

“It’s Definitely Different”: Investigating First-Generation Students' Paths to Graduate School and the Impacts of COVID-19

Rebecca Davis^a and Danielle Pollock^a

^aSimmons University School of Library and Information Science, United States

rebecca.davis@simmons.edu, danielle.pollock@simmons.edu

ABSTRACT

As the first in their families to pursue an advanced degree, first-generation graduate students (FGGS) often face a number of challenges that are different than those of their continuing-generation peers, including challenges related to knowledge of what educational opportunities exist and how to navigate a degree program. To date, no studies have specifically examined the information behaviors and needs of FGGS around two crucial areas of decision-making: 1) decisions to pursue graduate education, and 2) decisions related to their careers following graduation. These are areas where FGGS are unlikely to be able to rely on family members as sources of firsthand information. The global COVID-19 pandemic has affected the educational and career trajectories of many in higher education, and due to the factors noted above, may have particular impacts on this population as they begin their education and early careers.

This poster presents preliminary results from research interviews conducted in early 2021 with FGGS enrolled in either a doctoral or terminal master’s program. Using the information horizons framework, the study examines who, what, and where FGGS go to when seeking information for graduate education and career decisions, as well as how the global pandemic has impacted these processes.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Students; Education programs/schools; Information needs; Information seeking.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

First-generation students; Graduate students; Information horizons; COVID-19.