication and interactional styles. He was caught off-guard during his interactions with some students in Seattle Public Schools, and identified differences between his experience in a small town, where "the actions you take reflects on consequences like immediately, because people just perceive you that way for the rest of the time." He notes, "You can open yourself to different types of people but you can't necessarily go all in trustworthy…but you can't close yourself out from different people. It was a

big eye-opener for me." His identity of being from a small town, where everyone knows

everyone, seemingly became much more salient for him in a more urban environment where

greater anonymity is possible.

Regardless of first generation status or racial/ethnic background, all students benefit from

encounters with difference; participants generally maintained an attitude of respect for the

community environment, acknowledging evolution in interpersonal interactions, assumptions,

and beliefs. Overall, students who had previous experience with the community outside of

campus (i.e. attended a Seattle Public School) prior to engaging in service activities reported a

greater level of comfort and a deeper level of reflection on what their experience means to them

in the context of their academic and personal development.

Reciprocal Benefits of Service Activities

This finding suggests that the more connections made between service activities and

vocational discernment, academics, and professional development, the more meaningful the

experience can be. Participants touched on the reciprocal nature of involvement in service

activities, some questioning whether altruism through service activities is even possible. Robert,

a senior involved as a SUYI tutor, stated, "When you can see that you're actually making a

difference…it's really beneficial for you too…it's really rewarding…this might sound selfish,

cuz like how people view service as like 'doing for others,' but for me service, if you actually

enjoy it, it's for selfish reasons, so that's why you should continue it, only if you enjoy it

though." Robert also discussed how his service connected deeply with his academic interests in

social work and his internship experience in his major; he indicated that there was not just one

experience that stands out, but how these elements combine to bring meaning to his experience at

SU. Several students indicated that they continue with service work because they enjoy it;

connections to professional development and academic interests was a strong theme for many participants.

One of the benefits of involvement in service activities was self-discovery or identity formation. Sharon, a junior involved in service learning and a SUYI tutor, stated, "Service learning really taught me about myself…it helped me to succeed, where I want to go educationally." Through her service experience, Sharon was able to learn more about herself, including the influences in her life that brought her to SU. It seems that service allowed her to integrate many aspects of her identity and bring her whole self into her academics, which was something she was unable to do before.

Value of Educational Attainment

Participants acknowledged the importance of education and helping others to succeed, sometimes referring to instances where someone helped them to succeed academically. This theme was more robust within responses from students who acted as tutors with SUYI. Robert, a Seattle Public School alumna and SUYI tutor, noted the importance of academic support and mentorship when he stated, "…everyone needs support, you can't ever have too much…some people have like, rougher, I don't know, backgrounds, and you don't always get that…Seattle Public Schools isn't that great, and some parts of the neighborhood aren't that great…just being there, that helping hand…and education is really important, so it's important to focus on that." Robert previously acknowledged the support he received from his family in realizing his college aspirations, likely encouraging him to also serve as a "helping hand" for other students in Seattle Public Schools.

Involvement in service activities with the local community can encourage students to reflect on their own pathways to college, which can lead to an increase in cultural capital instead

of an avoidance of cultural background. Sharon, a SUYI tutor and African American student, describes her experience with service learning and the connections she made to her own pathway to success: "When I came to Seattle U, and even when I was doing Running Start in Tacoma, I felt like I was running away from my culture, through my education…When I went to St. Francis House, it really brought back the reality…education is great, but your past is kind of how you got where you're at, you know, and I think it was eye-opening in that sense…my story can change people, and influence people as much as my education can."   Sharon demonstrates her ability to integrate her past experiences and life circumstances into her current self-concept, overcoming internalized oppression that suggested to her that her culture and education were mutually exclusive.

Stories like Sharon's demonstrate the powerful liberatory force that involvement in service activities can play for students from underrepresented backgrounds: she felt empowered to share her personal discovery of how her pathway to education is just as important to her as her education itself. Service learning provided a context and depth to her educational experience, helping her to continue to succeed educationally. Her story indicates the importance of providing access to service activities, whether through paid opportunities or integration with academic coursework, to students who otherwise may not engage due to a demanding schedule.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study that are important to discuss. First, because this study was under the larger umbrella of a study on FGCS at Jesuit universities, methodology did not address the true nature of the research questions the author wished to answer. Future studies should utilize Yeh's (2010) framework when developing demographic surveys and focus group protocol in order to pinpoint developmental experiences and outcomes.

Second, within service activities reported by participants, there is a conflation of many categories of service activities, which makes it difficult to indicate which experience had more impact. It still remains the researcher's hypothesis that FGCS from the Seattle area who are involved in SUYI K-12 tutoring programs experience deeper learning and connection with the community than their peers.

Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

Future research could include a comparative study examining the differences in outcomes between students who identify as first generation and students who do not; is there a differential impact of involvement in service activities on different developmental areas? Another future study could compare different service activities, for example service learning and volunteerism, to again study the difference in outcomes. Finally, in order to determine if involvement in service activities has a significant impact on retention, research should be conducted which compares the likelihood of retention of FGCS who are not involved in service activities with those who are involved. Significant results would indicate that involvement in the CSCE programs could lead to an increase in retention and non-academic benefits.

Institutionally, there is little data on student retention at SU. A Director of Retention within the Division of Enrollment Services was recently hired, introducing many potential courses of action for tracking and analyzing retention for different student populations, including FGCS. Looking into SU's support systems FGCS, it is clear that there is a need to analyze programming that is already occurring to determine if high-impact practices are in fact being utilized, which ultimately contribute to student success and retention. It is problematic to create new programming when a myriad already exists; however, it is critical to assess our current practices to determine what we are already achieving with regard to FGCS success. Therefore,

the author recommends further assessment and evaluation institution-wide aimed at further

understanding the experience FGCS and factors that contribute to retention and success. This

includes further research on CSCE and SUYI involvement.

Results from this exploratory study suggest that FGCS benefit in many ways from

involvement in service activities, particularly those related to education access and equity;

however, many FGCS find that their opportunities to become involved are limited due to family

responsibilities, increased focus on academics, or the need to work multiple jobs to pay for

school. Therefore, it is critical that this opportunity be available to students through academic

service learning or paid opportunities. The CSCE at SU plays a crucial role in this sense of

being able to provide a validating and supportive experience for all students, not just the students

who can afford to participate.

One recommendation for the CSCE is to expand paid opportunities to engage in service,

particularly those within SUYI. The First Generation Project was a prime example of a paid

opportunity to engage around this identity group while providing academic support and

mentorship to future FGCS in the neighborhood. As such, it is an important next step to secure

funding for this project. A potential collaboration for facilitation of this group could exist

between the CSCE and the Office of Multicultural Affairs on campus.

Another option for the CSCE is to create a support and/or leadership program for Seattle

Public School alumni called "Seattle Gives Back" in partnership with the Commuter and

Transfer Student Life Office and the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Students involved in this

group would serve a predetermined number of hours per week in paid or non-paid positions and

then gather several times per quarter to reflect on their experiences serving as FGCS and take

part in professional development opportunities. Involving offices across campus traditionally

affiliated with FGCS support will solidify the CSCE yet another important resource for FGCS

who sometimes require more intentional support and guidance in making meaning of their

experience in higher education.

Sample Action Plan and Timeline

Action Step	Timeline	Point Person(s)
Identify SU students who are involved in CSCE programs and are alum of Seattle Public Schools (SPS) through new volunteer applications	Winter-Spring 2013	• CSCE K-12 Graduate Assistant • Student Engagement Coordinator • Key Work Study students
Host informal Brown Bag lunch session for SPS alum who are involved in CSCE programs	Spring 2013	• CSCE K-12 Graduate Assistant • Student Engagement Coordinator • Key Work Study students
Conduct information-sharing meeting with OMA and CTSL to determine course of action for developing "Seattle Gives Back"	Spring 2013	• CSCE K-12 Graduate Assistant • Student Engagement Coordinator
Recruit and train graduate student intern tasked with developing and implementing "Seattle Gives Back"	Fall 2013	• Associate Director for K-12 Partnerships • Assistant Director
Recruit core group of students interested in participating in "Seattle Gives Back"; institute programming	Winter 2014	• Graduate intern in collaboration with CSCE, OMA, and CTSL
Reevaluate resources and plausibility of implementing First Generation project	Winter-Spring 2014	• Associate Director for K-12 Partnerships • Assistant Director

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear from the results of this exploratory study that FGCS bring a rich and unique perspective to service as compared to their non-FGCS peers. Therefore, more qualitative and quantitative research must be conducted in order to more fully explore the impact that involvement in service activities has for FGCS, particularly those that identify as low-income and students of color. Additionally, research comparing the experiences of students at Jesuit and non-Jesuit universities will provide a fuller picture. In connecting research to practice, it is important for practitioners to recognize and value the unique experiences of FGCS who choose to become involved in service activities—and to provide additional avenues for involvement for students who may be discouraged due to outside family and personal commitments.

Final Reflection

I have greatly appreciated the opportunity to engage in research, especially being able to blend my interest in equity and access and my work as a graduate assistant with the Center for Service and Community Engagement here at Seattle University. With this project, more so than with other assignments in my program, I was able to take a critical look at my work in service and community engagement through a social justice lens. Our work with SUYI brings about many conversations about power, privilege, ethics, and responsibility; we tend to overlook the impact of our work on the development of students from diverse backgrounds, assuming that our students are likely to never have encountered difference to the degree that they do when the connect with the community through our programs. Through my research, I wanted to acknowledge and pull apart this assumption, inquiring into the experiences of students for whom this statement is not true. I wholeheartedly believe that we (CSCE staff) are doing a disservice to

the Seattle U community if we do not examine our own assumptions of our students and their backgrounds, particularly if we then depend on these students to educate others by sharing their perspectives. In conducting this research project, I feel that I understand more where my FGCS are coming from, which allows me to bring their voice into the discussion when it comes to conversations around power, privilege, and oppression. This is necessary because there are not many FGCS, particularly students of color, who are engaged with our work, which then puts more responsibility on staff to make sure that different perspectives are heard and understood.

I came into this experience very focused on how my research would fill a gap in the literature, and through the process have recognized the importance of connecting research to practice. In working with my site supervisor and having inside information into the evolution of the CSCE, I recognize that I have the ability to utilize my research to advocate for the experiences of all students who walk through our doors, especially students who come from underrepresented backgrounds in higher education. As such, I feel much more connected to this research project than I have to other projects in the past.

Though I do not identify as a FGCS nor a student of color, I am deeply committed to changing the culture of higher education to be more welcoming and appreciative of the wealth of knowledge, experience, and insight FGCS of color bring to the table. I worry that because I am a White woman, I will fall into the "well-meaning White woman" archetype, in turn doing more harm than if I had not been involved at all; with this project, I wanted to ensure that I remained true to the students and their stories, communicating to them that I appreciate and value their contributions. I forge relationships across difference because I listen fully, deeply, and humbly; I value the truth that each person speaks, and I acknowledge that I have shortcomings in my ability to understand.

My justice-focused mindset permeates my work as a student affairs professional, which is why I was able to recruit such a diverse sample for my focus groups. Previous relationships and points of connection go a long way in building credibility, which ultimately led to students being vulnerable and honest. I am encouraged to know that I am building a skill set that will ultimately help me to advocate for students with whom I do not share any identity memberships. Through this project, I was able to integrate my knowledge regarding student success, my awareness of the differential impact of traditional college experiences, and my skill in working across difference to produce a report that I am truly proud of.

Other skills I honed through this process included my facilitation skills and my data analysis skills. In transcribing my data, I realized that my questioning was sometimes confusing, as I at times bombarded students with multiple questions all at once. I now recognize that I need to simplify my line of questioning and ensure that I am asking a question that leads to the answer I need. In analyzing my data, I was able to creatively draw out themes that I believed illustrated the concepts I was trying to find. I enjoy this creative process because it forces me to think outside of the box and chase my hypothesis; I also learned that it is a fine line between finding data that illustrates your hypothesis and clarifying your hypothesis to connect more logically to your findings. Give and take is necessary, but it was important for me that the true nature of my research question not be lost in translation.

I struggled at times to ensure that my research is consistent and in conversation with the research in the field of student affairs. The field to me exists at the nexus of education, sociology, and counseling; I often struggle in determining where one audience ends and another begins. As such, this project challenged me to clarify who my student affairs audience is and to develop a relationship with the literature. After having completed this project, I realize my

motivation to explore student affairs through a psychological lens: what factors influence self-efficacy for first generation college students? How are these factors related to resilience and retention? I am excited to continue my studies one day through a PhD in Counseling Psychology.

It was a challenge for me to conduct this project independently. Part of what I enjoy about the research process is group process and creativity, and I felt that piece would have helped to bring out the richness of my data. The opportunities where we gathered as a group were very meaningful and informative, and I appreciated learning from others' experiences with their projects.

Overall, this project challenged me in ways that I did not necessarily expect. I learned advocacy and analysis skills, broadened my understanding of how I relate to others across identity groups, and made important connections between research and practice. I forged relationships with professionals who hold similar interests, and developed important writing and presentation skills. I am excited to have this experience to build off of in my future professional and educational endeavors, and I relish the fact that this project brought up more questions than answers for me, which brings me motivation and energy to keep learning.

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Appendix A: Demographic Chart

Pseudonym	Sex	Racial/Ethnic Background	Specific Race/Ethnicity/Tribal Affiliation	Hometown	Service Activity
Tricia	Female	Asian American/Pacific Islander	Asian (Japanese) & Pacific Islander	Tamuning, Guam	CSCE Student Leader/SUYI Tutor
Robert	Male	Asian American/Pacific Islander	Filipino	Seattle, WA	CSCE Student Leader/SUYI Tutor
Alex	Male	Latin@/Hispanic/Chican@	-9	Phoenix, AZ	SUYI Tutor
Sharon	Female	African American/Black [Non Hispanic]	African American, Black	Tacoma, WA	SUYI Tutor, Work Study
Louise	Female	Latin@/Hispanic/Chican@	White Brasilian	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	SUYI Tutor
Kelsey	Female	White [Non Hispanic]	Mixed/Unknown	Snohomish, WA	One-time Service Activities
Andrea	Female	Latin@/Hispanic/Chican@	Mexican	Orondo, WA	CSCE Student Leader
Sean	Male	Latin@/Hispanic/Chican@	-9	-9	CSCE Student Leader
Emily	Female	Asian American/Pacific Islander	Vietnamese American	Bellingham, WA	SUYI Tutor, Work Study

Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol

I.   Participants do the following prior to the start of the focus group:
- Review purpose of the study
- Receive and review informed consent form
- Complete a demographic survey
- Select a pseudonym—explain what a pseudonym is.

II.   Focus Group Ground Rules
It is important that we set some ground rules for this discussion. These rules are to ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak because each of you was specifically invited to participate. All of your opinions and responses are critical to this information gathering process. The ground rules help to ensure that everyone here today is heard. We need to respect each other, which means we will not be responding to or commenting on each other's statements. Instead we will ask that you just state your own opinions. You may add to or expand upon another person's position, but remember it must only be an idea that will broaden our vision and not be aimed at minimizing or deliberately contradicting someone else's view. We will use a speaking stick to insure that we don't interrupt one another. After a person speaks then he/she will pass the stick to the next person on his/her right. We will follow this pattern until we have heard everyone's opinion. We only have about 1 hour and 30 minutes to do this, so we need to be conscious of how much talking we are doing, which means there will be no monopolizing of speaking time.

III.   Focus Group Questions

College Choice	*What were key considerations in making your final choice to attend SU?* 1) Religious/Spiritual 2) Mission (non-religious/spiritual) 3) Sense of Belonging 4) Financial Aid 5) Recommendation (Family, School, Peers) 6) If you had not attended SU, where would you have gone to college? Why?
Family Influence	*How did your family influence your college access and college choice?*
Transition	*What aspects of your experiences at SU have helped you transition to college?* 1) Peer Groups (fictive kin) 2) Connection to campus resources (CSCE?) 3) Relationships with campus staff/professors 4) Spirituality support on campus
Academic Experiences	*What academic experience has had the most impact on you?* 1) How has it impacted you? a. Critical/analytical thinking

	b. Appreciate/exposure to academic area
	c. Religious/Spiritual development
	d. Leadership
	e. Ability to work with others
	2) How did you get involved with this experience?
	3) Are there any academic experiences you would have liked to be involved in that you were not? Why didn't you get involved? (For fresh/soph: Are there activities that you would like to do, but feel like you are unable to participate in? If so, why?)
	4) Do any of your experiences with these types of academic activities stand out: first year seminars, core classes, learning communities, writing classes, collaborative assignments, undergraduate research, capstone courses, global and diversity courses, or internships? If so, why?
	5) What about service-learning?
Non-Academic Experiences	*What experience outside of the classroom has had the most impact on you?*
	1) How has it impacted you?
	a. Religious/Spiritual development
	b. Leadership
	c. Community building
	d. Experiential learning (applying learning to real life)
	e. Other
	2) How did you get involved with this activity?
	3) Are there any activities that you would have liked to be involved in that you were not? Why weren't you involved in them? (For fresh/soph: Are there activities that you would like to do, but feel like you are unable to participate in? If so, why?)
	4) What have been your experiences with community based learning and immersion programs? What about SUYI (non-service learning)?
	a. How did you hear of SUYI?
	b. What were your initial impressions?
	c. If involved, what drew you to participate?
	5) What experiences have impacted your spiritual development?
Religious/Spiritual Development	*What impact, if any, has college had on your spiritual/religious beliefs?*
	1) Being away from religious/spiritual practices at home/church
	2) Attending a Jesuit Catholic university
	3) Facing obstacles and challenges during college
	4) Exploration of spirituality or religion through interactions with peers, faculty
	5) Exploration of spirituality or religion through courses
	6) Exploration of spirituality or religion through co-curricular activities (community based learning, immersion programs, etc.)
	7) Vocation/career exploration
Vocational Discernment	*How have you experienced vocational discernment while at SU?*
	In what area have you grown/developed the most in your vocational discernment?
	1) Key resources (Programs)
	2) People
	3) Leadership role

	4) Extracurricular 5) Non-religious/spiritual Mission-based work (immersions, SL, etc) 6) Religious/spiritual resources
General Experience	*In general, what was your experience like as a first generation college student at SU?*
Family Influence	*How did your family influence your college experience overall?*
Closing	*Do you have anything else you'd like to share?* *Are there any questions you wish we had asked?*

IV.   At the end of the focus group, close with the following:
- Thank you!
- Have participants sign up for iPad drawing

Appendix C: Demographic Survey

Please complete this survey to the best of your ability and to the extent that you feel comfortable. The more completely you fill it out, the more helpful it is to us in understanding the experiences of first generation college students. Thank you!

1. What is your focus group pseudonym (made up name)? _____

2. What is your gender?
    ☐ Male (0)   ☐ Female (1)   ☐ Intersex (2)

3. What is your racial/ethnic background? (Please mark all that apply)
    ☐ African American/Black [Non Hispanic] (1)
    ☐ Asian American/Pacific Islander (2)
    ☐ Latino/Hispanic/Chicana/o (3)
    ☐ American Indian, Aleutian, Native Alaskan, or Eskimo (4)
    ☐ White (non-Hispanic) (5)
    ☐ Other (6)

4. Please specify your race(s), ethnicity(ies) or tribal affiliation(s): _____

    _____

5. Where are your originally from? What is your hometown? _____

    _____

6. What is your citizenship status?
    ☐ U.S. Citizen (1)   ☐ Permanent Resident (green card) (2)
    ☐ Neither (3)

7. What is your parent or guardian's highest level of education? (Mark one per individual)

	Mother	Father	Guardian 1	Guardian 2
Grammar school or less (1)				
Some high school (2)				
High school graduate (3)				
Postsecondary school other than a 4-year college (4)				
Some college (5)				
College graduate (6)				
Some graduate school (7)				
Graduate degree (8)				

8. What is your best estimate of your parents' or total household income last year? Please consider income from all sources before taxes. (Mark one only)

☐ Less than $6,000 (1)	☐ $50,000-$59,999 (9)
☐ $6,000-$9,999 (2)	☐ $60,000-$69,999 (10)
☐ $10,000-$14,999 (3)	☐ $70,000-$79,999 (11)
☐ $15,000-$19,999 (4)	☐ $80,000-$89,999 (12)
☐ $20,000-$24,999 (5)	☐ $90,000-$99,999 (13)

☐ $25,000-$29,999 (6)	☐ $100,000-$149,999 (14)
☐ $30,000-$39,999 (7)	☐ $150,000-$199,999 (15)
☐ $40,000-$49,999 (8)	☐ $200,000 or more (16)

9. How did you learn about Seattle University? _____

_____

10. Where did you get most of your college information from during high school? *Please number the top 3 with 1 being the resource used most often.*

☐ Parents (1)   ☐ Siblings (2)   ☐ Other family members (3)

☐ Peers (4)   ☐ Teachers (5)   ☐ Counselors (6)

☐ Internet (7)   ☐ Other, please specify (8): _____

11. Are you currently:
☐ an undergraduate student (1)   Anticipated Graduation year: _____

☐ an alumnus (2)   Graduation year: _____

12. What is (was) your major(s)? _____

13. What is (was) your minor(s)? _____

14. What is your current overall college GPA? If alumnus, what was your overall GPA at graduation?
☐ A+ or A (1)   ☐ B (4)   ☐ C (7)
☐ A- (2)   ☐ B- (5)   ☐ C- (8)
☐ B+ (3)   ☐ C+ (6)   ☐ D + or below (9)

15. Where do you currently live?   (For alumni, also please describe where you currently live.)

☐ On campus in a residence hall (1)   Residential Learning Community _____

☐ Off campus with other students (2)   Distance from campus _____

☐ Off campus at home (3)   Distance from campus _____

☐ Other, please specify (4): _____

16. During college, what other housing situations have you lived in? Please provide time and description of situation (i.e. living in residence hall, at home or off campus with other students) (For alumni, please describe your housing situation(s) in college)

_____

_____

_____

17. Are/were you a transfer student? ☐ No (0) ☐ Yes (1)

If yes, what year did you transfer in: ☐Freshman (1) ☐ Sophomore (2) ☐ Junior (3)

What institutions did you attend prior to transferring?

School	Major(s)	Years Attended

18. What is the highest academic degree you plan to obtain? (Mark one only)

☐ Bachelor's Degree (B.A., B.S., etc.) (1)   ☐ Master's Degree (M.A., M.S., etc.) (2)
☐ Ph.D. or Ed.D. (3)   ☐ M.D., D.O., D.D.S., or D.V.M. (4)
☐ J.D. (Law) (5)   ☐ B.D. or M.DIV. (Divinity) (6)
☐ Other (7)   Please specify: _____

19. What are your short term plans (1-4 years) after graduating ? Or if you've graduated, what are you currently doing?
_____

_____

20. What are your long term plans (5-8 years) after graduating? _____

_____

21. While in college, what resources have you used and have they been beneficial to your academic success?

| | Not Used (0) | Used | |
		Not Beneficial (1)	Beneficial (2)
Tutoring Services			
University Advising			
Faculty Advising			
Peer Advising			
First Generation Program			
Transfer Student Program			
Other, please specify: _____			
Other, please specify: _____			

22. What is your religious affiliation?
☐ Protestant (1)
☐ Roman Catholic (2)
☐ Jewish (3)
☐ Buddhist (4)

☐ Islamic (5)
☐ Other (6), please specify: _____
☐ No religious affiliation (0)

23. Do you consider yourself spiritual?
    ☐ No (0)   ☐ Yes (1)

24. If yes, how do you describe your spiritual beliefs?

_____

_____

25. How do you define religion vs. spirituality?

_____

_____

_____

26. In college, which of these experiences have your participated in?

☐ First year seminar (1), please specify: _____

☐ Student government (2), please specify: _____

☐ Academic clubs (3), please specify: _____

☐ Cultural clubs (4), please specify: _____

☐ Mentor/tutor on campus (5), please specify: _____

☐ Community-based learning/Service Learning (6), please specify: _____

☐ Immersion program (7), please specify: _____

☐ Study abroad (8), please specify: _____

☐ Internship (9), please specify: _____

☐ Student-faculty research (10), please specify: _____

☐ Capstone or culminating project (e.g. senior project) (11), please specify: _____

☐ On campus job (12), please specify: _____

☐ Off campus job (13), please specify: _____

☐ Other (14), please specify: _____

27. In college, which of these experiences do you plan to participate in?

☐ First year seminar (1), please specify: _____

☐ Student government (2), please specify: _____

☐ Academic clubs (3), please specify: _____

☐ Cultural clubs (4), please specify: _____

☐ Mentor/tutor on campus (5), please specify: _____

☐ Community-based learning (6), please specify: _____

☐ Immersion program (7), please specify: _____

☐ Study abroad (8), please specify: _____

☐ Internship (9), please specify: _____

☐ Student-faculty research (10), please specify: _____

☐ Capstone or culminating project (e.g. senior project) (11), please specify: _____

☐ On campus job (12), please specify: _____

☐ Off campus job (13), please specify: _____

☐ Other (14), please specify: _____