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**An Assets-Based Approach to Recruiting and Retaining First-  
Generation College Students in Teacher Preparation Programs:  
The ROSCOE Educators Program**

# Presentation overview

1. First-generation college students in teacher education programs
2. Community Cultural Wealth Theory
3. Findings from our research
4. ROSCOE Educators program
5. Implications and Conversation



# Notes on positionality

## Who we are...

1. Presenters
2. Our research team
3. First-generation college students



# What existing research tells us about the experiences of first-generation college students (FGCS)

The recruitment, retention, persistence, and achievement of FGCS students are key elements of equity and inclusion in higher education (Collier & Morgan, 2008).

FGCS bring unique **strengths and capital** to their college experiences (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020); however, they may also be more apt to experience **systematic barriers** in higher education (Checkoway, 2018; Kim et al., 2021; LeBouef & Dworkin, 2021).

For example, economic exclusion barriers to higher education may be felt especially strongly by FGCS entering Education fields where unpaid student teaching and a myriad of field placement and certification fees add meaningfully to other expenses of tuition and textbooks (Rogers-Ard et al., 2012).

# Looking more closely at Schools of Education

- Nationally, **Schools of Education do not reflect the diversity of public schools**, with far more White, middle-class, female students graduating from teacher preparation programs than is reflected in the classrooms in which they will work (Taylor et al., 2017).
- In Schools of Education, **FGCSs play a critical role in increasing representation in the teacher workforce** and school personnel
- Recruitment and retention of FGCS takes on a **particular importance in light of ongoing teacher shortages** that have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Nguyen et al., 2022; Sutchter et al., 2019).
- Efforts to recruit and retain talented FGCS in Schools of Education must reflect an awareness of their lived experiences as they navigate complex coursework, financial stress, a myriad of certification and credentialing requirements, and opportunities for leadership and advanced study.

Most existing research has compared FGCS with their continuing education peers and applies a deficit-orientation

FGCS:

- Enroll in and complete postsecondary education at lower rates
- Leave postsecondary education at higher rates
- Attend graduate study at lower rates
- More apt to be unprepared for college and lack information related to financing and getting the most out of college.
- May have more trouble with time management
- Less likely to experience quality interactions with faculty
- Less apt to seek assistance or campus resources when experiencing academic hardships


(Cataldi et al., 2018; Collier & Morgan, 2008; Gibbons et al., 2019; Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020; López et al., 2023; Redford et al., 2017; Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Yee, 2016).

This existing research has set up from the onset to compare FGCS with a normalized view of a college student in higher education, rather than looking at the aspects of the learning environment that are failing to adequately support FGCS. These studies, whether intentional or not, take an **assimilation approach** to higher education in which FGCS students are expected to adopt or internalize the norms of their field in order to be successful (Ives & Castillo-Montoya, 2020).

While this existing work may be important in understanding the struggles of FGCS in higher education, the systemic inequities that shape FGCS experiences warrant a more critical approach.



# Community cultural wealth lens (Yosso, 2005)

- Applies Critical Race Theory to Bourdieu's cultural capital theory to develop a new framework.
  - Focuses on the cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities possessed by socially marginalized groups.
  - Community cultural wealth includes at least six different forms of capital: *aspirational, linguistic, social, familial, navigational, and resistant*.
  - These forms of capital emerge, in part, through a marginalized group's efforts to survive and resist various forms of oppression.
  - Provides a valuable lens through which to study the experiences and assets of FGCS.
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## Our research study

- 20 TCNJ students majoring in Education participated in qualitative interviews with two FGCS undergraduate student researchers over Zoom in Spring semester 2021.
  - All participants were FGCS
  - 17 of the 20 participants identified as female, and 3 as male.
  - Two participants identified as Black and 16 identified as Latinx or Hispanic.
  - Six participants were Transfer students
  - Participants were evenly distributed across Years 1-4 of their undergraduate Education programs.
- Interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded using open coding methods. The research team used content analysis methods to identify salient themes.
- FGCS researchers have been involved at each stage of analytic and dissemination efforts.

**Study 1: Pancsofar, N., Hall, M., Gouin, K., Espinal, A. C. (2024). Motivation, drive, and pride: Exploring assets of First-Generation College Students majoring in Education, *Journal of First-generation Student Success*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/26906015.2024.2432873>**

- Research question: *How do experiences of FGCS majoring in Education intersect with their FGCS identities?*
  - Motivation
    - “Their hope lies in us”: Family expectations and goals
    - “Build a better life”: College as a means of stability and moving out of poverty
  - Drive
    - “Taking your future really seriously”: Academic invulnerability
    - Leadership aspirations and professional practice
  - Pride

## **Study 2: Pancsofar, N., Hall, M., Dérémé, D., Fernandez, K., Johnson, J. T., Generali, R., & Miller, R. (in preparation). “*Sometimes the working harder just isn’t possible*”: Stress experiences of First-generation College Students navigating Higher Education.**

- Research question 1: *How do FGCS majoring in Education describe the stress they experience navigating college?*
  - “On my own”: Struggles to find navigational support [ADD Finances here]
  - “Culture shock”: Lack of representation
  - “Prove that I belong”: Imposter syndrome
- Research Question 2: *What do FGCS feel are the implications of these stress experiences for faculty/staff?*
  - Awareness
  - Shared community
  - Mentoring

**Study 3: Pancsofar, N., Hall, M., Castro, J., Camarena, A., Ayala, S., Matthew Y. (In preparation). Applying and assets-based lens to the recruitment and retention of first-generation college students in teacher preparation programs.**

- Research question 1: *How do FGCS use community cultural wealth in choosing to pursue Education majors and persisting through their undergraduate pre-service education?*
  - Preliminary findings:
    - FGCS described examples of each kind of capital highlighted by Yosso's community cultural wealth theory when describing their pre-professional paths in Education.
    - Resistant, experiential, and social capital seemed to be especially salient for these students.

# Implications of our research

- An understanding of FGCS assets must recognize that much of the capital described in these findings was born out of stressors and systems that challenge their well-being.
- Embedded within these FGCS assets are associated costs including increased pressures and very little room for mistakes.
- FGCS are deeply rooted in their lived experiences: Impacts of racism, xenophobia, classism, and other systemic oppression will be experienced differently across diverse FGCS as they traverse their Education majors.
- Schools of Education need to pay greater attention to possible barriers for FGCS and to consider advising through more holistic approaches.
- Leaving FGCS to assimilate to college spaces that were not necessarily designed for them hurts students and also constrains the growth of our Education fields as FGCS bring tremendous assets, skills, and knowledges that can transform teacher practice for the better.

# Implications

**Camila:**

*“As a teacher, a big thing is that we have to be adaptable and be willing. Like we have to care about our students. We have to care about the things they’re going through, not just in our classroom, but outside of our classroom and care enough to make sure that we’re making them better citizens, that we’re giving them the tools they need to get through life and also know that they have the ability to do more than maybe what’s expected or than what the world tries to tell them. And so I think, as a teacher, you have to genuinely care about your students and about the experiences they have and about the world around them. And I think that because I care so much, I’m always going to want to try the best I can for my students. I’m always going to want to try to work harder and try to give them the best resources.”*





# ROSCOE EDUCATORS PROGRAM

## FOR FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS MAJORING IN EDUCATION

- Creates community and connections for first-generation college students in the School of Education
- Nurtures leadership and research opportunities for first-generation college students entering educational professions.
- Uplifts and celebrates the talents, perspectives, and experiences of first-generation college students.



## COMPONENTS OF THE ROSCOE EDUCATORS PROGRAM:

- Group cohort meetings with other first-generation college students majoring in Education.
- Faculty mentor meetings.
- Peer mentor meetings.

## Resources Opportunities Support, and Collaboration for Educators



# ROSCOE EDUCATORS PROGRAM

## WHO IS A ROSCOE EDUCATOR?

This identity can be fluid. For the purpose of this program, first-generation college students are students with parents (in whatever way they define parent) who did not complete a four-year college education.



## First-generation college students may also include:

- Students whose parents completed a four-year college education in another country beside the United States.
- Students whose parents completed a four-year college education later in life.
- Students with siblings or cousins who complete (or are completing) a four-year college education.
- Students who self-identify as having minimal prior exposure to or knowledge of four-year college experiences like those at TCNJ.



This program is free and open to all Education and SLP majors who identify as first-generation college student.

To get become a ROSCOE Educator, email [roscoe@tcnj.edu](mailto:roscoe@tcnj.edu) or

Dr. Pancsofar, program coordinator at [pancssofar@tcnj.edu](mailto:pancssofar@tcnj.edu)

Say "I want to learn more about the ROSCOE Educators program" and we will help you get started!

## WHY DO WE NEED THE ROSCOE EDUCATORS PROGRAM?

This program builds on the existing efforts to broadly support first-generation college students by specifically supporting the recruitment, retention, leadership, and opportunities for first-generation college students pursuing majors in education.



By the numbers:

AY 24-25:

67 Educators

14 Peer leaders

17 Faculty/staff leaders

26 Upperclassmen Community members

18 Alumni

<https://education.tcnj.edu/roscoe-educators-program/>

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The ROSCOE Educators Community