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WWC QUICK Review

“Closing the Social-Class Achievement Gap: A Difference-Education Intervention Improves First-Generation Students’ Academic Performance and All Students’ College Transition”

What is the study about?

This study measured the impact of a difference-education intervention on the academic achievement of first-generation college students. The difference-education intervention teaches students how their social class backgrounds can affect what they experience in college. Participants attended a moderated panel discussion featuring demographically diverse junior and senior college students who shared stories with incoming students about how they adjusted to and found success in college. The questions posed by the moderator were similar across conditions, but in the intervention condition, panelists’ responses illustrated how their backgrounds contributed—both positively and negatively—to their college experience, and also emphasized the need for students to utilize strategies for success that take their different backgrounds into account. In the comparison condition, similar stories were told, but these did not connect student background with the college experience and did not emphasize that strategies for success can differ by social class. After the panel discussion, participants created a short video testimonial in order to provide students a chance to internalize what they believed they learned from the panel.

This study was conducted in a highly selective, mid-sized private university in the United States. About 45% of participants were first-generation college students, and about 30% were eligible for Pell Grants. Half of the participants identified as White, 21% identified as Asian or Asian American, 19%

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Handy Definitions

- ▼ *quick review*
- ▼ *study rating*
- ▼ *meets WWC evidence standards without reservations*
- ▼ *meets WWC evidence standards with reservations*
- ▼ *does not meet WWC evidence standards*

See the *full glossary* ►

identified as Latino, and 10% identified as African American.

What did the study report?

The study authors reported that there was a statistically significant effect on student grades at the end of the first year. Specifically, the GPA for first-generation college students in the intervention condition was statistically significantly higher than the GPA for first-generation students in the comparison condition (3.40 vs. 3.16). However, the GPAs for non-first generation students did not differ across the intervention and comparison groups (3.51 vs. 3.46).

How does the WWC rate this study?

This study is a randomized experiment, and as such, could *meet WWC evidence standards without reservations*. However, more information is needed from the study authors regarding attrition from the intervention and comparison groups before a rating can be given. A more thorough review (forthcoming) will determine the final study rating and report more fully on the study's results.

Citation

Stephens, N. M., Hamedani, M. G., & Destin, M. (in press). Closing the social-class achievement gap: A difference-education intervention improves first-generation students' academic performance and all students' college transition. *Psychological Science*. doi: 10.1177/0956797613518349

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