



**Student Life Survey:
A Look at First-Generation
Students**

Center for the Study of Student Life

September 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INVOLVEMENT

- 47.2% of first generation students are involved in student organizations, Student Life sponsored programs or Greek Life, compared to 61.2% of non-first generation students.
- On average, non-first generation students report spending more time participating in student organizations compared to first generation students (6.5 hrs v. 5.2 hrs).
- 45.2% of non-first generation students report having a leadership position in a student organization, compared to 33.8% of first generation students.

STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

- 35.1% of first generation students reported that they joined a student organization “to make Ohio State feel smaller,” compared to 48.9% of non-first generation students.
- Only 7.1% of first generation students reported that they joined a student organization because a parent or guardian encouraged them to join, compared to 16.1% of non-first generation students.
- When asked why they did not join a student organization, 31.9% of first generation students reported they had family commitments, compared to 18.8% of non-first generation students.
- 88.7% of non-first generation students and 80.2% of first generation students agree or strongly agree that they feel more connected to Ohio State as a result of joining a student organization.

CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT

- 10.8% of non-first generation students reported never attending a campus event, compared to 19.7% of first generation students.
- 64.0% of non-first generation students participated in a service event in the past academic year, while only 48.6% of first generation students participated to the same extent.

OHIO STATE TRADITIONS

- 67.2% of first generation students agree or strongly agree that they know Ohio State traditions (v. 81.2% of non-first generation students) and 55.0% report that they take part in Ohio State traditions (v.72.9% of non-first generation students).

CONNECTION TO OHIO STATE COMMUNITY

- 59.7% of first generation students reported they felt involved with others, while 70.1% non-first generation students say they feel involved with others.
- 57.3% of non-first generation students agree or strongly agree that they have relationships with Ohio State faculty, compared to 52.1% of first generation students
- 76.2% of first generation students report that they see themselves as part of Ohio State, compared to 83.8% of non-first generation students.

Note: All reported differences in the executive summary are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level or below.

INTRODUCTION

The Student Life Survey was distributed to a random sample of 5,000 undergraduate students at the Ohio State University in January 2015. The survey received 1,039 responses (a 20.8% response rate). Note that not all students answered each question. This report examines differences in the responses of first generation and non-first generation students. First generation students do not have a parent or guardian who has completed a bachelor's degree, and are often the first in their family to attend college. First generation students are less likely to persist and graduate than non-first generation students, even though a bachelor's degree is crucial for upward mobility and economic success (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Pike and Kuh, 2005). It is important to understand how college experiences and involvement differ between first generation students and other students in order to better support first generation students.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the 837 respondents who answered the question identifying first generation students, 290 (34.6%) were first-generation college students (i.e. neither parent completed a bachelor's degree) and 547 (65.4%) were not. Those students who did not know their parents' education status are excluded from the analyses.

Gender	Non-First Gen.	First Gen.	Total
Female	53.2%	53.3%	53.2%
Male	45.3%	44.3%	45.0%

Additional gender options not reported due to too few responses

Employment Status***	Non-First Gen.	First Gen.	Total
Work- all year	48.4%	57.9%	51.7%
Work- academic year only	8.6%	7.9%	8.4%
Work- summers only	28.2%	14.8%	23.6%
Not employed	14.8%	19.3%	16.4%

Class Rank***	Non-First Gen.	First Gen.	Total
1	9.7%	19.7%	13.1%
2	22.5%	18.3%	21.0%
3	21.0%	22.4%	21.5%
4	46.8%	39.7%	44.3%

Race/Ethnicity	Non-First Gen.	First Gen.	Total
African American or Black or African Descent	3.7%	4.8%	4.1%
Asian American or Asian (East, South, Southeast)	9.3%	14.5%	11.1%
Latino(a) or Hispanic	0.5%	2.4%	1.2%
Middle Eastern or Arab American	0.9%	0.0%	0.6%
White or European American	78.6%	65.5%	74.1%
Multiple Races or Ethnicities	4.0%	9.0%	5.7%
Prefer not to answer	2.2%	3.1%	2.5%
Other	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%

Current Residence***	Non-First Gen.	First Gen.	Total
On-campus	29.2%	27.7%	28.7%
Off-campus within in 43201	47.4%	32.8%	42.5%
Off-campus outside 43201	23.4%	39.4%	28.8%

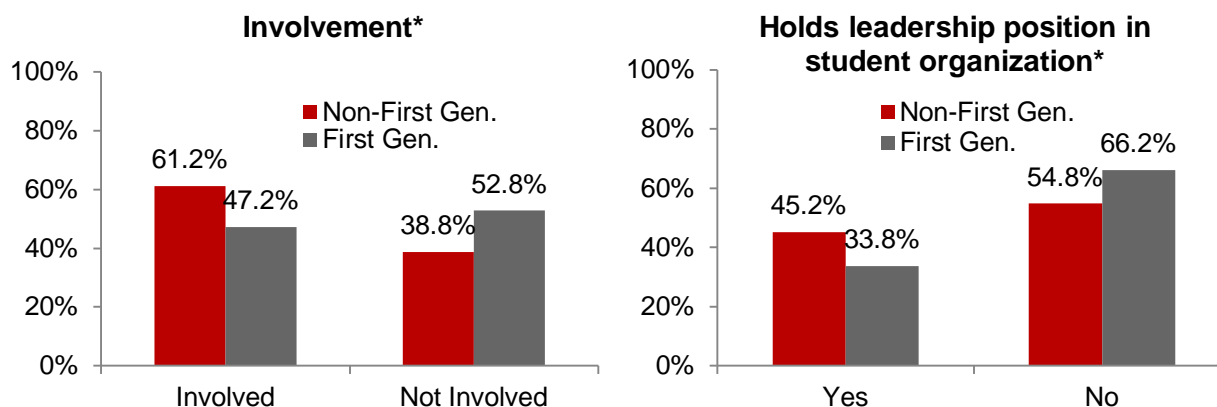
Transfer Status**	Non-First Gen.	First Gen.	Total
Haven't transferred	74.9%	63.3%	70.9%
Campus Change	5.3%	7.3%	6.0%
Transferred from another institution	19.8%	29.4%	23.1%

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

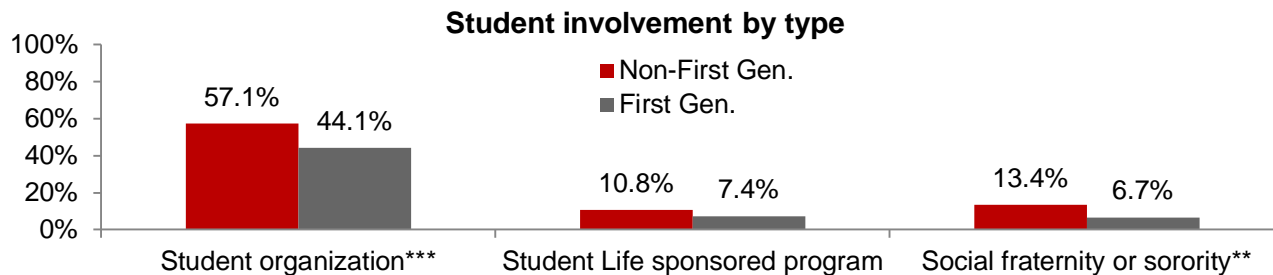
FINDINGS

OVERALL INVOLVEMENT

Among all undergraduate students, 59.2% are involved in at least one student organization, Student Life sponsored program or social fraternity or sorority. Of these students, 40.5% are a member of a group's leadership. There are significant differences between the percentage of first generation and non-first generation students who are involved in these programs or hold leadership positions, which are illustrated below.



Overall, 55.3% of undergraduate students participate in a student organization, 10.6% participate in a Student Life sponsored program and 11.9% participate in a social fraternity or sorority.



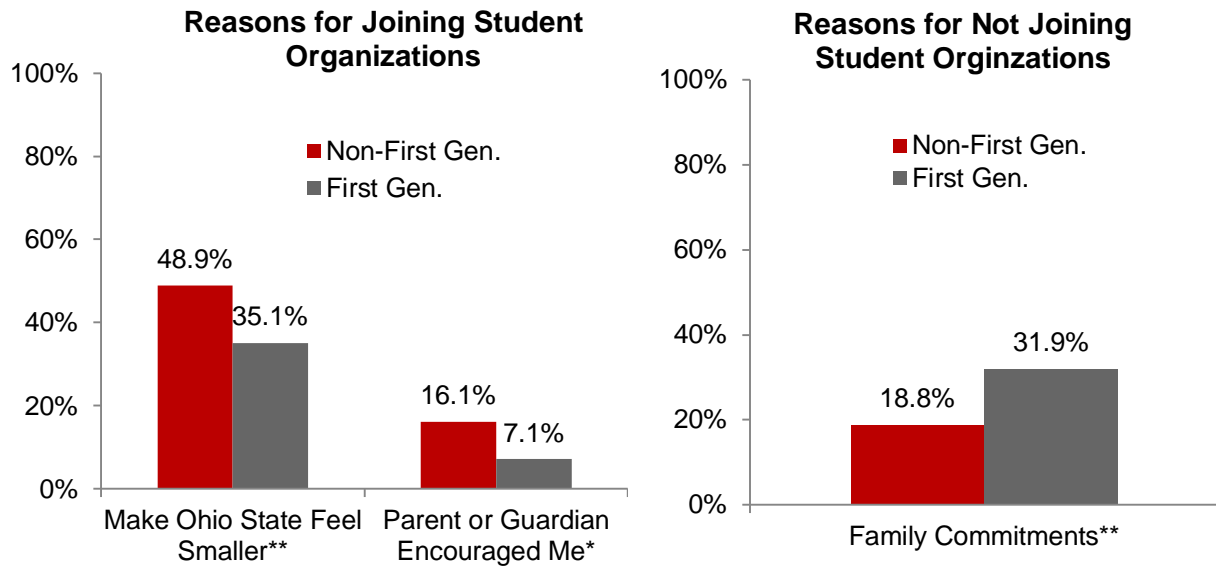
Hours of Involvement per Week	Non-First Gen.	First Gen.
0-4 hours	46.7%	61.0%
5-9 hours	29.2%	23.5%
10-14 hours	13.3%	8.8%
15-19 hours	5.1%	3.7%
20+ hours	5.7%	2.9%
Mean*	6.5 hours	5.2 hours

The chart to the left displays the distribution of student involvement hours per week. On average, non-first generation students are significantly more involved than first generation students.

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

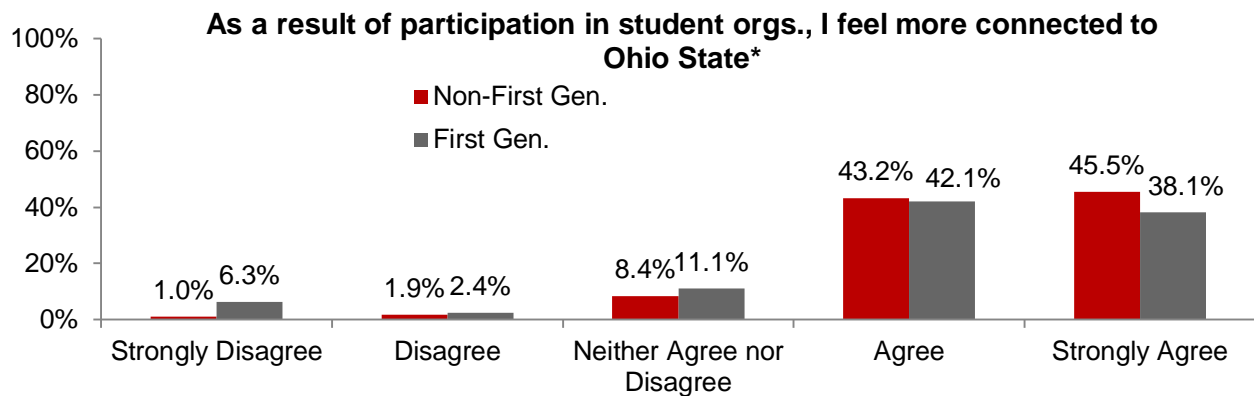
STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Student organizations are important components of undergraduate involvement. The significant reasons for joining and not joining are presented below.



Involvement by Student Organization Type	First Gen.	Non-First Gen.	Statistical Significance
Academic/Department/Professional	62.4%	75.2%	*
Ethnic/Cultural	28.7%	15.5%	**
Honoraries/ Honor Societies	19.4%	31.6%	*

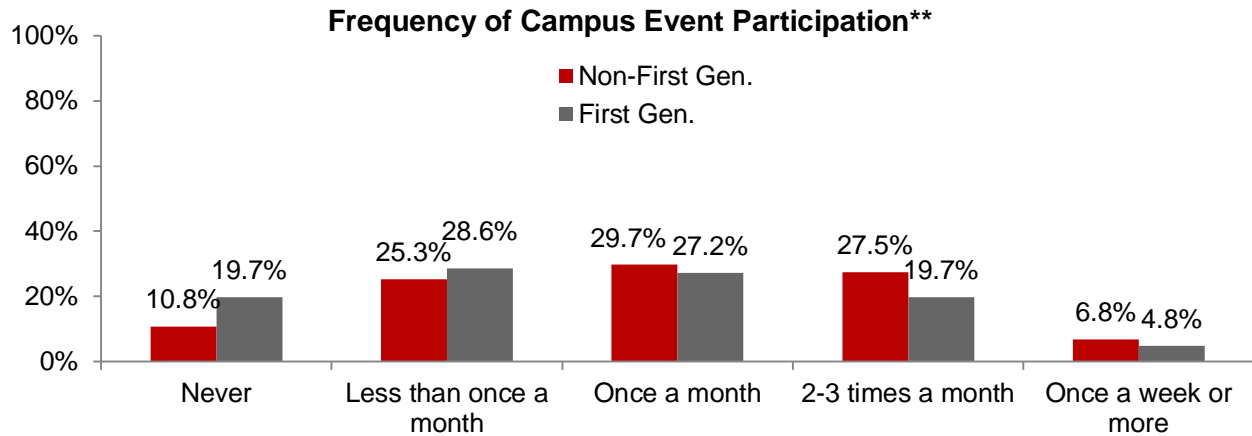
Overall, 85.3% of all students either agree or strongly agree that participating in student organizations has made them feel more connected to Ohio State.



*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

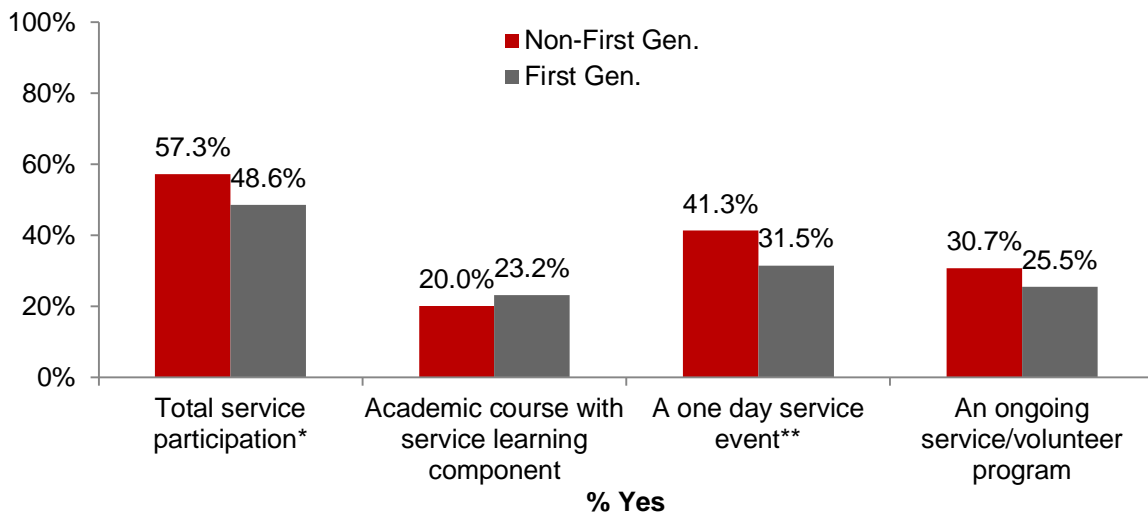
CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT

While 64.0% of non-first generation students participate in a campus event at least once per month, only 51.7% of first generation students participate at that often.



Students reported their involvement in a variety of service events and programs. Overall, 54.3% of students had participated in at least one service event or program.

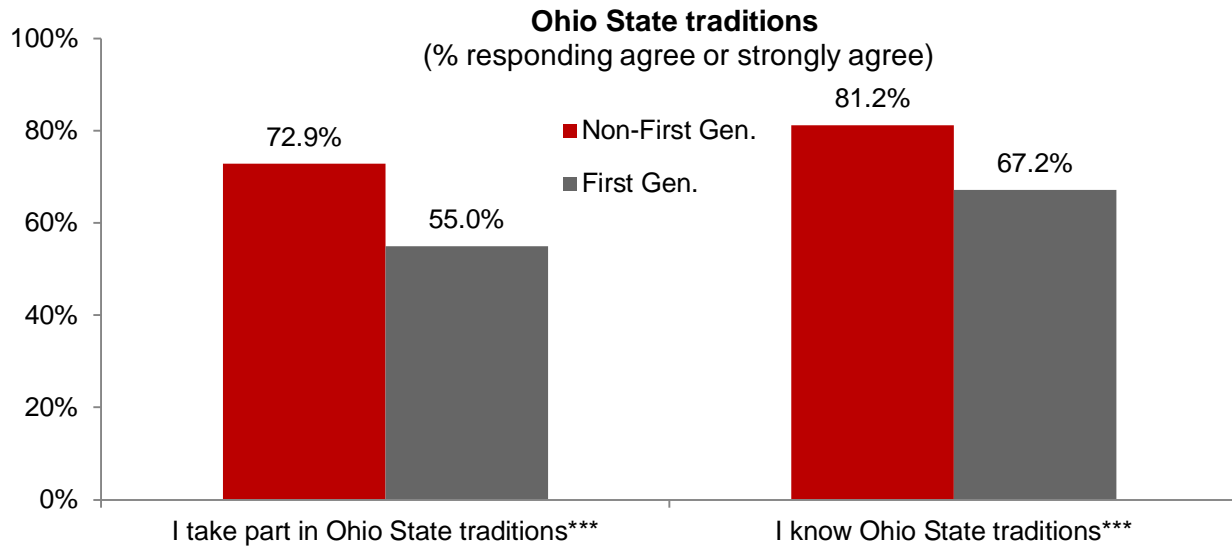
Service Participation in the Current Academic Year



*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

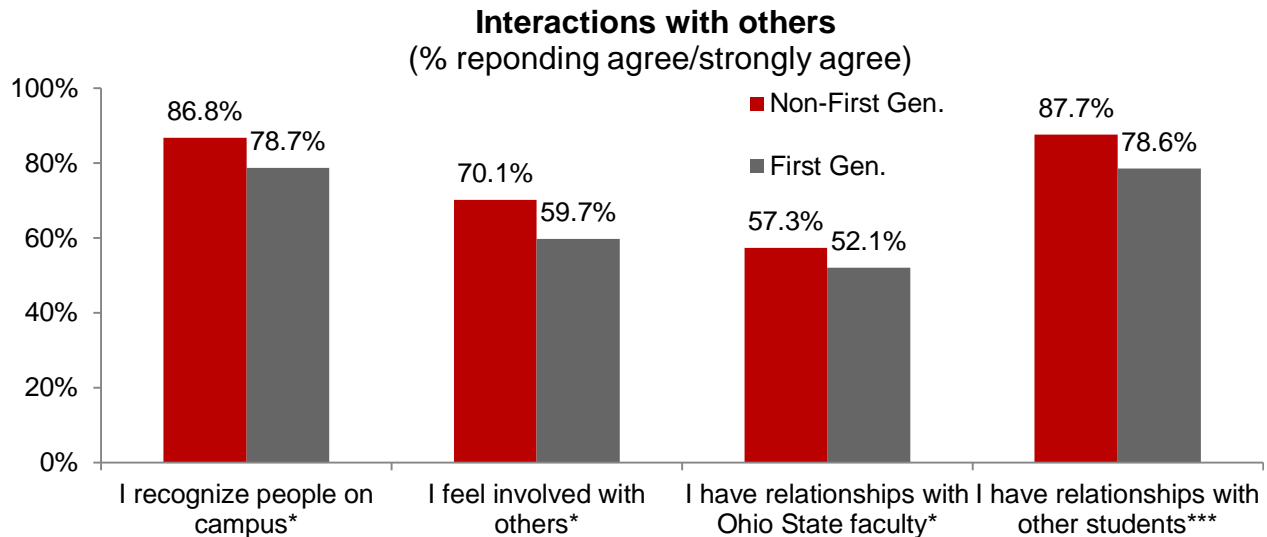
OHIO STATE TRADITIONS

76.3% of undergraduate students responded agree or strongly agree when asked, “Do you know Ohio State traditions?” Despite knowing the traditions, only 66.7% of students say they agree or strongly agree that they take part in Ohio State traditions. There are significant differences between first generation and non-first generation students, which are displayed below.



INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS AT OHIO STATE

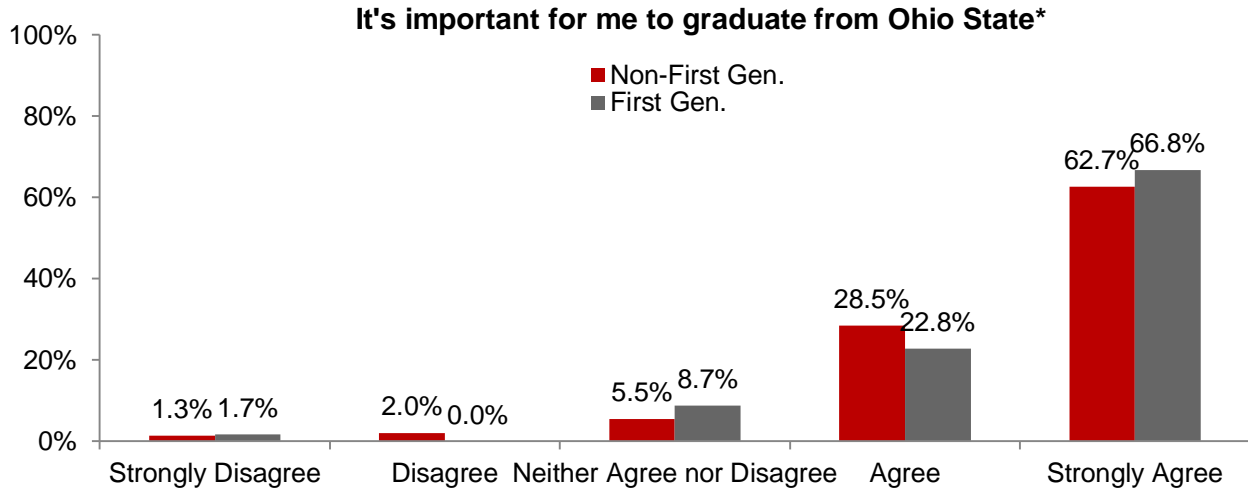
Overall, 84% of undergraduate respondents reported recognizing people on campus and 66% report feeling involved with others on campus. Further, while 85% of respondents report having relationships with other Ohio State students, 56% say the same about faculty.



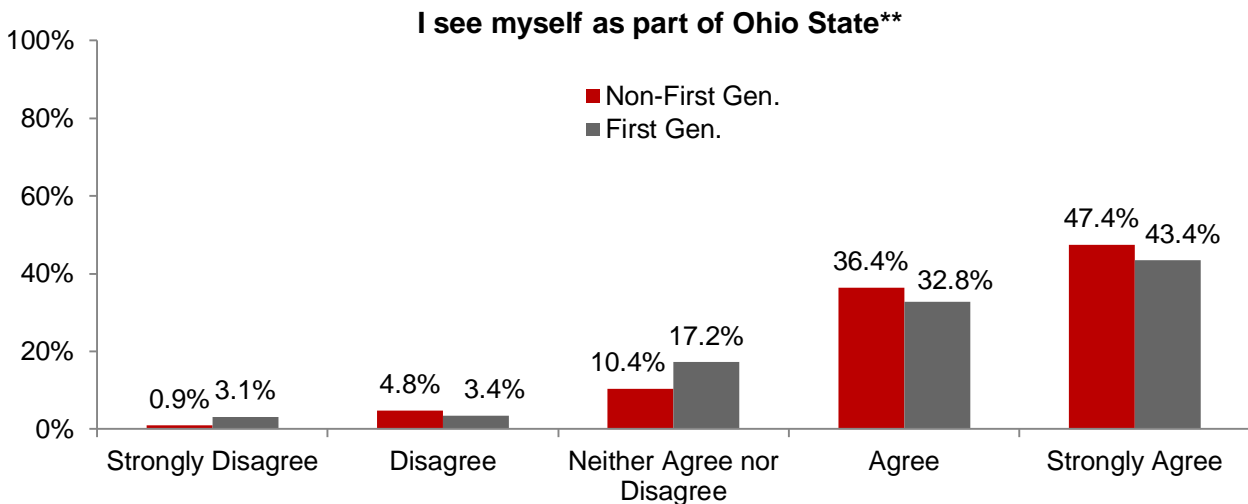
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

CONNECTION TO OHIO STATE

90.6% of undergraduate students report it is important for them to graduate from Ohio State. 89.6% of first generation students and 91.2% of non-first generation students agree or strongly agree that it is important to graduate from Ohio State.



Non-first generation students are significantly more likely to report they see themselves as part of Ohio State. Although first generation and non-first generation students differ on seeing themselves as part of Ohio State, there are no statistically significant differences in reported happiness with being at Ohio State, sense of belonging to Ohio State and overall satisfaction with their experiences at Ohio State.



*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

SUMMARY

Overall, first generation students are less involved than their non-first generation peers, especially in student organizations. Furthermore, first generation students feel less connected to Ohio State and its people, but report no significant difference in satisfaction at Ohio State. It is important to give first generation students more support, because they often cannot use family members as sources of information about how to succeed in college like non-first generation students can. By encouraging first generation students to be involved in campus activities, it is more likely that they will meet other students, staff and faculty who may become resources for first generation college student success.

REFERENCES

Pascarella, E. and Terenzini, P. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Pike, G.R. and Kuh, G.D. (2005). First- and second-generation college students: A comparison of their engagement and intellectual development. *Journal of Higher Education*, 76, 76-300.