

The significance of being first: A consideration of cultural capital in relation to “first in family” student’s choices of university and program. A Practice Report

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Abstract

This presentation explores the differences between expectations of first in family students and students who have immediate family members (parents, care givers, or siblings) who have attended university before them. The authors draw on Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital to examine how being first in family influences student expectations. Data from a large survey of over 3,000 first year students conducted in 2010 across the three South Australian universities is used to explore the demographic make-up of first in family students, and the choices they make as to what type of university and program they enroll in. Based on qualitative and quantitative data, the authors compare choices of first in family students with those made by non-first in family students. Determining these differences provides opportunities for staff at universities to consider how they may better support students who have the ability, drive and determination to succeed at university but lack the cultural capital and may therefore be thwarted by unforeseen hurdles.

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