

STUDENT ACCESS AND PROGRESSION: First-in-Family Students

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**STARS Conference, July 2017
Adelaide**



**Australian
Learning &
Teaching
Fellows**



**FIRST
IN FAMILY**



**UNIVERSITY OF
WOLLONGONG**
AUSTRALIA



Today's Session

- Background: Exploring first-in- family students – *Who ? Why? and What?*
- What is it like to attend university as the 'first'? A brief overview
- What is already available to assist first-in-family learners?
- What can this network do?

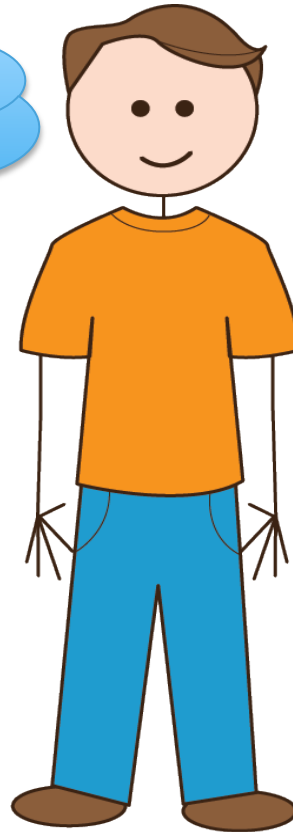
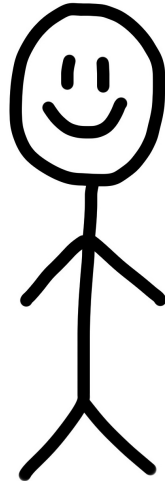
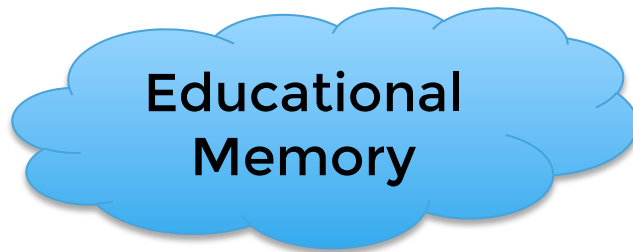
Why are we here?



Background: Who are first in family students?

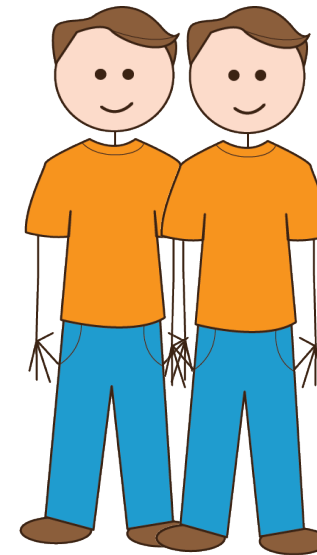


Summary Literature Review: First-in-Family students



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"Insider knowledge"



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Why first-in-family? Why now?

- Difficult to identify – no one clear definition
- Within Australia, higher rates of attrition have been recorded for students whose parents have not completed high school (19%) compared to those who had a parent with a diploma qualification or higher (12%) (McMillan, 2005).
- Deficit thinking - a 'group at risk' (Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013, p329)

Attending as the 'first'

Overwhelmingly, FiF Students are:

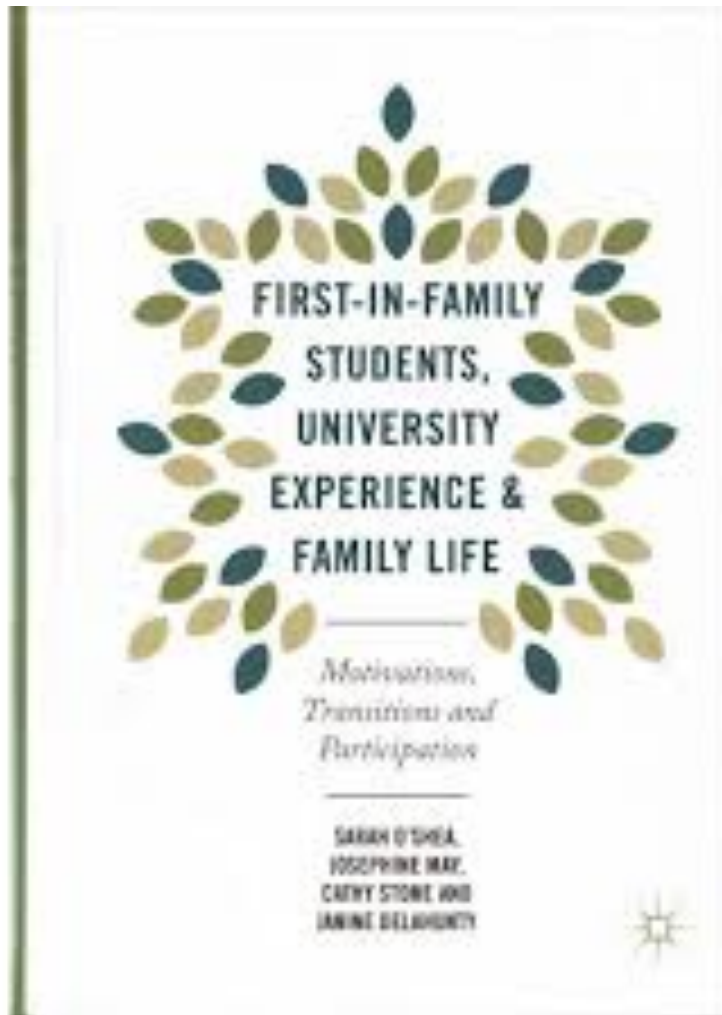
- Seeking to 'better their lives' and that of their families (children/partners); for younger students this return is tied up in family biographies
- Likely to feel 'out of place' at first - 'imposter'. Lack confidence. Feel lucky and grateful to be 'allowed' to be at university
- Concerned about impact on family, particularly finances and time

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Attending as the 'first'

Overwhelmingly, FiF Students are:

- Unfamiliar with university – myths and stereotypes. Need time to adjust and understand expectations, language, systems
- Needing and valuing support that reaches out to them – less likely to seek it by themselves due to lack of confidence and of knowledge
- Appreciative of family support and interest; but sharing about uni is limited by family's lack of experience



Findings are detailed in: O'Shea, S., Stone, C., May, J., & Delahunty, J (2017). First-in-Family Students, University Experience and Family Life: Motivations, Transitions and Participation. London: Palgrave Macmillan

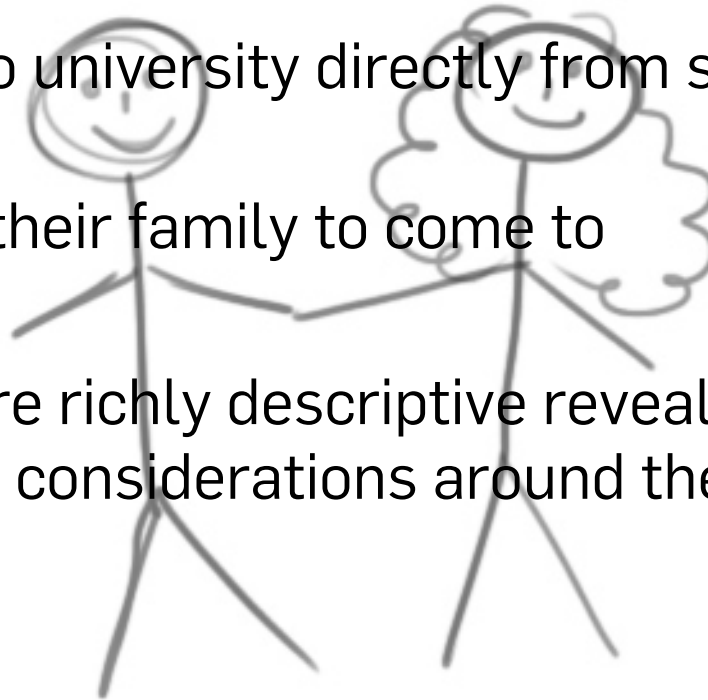
Lets hear from the students....

- Lachlan and Marlee

Both came to university directly from school

Both first in their family to come to university

Narratives are richly descriptive revealing the hidden tensions and considerations around their HE participation



LACHLAN'S STORY: "I'm the first person I think in my entire bloodline to set foot in a university"

"It's put on a pedestal": the privileging of university

"Dad always tells me the story, back in his day you didn't get to choose, you did what you were told...":
Lachlan's story is embedded within his parent's biographies

"...they saw university as the ticket to a successful life":
As he nears the end of his university career, his success is assured in his family's view

MARLEE'S STORY: “Wow, you must be really smart if you're going to uni”

“I am sort of the first person that's gone to uni in our family so it does seem like I am being put on the spotlight quite a bit” : Additional invisible pressure

“I've always been the carer in the family...” : Degree choice rooted in family biography

“...my little eight year old brother ... he, no joke, goes around to his friends at school and goes “My sister's a nurse” and it's so sweet..” Intergenerational implications

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Reflection

- How do Lachlan and Marlee's stories reflect the experiences of first in family students that you have encountered ?
- How might we better support students such as Lachlan and Maree during their transition into university?
- What is happening in your institution that could be shared?

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Blue Sky Thinking

- Definition: “creative ideas that are not limited by current thinking or beliefs”¹
 - Out-of-the-box thinking
 - Brainstorming
 - Unfettered thinking
 - No judgement
 - All possibilities considered – creative, crazy or controversial!
 - Don’t be limited by what you consider feasible

1. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/blue-sky-thinking>: My thanks to Kate Wadwell for letting me use this slide

Blue Sky Thinking

- What do we (as university practitioners) need to do / consider / lobby for (etc) in order to improve the engagement and retention of first in family students?



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What next?

- Brainstorm at your tables
- Choose three 'ideas' and write these on the whiteboard
- Consider the following:
 - Is it positive?
 - Is it possible?
 - How/ Who /What?

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What's already available?

- Foregrounding the first-in-family voice
- Celebrating first-in-family status
- Resources for the student and their families
- Strategies for engaging with family and community

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Foregrounding first in family student experience



<https://www.nytimes.com/video/education/00000003605706/ivy-league-trailblazers.html?action=click>ype=vhs&version=vhs-heading&module=vhs®ion=title-area>

What's it like to be the first in your family to go to university?

<https://youtu.be/6jAzWQyD8UY>



Introducing the First in Family Website: firstinfamily.com.au



The screenshot shows the homepage of the First in Family website. At the top left is the logo, which consists of a stylized 'E' inside a square followed by the text 'FIRST IN FAMILY'. To the right of the logo is a navigation menu with the following items: Home, Stories (with a dropdown arrow), Success (with a dropdown arrow), Kids (with a dropdown arrow), Family (with a dropdown arrow), and Teaching and Support (with a dropdown arrow). Below the navigation is a large orange heading that reads 'Welcome to the First-in-Family website!'. Underneath this heading is a paragraph of text: 'This website is designed for current and intending university students who are the first in their immediate family to go to university, as well as for their families and for all those who work within the higher education sector. The resources created especially for this website are based upon our research with students who were the first in their family to enrol in a university. Our project team are dedicated to supporting individuals as they move into the university environment. click here to view our research presentations at the first in family forum.' Below the paragraph is a call to action: 'Scroll down to learn more about this project.' followed by 'We warmly welcome your feedback about the site.' The main content area features a video player. The video frame shows a young woman wearing a white hijab and glasses, smiling. To the right of the video frame is a quote in white text on a dark background: 'Right now I am embarked on one of the most thrilling and scary things I've ever done.' Below the quote is a 'Return to top' link.

National Principles and Strategies for supporting FiF students and their families.

- 1. Changing conversations: Engage with family and community ▶
- 2. Take the mystery out of university ▶
- 3. Make no assumptions ▶
- 4. Build a sense of community ▶
- 5. Adopt a strengths-based approach ▶
- 6. Model authenticity: draw on first-in-family student experience ▶
- 7. Institutions: commit to resources and policy ▶

Available from:
[http://
www.firstinfamily.com.au/
OLT-1.php](http://www.firstinfamily.com.au/OLT-1.php)

Additional resources:

- [Tips for Engaging with Family and Community of Learners](#)
- [Online tool box](#) for equity practitioners
- [Family Quizzes / Uni Lingo:](#)
- [Website](#) that bring together the Seed Grant and OI T resources

Uni Lingo!

Drag the item (on the left) to the appropriate definition in the columns on the right. If correct, the item will be accepted and revealed which, when clicked, will give you more information on that topic/definition.

tutorial	<input type="text" value="drop definition here"/>	<input type="text" value="drop definition here"/>
Census data	Last date for withdrawing from a subject without penalty	A group making up part of a faculty
lecture	<input type="text" value="drop definition here"/>	<input type="text" value="drop definition here"/>
Part time study	Where a lecturer speaks to a large group of students – students do a lot of listening	A range of services dedicated to providing practical and emotional support for students
School	<input type="text" value="drop definition here"/>	<input type="text" value="drop definition here"/>
Undergraduate	Where groups of students work on activities or discussions, usually about the lecture topic	A result which is exceptional!
a '10' grade	<input type="text" value="drop definition here"/>	<input type="text" value="drop definition here"/>
Student support services	<input type="text" value="drop definition here"/>	<input type="text" value="drop definition here"/>
Full time study	<input type="text" value="drop definition here"/>	<input type="text" value="drop definition here"/>



Top Five⁺¹ Hints for Family Survival



To family and friends:

“It's hectic, it's crazy, it's disorganized, it's scary, but in the same breath it's fun and rewarding!”

Family Quiz!

- 1 At the beginning of university is it better for family members to:
- 2 If the student in your family is concerned about university fees, would you:
- 3 How can you help your student around assignment time?
- 4 You notice the student in your family spends a lot of time off-campus, should you:
- 5 Your new university student seems to have isolated themselves from the family and is spending a lot of time in their room, should you:
- 6 What do you feel would be the most stressful times in the semester:
- 7 The student in your family is struggling with the workload, would you:

Key Points from research

- The importance of bringing the family along with the students in this journey
- Recognition of the powerful intergenerational impacts of this decision
- Everybody's business – not just the students
- Identifying the intersectionality of the student which can lead to a more complex transition to university

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What do parents/ caregivers appreciate or need?

- Authentic and context based information about university
“It was great to see the connection and relevance depicted in the welcome video of current students both in the backgrounds of the people in the video and their choices”

(#45, father of prospective student)

- Demystification of the university and its environment
...realised it is not a school system set up. A lot more activities, NOT just lectures. Library, gym, sports events, programs for school aged children uni connected services etc

(#10, mother of prospective student)

What do parents/ caregivers appreciate or need?

- Highlight the roles that parents and family members can adopt in this educational journey

For example: 1) Practical / Emotional Support; 2) Asking questions; 3) Being available! 4) Notice change

- Reassurance in relation to possible fears and concerns

Finances / Moving to a new location / Ability to cope with the rigours of study /A sense of 'loss'

What do parents/ caregivers appreciate or need?

- Deconstruction of the 'inner workings' of university – the insider view!

(eg the extreme highs/lows of university semester; attendance patterns; learning styles etc)

- **Actively dispelling myths!**

The types of myths encountered included:

- *The inflexible nature of lecturers and / lectures: this includes being forbidden to ask questions in lectures; being told to leave the lecture if late etc*
- *The idea that university was simply a series of parties*
- *University as a 'bludge' with little attendance required*
- *Expectations related to American campuses (such as sorority clubs etc.)*

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Where to from here?

- What one thing have you taken from today's session that you could implement?
- How could this network assist in this endeavour ?
- What are the gaps or needs that you perceive as being important?

First in Family as an equity category?



Improving retention, completion and success in higher education

Higher Education Standards Panel
Discussion Paper, June 2017



Factors such as being first in family to attend university, poor prior academic performance and being externally enrolled could also categorise students as 'at risk'.

First in family students is a collective category currently defined by institutional enrolment data on parental education levels. It is not reported systematically and it traverses established equity groupings. Professor Sarah O'Shea, National Learning and Teaching Fellow, has proposed that the first in family category be considered an encompassing equity group embracing existing equity classifications. She also highlighted that first in family status does not have an implicit negative value and could be regarded as a form of celebration with targeted support and outreach framed in a positive sense. A national approach to recording first in family data may be warranted.

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HESP Discussion Paper (June 2017) page 45



Thank you for your attention!

QUESTIONS / FEEDBACK

If you are interested in receiving updates about this research, please email:
first-in-family@uow.edu.au or saraho@uow.edu.au

For more details of the research featured in this presentation please see:

O'Shea, S., (2016). Avoiding the manufacture of “sameness”: First-in-family students, cultural capital and the higher education environment. *Higher Education*. 72(1), 59-78.

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Stone, C., O'Shea, S., May, J., Delahunty, J & Partington, Z. (2016). Opportunity through online learning: experiences of first-in-family students in online open-entry higher education. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*. 56(2), (pp146-169)

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Universities Australia. (2016, January). University now within reach for a broader cohort of Australians. Media Release. Retrieved from www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au