

Educational Mobility, Inequality, & College Student Well-Being

Inequality scholars have noted over the last decade barriers and vulnerabilities often experienced by first-generation college students — i.e., college students for whom neither parent holds a college degree. In this presentation, the author will discuss a longitudinal project he began 5 years ago in which he followed a sample of approximately 1,000 new college freshmen throughout their college years using survey and qualitative methods, and coupling such data with long term outcomes (e.g., graduation and grade point average). Beyond highlighting inequalities in outcomes, the quantitative and qualitative data allows for deeper interrogation of the mechanisms underlying first-generation student vulnerability and experiences across their college years. Especially profound, his analyses show, are academic challenges, ongoing financial pressures, and limited integration on campus for these students, each of which create a great likelihood of dropping out and underperforming in their classes. The author discusses his analyses and their findings in these regards, and will conclude by tying his results to broader social science concerns with mobility, inequality and their social-psychological implications.