

Informing the First Generation MLIS Experience: Challenges & Resources

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ABSTRACT

While MLIS programs have historically served as “launching pads” into professional careers, few programs identify and focus on the experiences of FGS (students first in their families to earn a master’s or professional degree). Programs and faculty thus remain largely unaware of this student identity or how it constitutes relative “invisibility.” Programs and faculty are likewise unaware of the ways in which one’s status as FGS and class, ethnicity, race, and linguistic diversity intersect.

Not long ago, Professor Gabrielle Foreman acknowledged one of the central facts of being an FGS: “For first-generation students and students of color, asking for help feels like begging. For more privileged students, asking feels like networking.” Education research appears increasingly interested in FGS experience, though MLIS programs exhibit little curiosity about this demographic. Can MLIS programs better address the challenging experiences of first-generation students (FGS) as they prepare to thrive in the profession? This panel introduces and explores experiences that remain largely hidden but nevertheless can hamper student success not only in school but in professional practice beyond.

The panel introduces questions particularly relevant to graduate MLIS programs, several of which recently surfaced in two preliminary studies (funded by the American Library Association and ALISE). Interview findings revealed three key question clusters: first, acknowledged academic skill deficits; second, insecurities FGS perceive regarding development of social capital for matriculation and the professional world beyond; and third, questions concerning a variety of familial and cultural issues impacting FGS success.

This discussion begins to explore these questions, raises FGS visibility, and inaugurates a broader ALISE conversation to help students, their programs, and their instructors. Presentations and open discussion will address issues challenging FGS students with respect to academic skills; issues connecting self-doubt in information seeking and decision-making, social support; and cultural challenges that can inhibit the self-efficacy required to overcome the “begging” illustrated in Foreman’s quote.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Students; Teaching faculty; Curriculum; Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI)

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

first generation students (FGS); online education; MLIS programs

REFERENCES

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