

Enhancing Financial Capability Among Latine First-Generation College Students and their Families through Service-Learning Assignments

By: Alexei Bullara, Joanna Karczewska, Kristen Gaber, Elizabeth Barnett, Christina Almanza Gonzalez

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Background: Higher dropout rates among first-generation college students (FGCS) due to financial challenges indicate a need to help FGCS and their families navigate formal financial systems. Latine FGCS come from working-class, immigrant families hesitant to engage with institutional support (Padua & Doran, 2016), and few studies have explored approaches to address this need. This study explores a financial capability and asset-building (FCAB) assignment to address this gap.

Methodology: The Financial First Responder (FFR) is a free asynchronous service-learning FCAB training program that uses Consumer Financial Protection Bureau tools to guide practice with oneself and others (Doran et al., 2024). The FFR was assigned to multiple sections of a required social work course in a Hispanic-serving university (N=194; 86% Latine, 82% FGCS; AY 2023-4). Students completed the training and submitted reflections and pre-/post surveys. Data was analyzed to determine how often FGCS elected to practice with family members and their perceptions of the process and impact.

Approach: This study used the concepts of language brokering and familism (Arumí & Rubio-Carbonero, 2022; Rama et al., 2020) to understand cultural dynamics in these families.

Results: Despite stigma around discussing finances (Mikelson & Williams, 2008), 65% of students worked with a family member or partner to complete the training. The frameworks suggested the assigned training normalized financial discussions within families.

Conclusion: Results suggest Latine families often rely on each other rather than external sources for financial information, reflecting a cultural emphasis on family support (Campos et al., 2014). Involving family in training helps reinforce knowledge and improve family financial health. Integrating assignments into curricula provides a cost-efficient foundation for community-based interventions while enhancing the financial capability of students and their families.

Keywords: financial capability, first-generation college students, Latine immigrant family, service-learning