

**The Impact of College-Implemented Interventions on the First-Generation
College Student Experience**

First Generation Office & FYSEP

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SOCY 91: Sociological Imagination, Senior Capstone Project

Dartmouth College

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Introduction:

Who are first generation students? These are students who are the first in their families to go to college and receive a bachelor's degree. Getting into a selective college as a first generation student in the first place is a challenge, with no one in the family able to offer guidance throughout the process. This disadvantage doesn't go away once they set foot into an elite institution of higher education like Dartmouth. In order to better aid first generation students, it is necessary to understand their experience. Since 2009, Dartmouth has tracked the number of first generation students that make up each entering class, with the percentage ranging from 10-15% (Willen, 2018). The first generation identity is a complex one, with students from different races, ethnicities, countries, etc. falling under this category. Students who identify as first generation college students may also identify as low income or as a racial minority, which brings their own sets of challenges at a campus that is affluent and predominantly white. However, these challenges (such as stereotype threat, imposter syndrome, culture shock, etc.) do not exist independently and instead act on one another, as the term multiple jeopardy would imply. While being a first generation student is challenging, they are simultaneously being offered the privilege of attending a well-resourced and well-connected institution like Dartmouth, so the question becomes how can the college better equip first generation students to thrive on campus? The first step to answering this question is measuring the impact of the current aids in place (ex: FYSEP at Dartmouth) through measuring its impact on sense of belonging, comfort with college and mental health.

Literature Review & Theoretical Argument

Previous research on first generation students reveal the importance and benefit of programs and experiences that provide them with social and cultural capital that help ease their transition into college. McDossi's study has found that first generation students have difficulties in academic and social integration due to barriers related to resources which in turn impacts their social capital (McDossi et al 2022). Social capital is college would be finding a community, establishing networks, and making connections with other students. This can have long-lasting impacts even after college and affect finding a job or other opportunities that these connections could provide students. Thus, it is imperative that programs like FYSEP Summer Session provide students with a space to connect with other students from a similar background and become exposed to different resources and staff on campus before other students are on campus. Additionally, in another study it was found there was a split among lower-income undergraduate students in terms of interacting and engaging with authority figures in college and being proactive with it (Jack 2016). This study primarily focused on cultural capital and how individuals' pre-college experiences, like attending boarding school, impacted how proactive and comfortable lower-income undergraduates felt on interacting with authority figures like attending professors' office hours or asking for help. Thus, the diversity in experiences among first generation students can affect how willing they are to seek out help and interact with authority figures which could negatively impact them socially and academically.

Along with the social and cultural capital aspect affecting first generation students, their mental health should also be taken into account. A study found that first-generation students tend to experience more stressors in their youth and college years compared to their peer counterparts

(Wilbur 2021). As a result, first generation students experience stress through navigating being the first in their family to attend college and other stressors, which can heavily wane on their mental health. In a study looking at a 2-month summer intensive program, researchers found that the program helped to promote students' mental well-being (Swanbrow 2017). Thus, it reveals that a summer program which provides social and academic support to incoming students can help and promote their mental health. As a result, since this program is a bit similar to FYSEP Summer Session but just a bit longer, we wanted to know if it would have the same effect on first generation students. This would be interesting to look into since throughout the years, FYSEP has extended its program duration from 4 days to 4 weeks and has added a residential component to it. During the program, first year, first-generation students engage in classes and community bonding activities that help ease their transition into college through being exposed to resources and staff as well as fostering a sense of community among the participants. This would mean that the FYSEP Summer Session would be able to help combat some of the resource-related barriers that first-generation students experience, as previously mentioned, through providing them with resources and a sense of community. Through participation in the program, first-generation students would be able to have social and cultural capital and be better prepared both socially and academically for their transition into Dartmouth, which is the program's main goal and objective.

Research Question and Hypothesis

Based on the previous studies, we wanted to assess the impact that the FYSEP Summer Session has on first-year generation students. Thus, our research question was: How has participation in the FYSEP summer program among first-year, first-generation students impacted mental health and sense of belonging? How does sense of belonging mediate mental health? We aim to research this through our independent variable, participation in the FYSEP Summer Session, and our dependent variable, mental health (see Appendix for our conceptual model). We also included a variable of sense of belonging in which we think would mediate this relationship. The overall sense of belonging component is broken down into a sense of belonging to the Dartmouth community as whole and first-generation community and comfort with college which focuses on the access and comfortability in accessing resources and interactions with faculty. We expect to find that FYSEP participants experience a greater sense of belonging and better mental health than non-FYSEP participants.

Study Design (Methods)

For the quantitative portion of this project, we made a Google Form and adapted several peer-reviewed scales to evaluate sense of belonging, comfort level, and mental health on campus. In order to ensure comfortability, we emphasized that their participation was not required, they were free to exit the survey, and asked for consent to participate.. In order to evaluate sense of belonging, we adapted a scale used by Johnson et al., in a study titled "Examining Sense of Belonging Among First-Year Undergraduates From Different Racial/Ethnic Groups." This

section asked questions such as, “I feel a member of the campus community,” and “I would choose the same college over again,” to evaluate the respondent’s sense of belonging to the university. In order to evaluate comfort with the college, we adapted a scale used by Hurtado and Carter’s 1977 study, “Effects of College Transition and Perceptions of the Campus Racial Climate on Latino College Student Sense of Belonging.” This section included questions such as, “I can seek help when I need it on campus.” and “I can make new friends on campus.” In order to evaluate mental health, we adapted a scale used by Ryf in “Happiness is Everything, or Is It? Explorations on the Meaning of Psychological Well-Being.” This scale evaluated mental health by asking questions such as, “In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live” and “When I think about it, I haven't really improved much as a person over the years.”

The reason we focused on measuring these topics specifically is because the first-generation identity is one that comes with many challenges and programs like FYSEP exist in order to help FGLI students succeed in college and provide them with the tools/ resources necessary to do so. Thus, our focus on sense of belonging and mental health is to evaluate how effective programs like FYSEP are and see what the difference is (if at all) between those who participated and those who didn’t among the first-generation community during their first year of college.

For the qualitative portion of this project, we conducted in-depth interviews via zoom. In order to ensure comfortability, we sent a consent form beforehand and asked for consent to record. In order to ensure anonymity, we used pseudonyms. We selected 10 participants that expressed an interest in being interviewed in the Google Form survey. We chose 5 participants who did FYSEP and 5 who didn’t. We used the subsections of the Google Form (sense of belonging, comfort level, and mental health) to produce our interview questions. We asked a few questions about the FGO to get a sense of participants’ familiarity with the office and resources and gauge how they feel they fit into the first-gen community. At the end of each section, we also added some questions specifically about the impact that FYSEP has or had on sense of belonging, comfort level, and mental health that we will ask to those who were part of the program to then be able to compare and see if there are any differences among participants that did not participate in the FYSEP Summer Session.

Results:**Table 1 : Univariate Descriptive Statistics**

Variables	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Sense of Belonging	3.834615	0.9037796	1.8	5
Comfort with College	4.057692	0.7099009	1.75	5
Mental Health	66.19231	9.433022	43	87

N=52

Table 1 tells us that overall, FYSEP students fared significantly better than non-FYSEP students on all measures. Thus, indicating the efficacy and importance of this program in helping first-generation students succeed academically and personally at Dartmouth.

Sense of Belonging**Table 2: Sense of Belonging *T-test***

	FYSEP		Non-FYSEP	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Sense of Belonging	4.057143	.842365	3.376471	.8743065

N= 52

For the quantitative portion of our study, we ran a descriptive analysis and a t-test. We found that there was about a 0.68 mean difference (as shown in Table 2) between FYSEP and non-FYSEP students, meaning that FYSEP students had a greater sense of belonging. Through this data analysis, we found that FYSEP is doing a good job in fostering community and sense of belonging during their summer session program which ends up positively impacting first-year, first-generation students during their transition into college.

Table 3: Sense of Belonging Themes

Variable	FYSEP	Non-FYSEP
Dartmouth Culture	-Feel out of place, especially in social spaces like Greek life -FYSEP helps them feel like they	-Feel like they don't fit in, especially in term of academics (impostor syndrome)

	belong and deserve to take up space	
First-Gen Community	-Feel like they belong to the first-gen community, due to shared backgrounds	-Despite similar backgrounds, generally don't feel as connected to the first-gen community (or the FGO)
Support Systems	-Feel most supported by college through financial aid -Friendships served as main source of belonging	-Feel most supported by college through financial aid -Finding friends helped them feel like they belonged

Qualitative

For the qualitative portion of our study, after we interviewed our participants we developed a table to emphasize the common themes (as shown in Table 3) between FYSEP and non-FYSEP participants. In regards to their sense of belonging, both groups noted friendships as a crucial part of their belonging on campus. One non-FYSEP participant noted that their friendships are a key reason they decided to stay at Dartmouth. When asked if they would choose the same college again, the majority said yes, but expressed a bit of hesitation. When asked if they felt supported by the college, most participants said yes, they felt the most clear support they receive from the college is through financial aid. When asked to define Dartmouth culture, most respondents identified an environment that does not perfectly align with themselves. Non-FYSEP respondents expressed two sides to Dartmouth, a caring side and a daunting side (imposter syndrome). Some FYSEP respondents expressed that they did identify with Dartmouth culture since FYSEP helped them feel like they deserve to take up space and belong at Dartmouth. Non-FYSEP students expressed uncertainty regarding their sense of belonging to the first-gen community. FYSEP students were more likely to note a sense of belonging to the first-gen community, but were likely to express detachment from the community if they didn't make lasting friendships during the summer session.

Comfort with College

Unlike the previous section, the comfort with college section was looked at and broken down separately since the questions asked for this section were not highly correlated or encompassed each other as a whole. The categories under comfort with college were hypothetical questions like seeking help, finding their way around campus, communicating with their instructors, and making new friends on campus. The results can be seen in Table 4 below. In terms of finding their way on campus, there was a 0.4 mean difference between non-FYSEP and FYSEP students. There was a 0.2 mean difference between non-FYSEP and FYSEP students in communicating with their instructors. There was also a 0.3 mean difference between FYSEP and non-FYSEP students in terms of making new friends. However, these differences when measured from a 5 point scale are very minimal and are not significant, so they don't tell us much about the

differences that exist between these two groups in these categories. However, in terms of seeking help, there was a 1.0 mean difference between FYSEP and non-FYSEP students in which FYSEP students were more likely to ask and seek help than non-FYSEP students. Since this 1.0 mean difference was out of a 5 point scale, this was the biggest and most significant difference that we noticed for the questions under this section. This difference would be the main driver of the differences in mean between FYSEP and non-FYSEP students in our later tests when we decided to create a composite scale for comfort with college that combined all these questions together. Thus, we can conclude FYSEP students are more likely to seek help than non-FYSEP students, and this finding could be associated with some of the programming that occurs during the FYSEP Summer Session. As a result, we can say FYSEP is doing a good job in helping their participants feel comfortable asking for help, and they could improve more with their other aspects like navigating their way around campus, communicating with their instructors, and helping making new friends.

Table 4: Comfort with College *T*-test

	FYSEP		Non-FYSEP		t-test
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Comfort with College	4.207143	0.6430789	3.75	3	0.760345 *
Seeking help	4.2	0.9009799	3.235294	1.147247	0.831370 **
Finding way on campus	4.6	0.6945163	4.235294	2	0.857492 Not significant
Communication with instructors	4.314286	0.9321521	4.117647	9	Not significant
Making new friends	3.714286	1.202239	3.411765	1.371989	Not significant

N= 52

These quantitative findings and data were somewhat supported in our qualitative data through the interviews we conducted with FYSEP and non-FYSEP students. Some of the questions that we asked focused on various aspects that we felt fit into helping to assess students' comfort with college: transition to Dartmouth, familiarity and access to campus resources, relationship with faculty/staff and comfortability reaching out, and FYSEP impact on overall comfort with college. Our findings and common themes from our interviews can be seen in Table 5 below. When asked about their transition to Dartmouth, both FYSEP and non-FYSEP students described a difficult transition. We found that FYSEP students were surprised about the academic rigor at Dartmouth but had friends, faculty's presence, and connections that helped ease their transitions while non-FYSEP students had a bumpy start with both social and

academic hardships along with experiencing culture shock. As a result, non-FYSEP students struggled more with finding their community and adjusting to college while FYSEP students struggled with adjusting to how Dartmouth actually is compared to the FYSEP Summer Session. However, one similarity between the two were that informal and/or formal mentorship from upperclassmen were helpful in their transitions.

In terms of familiarity and accessibility to resources, only some of the non-FYSEP students were familiar with campus resources while FYSEP students were familiar with resources largely due to the FYSEP Summer Session. Among non-FYSEP students there was a split in knowledge about resources and comfort accessing them while others recalled bad experiences reaching out and felt like there was a lack of resources available. On the other hand, FYSEP students felt familiar with the resources on campus and though they don't use them all initially, they know who to reach out to if they were to need it. When asking about the relationship with faculty or staff and their comfortability reaching out, we found that FYSEP students have some connection and comfort with professors although some participants revealed tensions and bad experiences they had with certain professors. On the other hand, non-FYSEP students felt comfortable reaching out to professors about class-related stuff but weren't comfortable reaching out to professors in a less formal way in which they could just get to know their professors. This finding helps support the survey data that FYSEP students were more likely to seek help than non-FYSEP students since they were able to recall experiences when they reached out for help easily and engaged in informal interactions with professor compared to non-FYSEP students who instead found it more difficult to reach out to professors. Overall, when we asked about the impact the FYSEP had on their comfort with college, FYSEP participants said that the program helped expose them to resources and they felt comfort and support from the First Generation Office and staff. Thus, through the exposure to resources and staff during FYSEP Summer Session, FYSEP students were able to feel more comfortable and better equipped during their transition into college which FYSEP and the FGO should focus on more when planning their future programs and events.

Table 5: Comfort with College Themes

Variable	FYSEP	Non-FYSEP	Similarities
Transition to Dartmouth	surprised about academic rigor but friends, faculty's presence, and connections made transition easier	rough, bumpy start along with culture shock	Informal and/or formal mentorship from upperclassmen helpful in transition
Familiarity and Access to Campus	Familiar; don't use all of them initially, but now know who to reach out to	split; knowledgeable about resources and comfortable while others had bad experiences	None

Resources		reaching out and feel like there is a lack of resources available	
Relationship with Faculty and Staff and Comfortability Reaching out	some connection and comfort with professors; some had tensions and bad experiences	felt comfortable reaching out to professors about class stuff; less informally	None
FYSEP impact on Comfort with College	Exposure to resources; comfort/support from office	N/A	N/A
Leaving Dartmouth	harsh academic transition into fall, feeling burnt out; stayed because of community, break, and accessing resources	stress, unprepared, social media comparison; stayed because of freedom, challenge, community	importance of community as factor of retention

Under this section, we also added the questions asking students if they would leave Dartmouth which was not focused on in our quantitative data but rather asked in our interviews. FYSEP students revealed that they thought about either dropping out or transferring due to the harsh academic transition into fall and feeling burnt out. This finding would relate back to FYSEP students being surprised about the academic rigor at Dartmouth and the burn out was often due to the FYSEP students having almost a 15 week term due to the Summer Session and the 10 week term in the fall. FYSEP could take these observations into consideration for the future participants in terms of talking academic rigor at Dartmouth and how it compares to the Summer Session as well as the academic supports and resources students can reach out to. However, FYSEP students decided to stay due to the community, winter break, and accessing resources the college provided. On the other hand, non-FYSEP students noted they would leave Dartmouth due to feeling stress, unprepared, and having a social media comparison of schools but decided to stay due to the freedom, challenge, and community that found at Dartmouth. Though there were differences, it is important to note that community as a factor in retaining students at Dartmouth and preventing them from leaving. FYSEP and the FGO should take this sense of community into account in creating curriculum, programming, and events among both FYSEP students and first-year, first-generation students as a whole.

Involvement with FGO

Those who participated appreciated meeting people from similar backgrounds, accessing the college environment beforehand, and being exposed to resources. This sense of community within the FYSEP group seems correlated to the likelihood of the individuals visiting the FGO.

Those who did not participate in the FYSEP SS expressed hesitation in visiting the FGO, since they were unsure if they even belonged to the space.

Mental Health

Table 6: Mental Health *T*-test

	FYSEP		Non-FYSEP	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Mental Health	68.08571	9.312772	62.29412	8.680184

N= 52

FYSEP participants did 6 points better on average than non-FYSEP participants. What this means is that FYSEP students reported that they have better mental health and well-being overall than non-FYSEP participants. Furthermore, with a standard deviation of 9, FYSEP participants had a 2/3rds of a difference which is very large in magnitude. Again, demonstrating the vast impact FYSEP has had on the first-year students' mental health and well-being outcomes.

Table 7: Mental Health Themes

Variable	FYSEP	Non-FYSEP
Overall Mental Health	Felt newfound access to mental health resources but some feel there is still a cultural barrier to mental health care.	Most said mental health struggles due to the speed of things and rigor here. They believe mental health is really important.
Comfort Accessing Resources	They have all reached out to the counseling center but resulted in varying amounts of satisfaction.	All were familiar with resources but only some were comfortable accessing and actually accessed counseling.
Support Systems	Family and friends encouraged them to seek help, cultural barriers (not as communicative with family about mental health) Qualities: supportive, empathetic, motivating.	Types: family + friends All said they have a good support system. Qualities: good listeners, supportive, easy to get along with, emotional intelligence.

Qualitative

Table 7 above details the main themes we found when it came to mental health. When asked about their mental health before attending Dartmouth, non-FYSEP students said they were better before attending. The FYSEP students expressed varying levels of mental health before attending Dartmouth. However, the FYSEP group expressed relief being introduced to newfound access to mental health resources, even if the process is unfamiliar. A common thread across groups was a sense of imposter syndrome, from being one of the best in their respective high schools to struggling academically in college. In terms of accessing mental health resources, non-FYSEP individuals were familiar with the resources, but there was a hesitation in accessing since they heard that counseling “was not good or helpful.” The FYSEP group all reached out to the counseling center with varying degrees of satisfaction, some noting significant cultural differences. Both groups noted friends and family as an important aspect of their mental health support system. Some of the qualities they detailed include: supportive, empathetic and good listeners.

Sense of Belonging mediating Mental Health

We decided to run two regression models to see how, if at all, sense of belonging influences mental health. In Table 8 below, Model 1, controlling for the comfort with college variables, we see that FYSEP participation is strongly correlated with better mental health. Essentially, we see what was proven through the t-test in Table 6 above that FYSEP students had better mental health and well-being than non-FYSEP students. In Model 2, we see that making new friends and seeking help are two of the driving variables when it comes to sense of belonging and mental health. In other words, a sense of belonging, but specifically being able to ask for help and make new friends impact first generation students’ mental health outcomes.

Table 8: Multivariate Probability Model

	Mental Health (Model 1)	Mental Health (Model 2)
FYSEP	5.791597 (2.69467)	1.533256 (2.329922)
Seeking help		2.180462 (1.217472)
Finding way around campus		0.0768141 (1.749331)
Communication with instructors		1.900607 (1.424765)
Making new friends		3.06505 (0.891526)
belonging		1.21328

		(1.453426)
_const	62.29412 (2.210742)	32.53449 (6.375862)

N=52

Suggestions/Implications

1. Accessible Master Doc of Campus Resources

Through our qualitative research, we found that both FYSEP and non-FYSEP participants had a difficult time identifying what campus resources were available to them. Even students who participated in the FYSEP summer session noted a difficulty remembering what resources were introduced during the program. Ideally, this master doc would include resources introduced during the FYSEP summer session. This would ensure that both participants and non-participants of the SS would be able to refer back to it whenever they'd like. It would include resources pertaining to mental health, financial aid, etc.

We believe it would exist best on the FYSEP website or the FYSEP social media pages since it would be easy to access, locate, and refer back to. Having an easily accessible master document of resources available and relevant to first-generation students would facilitate their navigation of said resources. Furthermore, this easily accessible master document would especially help first-generation, first-year students who are barely familiarizing themselves with the college.

2. Expanding Academic Resources

Through our research, we found that non-FYSEP students were really impacted by the intense academic rigor and fast-paced nature of the 10-week term system. Therefore, we suggest that the FGO expand their academic resources to these students through the continuation/expansion of formalized tutoring for first-generation students specifically. The FGO currently has a tutoring program in which they reach out to the first generation students in the community asking them to indicate the classes they would like to be tutored in. One of the benefits of this program is that the tutors are fellow first-generation students which often is comforting to have someone who shares similar experiences as you around. Our suggestion would be that the FGO expand their tutoring program to reach more non-FYSEP first-generation students through increased outreach.

3. Increase Outreach to First Generation Students

Based on our interviews, we found that students who did not participate in the FYSEP Summer Session were less likely to identify with the first-generation community since most of them did not have that initial contact with the First Generation Office or faculty and staff associated with the office like FYSEP students had. As a result, they were more hesitant to reach out to the First Generation Office and interact with the community on campus. This finding is important to note since this year is the first time that the First Generation Office has its own space and expanded to serve both FYSEP students and first-generation students throughout the different class years. As a result, since the FGO is now serving a large first-generation community, they should increase outreach to students who did not participate in the FYSEP Summer Session. Through increasing outreach to these non-FYSEP students, the FGO would be able to better support these students both socially and academically through exposing them to resources and offering them a community, which can aid them in having social and cultural capital that can benefit them.

A way in which the FGO could increase their outreach to first generation students who did not participate in the FYSEP Summer Session would be to hold an event during orientation week for these students. This event would be helpful in bridging this accessibility gap and a great way for non-FYSEP first generation students to meet the FGO space and staff since it would be during time when they are still getting to know campus and could be a great opportunity to have this first initial connection with this community. During their interviews, non-FYSEP students said that they didn't feel like they belonged to the community or weren't aware that the office was a space available to them since they didn't receive an official invitation or had any connections to go there. Based on these findings, another suggestion would be for the FGO to hold an event during the first term in which first-year, first-generation students are invited to the office and are able to gather together where they can socialize with one another through being able to interact and see the faces behind the emails and messages that they receive. These events can serve as an opportunity for students to create these ties and foster a community in the office and first-generation community on campus at Dartmouth during the start of their transition which can continue on throughout their time here at Dartmouth.

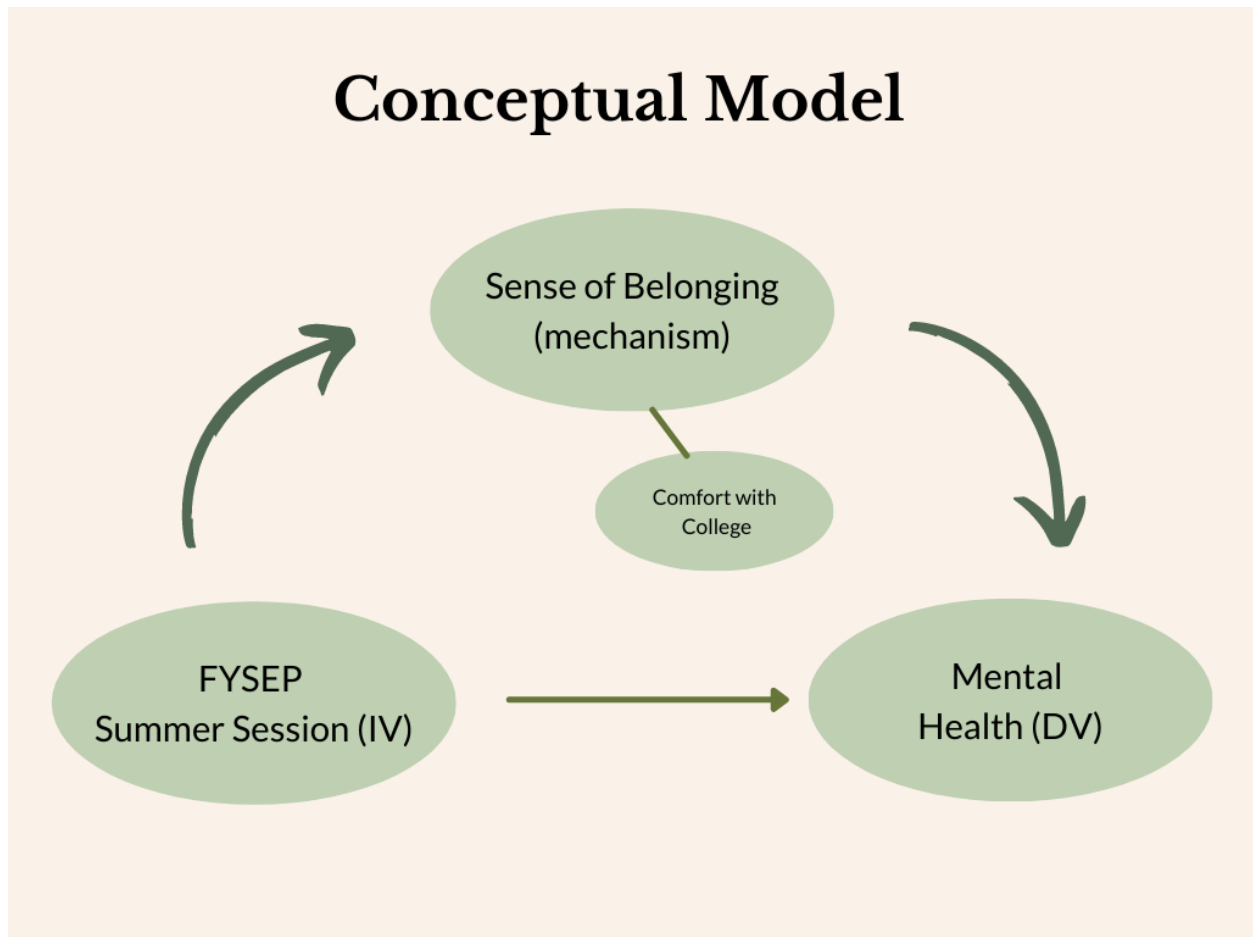
4. Increase Visibility of First Generation Students at Dartmouth

One of our goals as researchers for this project was to increase visibility of first-generation students at Dartmouth. Thus, through the distribution of the First Generation Student booklet created by our team on listservs and the FGO website, we believe first-gen student visibility will be increased. This booklet details all of the main findings from our study that can be understood by a broad audience but more importantly, it includes narratives from our interviewees, showcasing the challenges they face and

shedding light on their experiences. This booklet will be especially helpful for professors and faculty to have as it includes a list of resources that they can refer their first generation students to if they are not able to help them directly. Visibility of this community is extremely important as it continues to grow. The class of 2025 has the largest percentage of students who identify as first generation students (15%) and our hope is that this booklet and its distribution will humanize these students and create a place where they feel more comfortable and know they belong.

Appendix

Conceptual Model (Appendix A)



Survey Link (Appendix B) — <https://forms.gle/Aprmk8mX8vJmHfrY6>

Interview Guide (Appendix C) — <https://tinyurl.com/FYSEPinterviewguide>

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THE FIRST GENERATION
STUDENT

BOOKLET

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OUR GOAL

This booklet details all of the main findings from our study that can be understood by a broad audience but more importantly, it includes narratives from our interviewees, showcasing the challenges first-year, first-generation students face and shedding light on their experiences. This booklet will be especially helpful for professors and faculty to have as it includes a list of resources that they can refer their first generation students to if they are not able to help them directly. Visibility of this community is extremely important as it continues to grow. The class of 2025 has the largest percentage of students who identify as first generation students and our hope is that this booklet and its distribution will humanize these students and create a place where they feel more comfortable and know they belong.

Our project is called The Impact of College-Implemented Interventions on the First-Generation College Student Experience. First generation students are the first in their families to go to college and receive a bachelor's degree. One of the first barriers they face is access to elite institutions in the first place, especially because they often have to navigate this process by themselves. However, this disadvantage doesn't go away once they set foot into an elite institution of higher education like Dartmouth. Therefore, in order to better aid first generation students, it is necessary to understand their experience in college. Since 2009, Dartmouth has tracked the number of first generation students that make up each entering class, with the percentage ranging from 10-15% (US News). The Class of 2025 has the largest percentage of first generation students in Dartmouth's history at 15 percent.



OUR PARTNER

Dartmouth's First Generation Office (FGO)



The First Generation Office (FGO) is a relatively new space on campus that offers various programs and resources for first generation students at Dartmouth. One of their programs that has existed since 2009, First Year Summer Enrichment Program (FYSEP), has expanded throughout the years going from a four day program to a four week program.

The 2021 summer session was the inaugural four week residential program with 95 students from the incoming class year of 2025 and consisted of sample classes, workshops, and recreational activities. Additionally, the FGO has recently expanded their reach to serve all first generation identifying students on campus.

The FGO is made up of a group of intelligent, caring, and hard-working people who care deeply for first generation students. FGO, through its programming, mentoring, tutoring and FYSEP Summer Session dedicate time and love towards aiding first generation students' success at Dartmouth both academically and personally.

There are # of first generation students in the Class of 2025 and over 300 upper class first generation students. This is a population that is "small" but mighty.

For more information about the FGO or FYSEP, please visit their website here:

<https://students.dartmouth.edu/fgo/>

OUR PROJECT

IMPORTANCE & RELEVANCE

- Getting into a selective college as a first generation student in the first place is a challenge, with no one in the family able to offer guidance throughout the process.
- First generation students deserve to take up space and add so much culture and knowledge to their college campuses. Therefore, understanding their experiences is key to creating visibility for this community at Dartmouth.
- First generation students being offered the privilege of attending a well-resourced and well-connected institution like Dartmouth
 - How can the college better equip first generation students to thrive on campus?
- The first step to answering this question is measuring the impact of the current aids in place, such as the residential FYSEP summer session and evaluating its impacts on mental health, comfort with college, and sense of belonging.

METHODS

Quantitative:

28 item survey sent out to the first-year, first-gen community

- Sense of Belonging:
 - 5 item scale (Johnson, et al., 2007)
- Comfort with College:
 - 5 item scale (Hurtado & Carter, 1997)
- Mental Health:
 - 18 item scale (Ryff, 1989)

Qualitative:

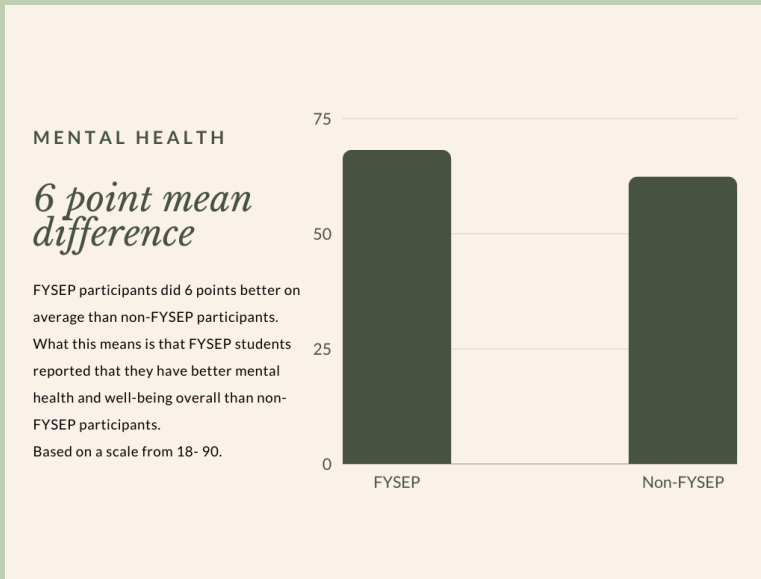
10 anonymous, in-depth interviews via Zoom

- 5 FYSEP Summer Session (SS) Participants
- 5 first-years, first-gen students who did not participate in FYSEP SS

- Aimed to measure the impact of FYSEP on first-generation students
- Potentially identify differences between those who participated in the FYSEP SS and those who did not

MENTAL HEALTH FINDINGS

Our Findings



"So yeah i'd say that the mental health resources i've used have worked pretty well and I feel very comfortable using it."

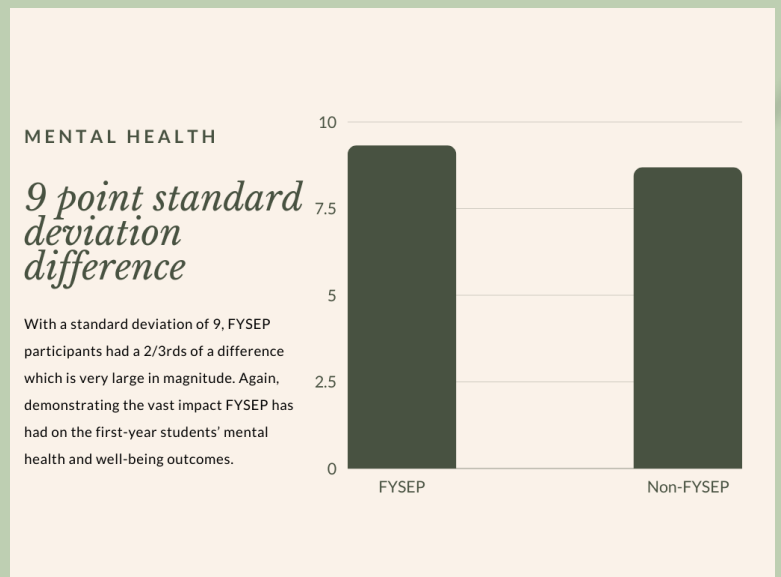
"Once I came here, I see that I'm just one more of a lot of amazing people and that puts me in a place that I know that I can relate to some people. It is easier to relate to some struggles or how to deal with tasks for example but it also makes me compare myself a lot with other people and I feel like that doesn't give me a lot of self-esteem."

In reference to qualities of a support system:

"They don't just like dismiss my problems, they empathize with me, like they'll tell me like 'yeah i'm doing this, too' and that's something that helps so much... but it is so nice to know that you're not the only one who is like having this problem."

"Talking about like parents or the realities of being first gen low income or an immigrant, you know, we kind of are cut from the same thread and that helps."

"And then, when I came here [Dartmouth], it was just like everything hit at once, and I had to like get into that speed of education again."



" I feel like my self esteem has gone up, as I felt more like I belong."

"I would say that I am still like now trying to just take care of my mental health. It's not easy but I'm trying to take care of it"

SENSE OF BELONGING

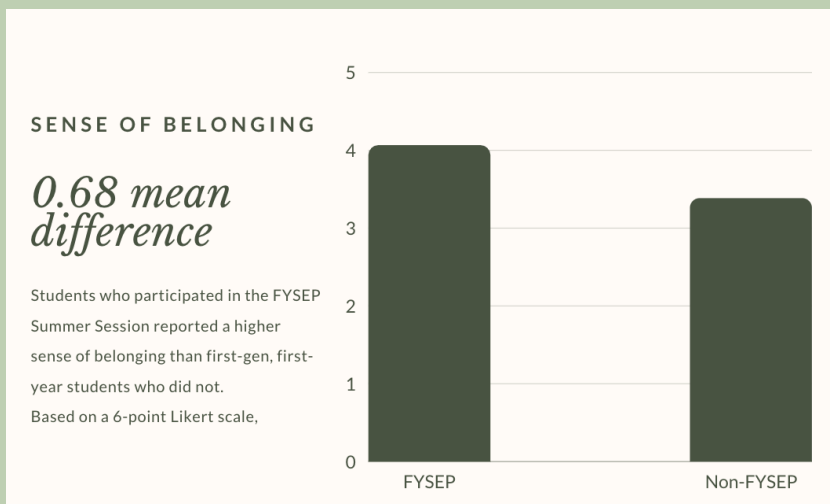
“FYSEP did a good job reminding us that we are not alone, and that they would always be there for us. I feel a part of the FYSEP community.”

“FYSEP promised to be with you, through to the end, so I think it makes you feel proud of where you're from and how far you've come.”

“I do feel like I deserve to be here. I do feel like if Dartmouth put me here, it was for a reason. But I don't relate that deeply to the Dartmouth community overall. So it's this weird 'belonging.'”

I feel like I do belong within the school, but at the same time, I do acknowledge that, originally, Dartmouth was not made for someone like me.”

Our Findings



Themes	FYSEP	Non-FYSEP
Dartmouth Culture	-Feel out of place, especially in social spaces like Greek life -FYSEP helps them feel like they belong and deserve to take up space	-Feel like they don't fit in, especially in term of academics (impostor syndrome)
First-Gen Community	-Feel like they belong to the first-gen community, due to shared backgrounds	-Despite similar backgrounds, generally don't feel as connected to the first-gen community (or the FGO)
Support Systems	-Feel most supported by college through financial aid -Friendships served as main source of belonging	-Feel most supported by college through financial aid -Finding friends helped them feel like they belonged

COMFORT WITH COLLEGE

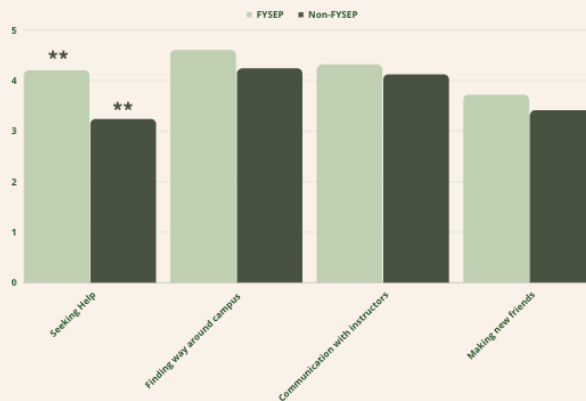
COMFORT WITH COLLEGE

1 point mean difference

FYSEP participants were 1 point more likely to seek help on average than non-FYSEP participants. This finding is important and significant compared to the other categories listed under comfort with college. This means that FYSEP students are more likely to seek help than non-FYSEP students, and this finding could be associated with some of the programming that occurs during the FYSEP Summer Session.

Note: Based on a 5-point Likert scale

Comfort with College between FYSEP and Non-FYSEP First-year, First-Generation Students



“FYSEP helped me a lot with that because it was my first time having interaction with faculty but it was in small classes. I even remember that one of my professors for CIB...She even thought us how to send an email to your professors which was really meaningful because I didn’t know you had to ask for an extension. So right now, I feel like as I know these things it is starting to get easier.” - FYSEP '25

“I feel like I am just afraid to speak with my professors because like I did not have like that good experiences last term with my other professors...I find myself reaching out more to peer tutoring services like RWIT or just like asking my friends or TAs for help on assignments.” - FYSEP '25

“We all share the same issues. I feel like I am more comfortable around them and opening up to them and like finding them [first-generation community] on campus has been what has changed my mind because ... Life is easier when you have people in your corner supporting you.” - Non-FYSEP '25

“One thing that I feel that is meaningful is that... sometimes there are so many resources and I don’t know what exactly to do and having people to talk to is really, really meaningful...I also know that if I turn out to anyone in the office or any other student also from FYSEP, I know they would also know how to help me with those resources. Just having someone to turn to is, for me, one of the most meaningful things.” - FYSEP '25

My transition has been good, I think it's important to have a community here and have friends that you can rely on because it definitely makes navigating this crazy please just bearable. - Non-FYSEP '25

Comfort with College Themes			
Variable	FYSEP	Non-FYSEP	Similarities
Transition to Dartmouth	surprised about academic rigor but friends, faculty's presence, and connections made transition easier	rough, bumpy start along with culture shock	Informal and/or formal mentorship from upperclassmen helpful in transition
Familiarity and Access to Campus Resources	Familiar; don't use all of them initially, but now know who to reach out to	split; knowledgeable about resources and comfortable while others had bad experiences reaching out and feel like there is a lack of resources available	None
Relationship with Faculty and Staff and Comfortability Reaching out	some connection and comfort with professors; some had tensions and bad experiences	felt comfortable reaching out to professors about class stuff; less informally	None
FYSEP impact on Comfort with College	Exposure to resources; comfort/support from office	N/A	N/A
Leaving Dartmouth	harsh academic transition into fall, feeling burnt out; stayed because of community, break, and accessing resources	stress, unprepared, social media comparison; stayed because of freedom, challenge, community	importance of community as factor of retention

OUR SUGGESTIONS

01 ACCESSIBLE MASTER DOC OF CAMPUS RESOURCES

Through our qualitative research, we found that both FYSEP and non-FYSEP participants had a difficult time identifying what campus resources were available to them. Ideally, this master doc would include resources introduced during the FYSEP summer session. This would ensure that both participants and non-participants of the summer session would be able to refer back to it whenever they'd like. It would include resources pertaining to mental health, financial aid, etc.

We believe it would exist best on the FYSEP website or the FYSEP social media pages since it would be easy to access, locate, and refer back to. Having an easily accessible master document of resources relevant to first-generation students would facilitate their transition to college.

02 EXPANDING ACADEMIC RESOURCES

Through our research, we found that non-FYSEP students were really impacted by the intense academic rigor and fast-paced nature of the 10-week term system. Therefore, we suggest that the FGO expand their academic resources to these students through the continuation/expansion of formalized tutoring for first-generation students specifically. The FGO currently has a tutoring program in which they reach out to the first generation students in the community asking them to indicate the classes they would like to be tutored in. One of the benefits of this program is that the tutors are fellow first-generation students which often is comforting to have someone who shares similar experiences as you around. Our suggestion would be that the FGO expand their tutoring program to reach more non-FYSEP first-generation students through increased outreach.

03 INCREASE OUTREACH TO STUDENTS

Based on our interviews, we found that students who did not participate in the FYSEP Summer Session were less likely to identify with the first-generation community since most of them did not have prior contact with the First Generation Office (FGO). As a result, they were hesitant to reach out to the FGO and interact with the first-generation community on campus.

A way in which the FGO could increase their outreach to first generation students who did not participate in the FYSEP Summer Session would be to hold an event during orientation week for these students or the FGO to hold an event during the first term in which first-year, first-generation students are invited to the office and are able to socialize with each other. This event would be helpful in bridging this accessibility gap and a great way for non-FYSEP first generation students to meet the FGO space and staff since it would be during time when they are still getting to know campus and could be a great opportunity to have this first initial connection with this community which can continue and grow during their time here at Dartmouth.



LIST OF RESOURCES

Where to refer first generation students.

- FGO Office
 - FGO Staff:
 - Jay Davis: Jay.T.Davis@dartmouth.edu
 - Theresa Hernandez: Theresa.M.Hernandez@dartmouth.edu
 - Diane Cammarata: diane.e.cammarata@dartmouth.edu
 - Tutoring Program
 - Mentoring Programs
- Dartmouth's Mental Health Student Union (MHU) Peer Support
- Student Wellness Center
 - Offers programs in well-being (check-ins, yoga, mindfulness & meditation) and prevention & education
 - Location: 6 North Main Street Robinson Hall, Suite 319
 - Contact: Student.Wellness.Center@Dartmouth.edu; 603-646-9414
- Undergraduate Deans' Office
 - Specifically Dean Hoyt and Dean Burns (as they have connections to the FGO)
- Office of Pluralism and Leadership (OPAL)
 - Offers programming in Advising, Community & Leadership/Advocacy, Education, Heritage and History Celebrations
 - Location: Collis Suite 211, 213-217
 - Contact: Pluralism.and.Leadership.Office@Dartmouth.edu; 603-646-0987

LIST OF RESOURCES

Where to refer first generation students.

- Academic Skills Center
 - Group and Individual Tutoring Programs, Academic Coaching, Learning@Dartmouth, Learning Resources and Tips
 - Location: Conducting business online and in person in 224 Baker Library
 - Contact: Peer.Tutoring.Program@dartmouth.edu; (603) 646-2014
- Dartmouth College Health Services/Dicks House
 - Offers primary care services, counseling, pharmacy, fees and insurance information, medical records, and sports medicine
 - Location: 5-7 Rope Ferry Road
 - Contact: Dicks.House.Health.Service@Dartmouth.edu; 603-646-9400
- Counseling Center
 - Offers appointments, workshops, outreach programs, guides and resources, and self help resources
 - Location: 2nd floor of Dick Hall's House (use 5 Rope Ferry Road entrance)
 - Contact: Counseling@Dartmouth.edu; [603-646-9442](tel:603-646-9442)
- Financial Aid Office
 - Offers help in understanding or talking about financial aid package/award, D-Plan and aid (study abroad/exchange programs, leave/transfer terms)
 - Location: 6024 McNutt Hall
 - Contact: Financial.Aid@Dartmouth.edu; 603-646-2451
 - Person: G. Dino Koff, Director

OUR TEAM



ERICA BERMEO MATUTE
Senior ('22)

Erica is a Sociology major modified with Latin American, Latino and Caribbean Studies (LALACS) and Spanish minor at Dartmouth. She is Latina, first-generation student herself and hopes to create a strong community among first-generation students at Dartmouth for future class years. She is also interested in helping supporting undocumented students on campus and migrant farmworkers in the Upper Valley.



JESSICA HERNANDEZ
Senior ('22)

Jessica is a Sociology major modified with Latin American, Latino and Caribbean Studies (LALACS). As a latina, first-generation student herself, she is very passionate about educational access and success. She wants to work with first-generation, low-income students and supporting them in accessing and succeeding in college environments.



MELISSA HOANG LOPEZ
Senior ('22)

Melissa is a Psychology major with a Sociology minor. She is interested in how the individual mind is affected by the social structures surrounding it, especially in the contexts of mental health and education. A cause she cares about is bridging the accessibility gap for underrepresented folks in areas such as mental health and (higher) education. Being a first-generation, low-income, Latinx, and Asian student herself, she feel a personal connection to causes of this nature.



Acknowledgements

We would like to give a very big thank you to all of the people who made this project possible and supported us through it:

Professor Kimberly Rogers
Professor Jason Houle
Jay Davis -- FGO Director
Marvin Burns -- FGO Interim Director
First Gen Student participants

many thanks



THE FIRST GENERATION
STUDENT
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