

Involvement and Student Development: Comparing First-Generation Students to Continuing-Generation Students and the Impact of a First-Generation Learning Community

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As a group, first-generation students tend to have lower persistence rates than continuing-generation students (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Using Astin's Theory of Student Development as a theoretical framework, this study examined how factors associated with student development and persistence differ among first-generation and continuing-generation students. The study also examined how participation in a learning community geared toward first-generation students influences participants' development and persistence. ANOVA analysis indicates that compared to continuing-generation students, first-generation students in this study were less involved in academics and had lower gains in both intellectual development and engagement with diverse perspectives. First-generation students also had lower first-to-second year persistence rates, although this difference was not significant ($p = .113$). First-generation students who participated in the learning community outperformed both first-generation students who were not in the learning community and continuing-generation students in involvement in academics, with faculty, and with student peers, gains in intellectual development, interpersonal development, and engagement with diverse perspectives, and persistence, although the difference in persistence was not significant. In accordance with Austin's theory, regression analyses indicate involvement in academics and with student peers significantly predicts gains in student development and persistence.



Gail Markle joined the Sociology department in 2011. She regularly teaches *Intersections of Race Class and Gender*, *Social Class and Mobility*, and *Senior Seminar*. Her research interests include environmental behavior, social stratification, and factors that influence educational achievement.