

# 40% of first-generation students have “very distracting” and “troublesome” financial problems

by Noel-Levitz

First-generation college students feel an amplified sense of financial insecurity in today's turbulent economy.

According to the results of a survey detailed in our [2011 National Freshman Attitudes Report](#), more than 40 percent of incoming first-year, first-generation college students in fall 2010 acknowledged having significant financial problems.

With more than 4 in 10 first-generation respondents agreeing with the survey statement, “I have financial problems that are very distracting and troublesome,” it appears their financial burdens may be greater than any other group. Other segments included in the report agreed with the statement at the following rates:

**First-year students at four-year private colleges: 31.3%**

**First-year students at four-year public universities: 27.7%**

**First-year students at two-year public and private institutions: 34.0%**

**Non-first-generation first-year students (all institution types): 26.6%**

The six-point gap between first-generation students and the second-highest segment (students at two-year public and private institutions) demonstrates that this is a challenge that is especially prevalent for college-goers who are the first in their family to attend a higher education institution.

So what can institutions do to allay these students' financial anxieties? In addition to offering financial assistance and counseling, an effective practice to offset financial concerns is to regularly communicate with students and parents about the value of the education they are receiving. By reminding them of the rationale for going to college, and by emphasizing the quality of education you offer, you are helping them value the college experience and to remain committed to staying enrolled. Some additional suggestions: work at making information easier to obtain on scholarships, financial aid, and part-time jobs, including scholarships available from outside organization; offer flexible payment plans; and strive to confirm awards and on-campus job assignments earlier.

The importance of these and other interventions is underscored by the fact that students' financial burdens, on the whole, are a significant, ongoing concern. This year's aggregated results indicate that 30.7 percent of college students nationally reported having “very distracting and troublesome financial problems.” This is consistent with results for the same question from the Fall of 2009 (last year's report), but indicates an increase over two and three years ago.

**2010 national mean: 30.7%**

**2009 national mean: 30.8%**

**2008 national mean: 29.3%**

**2007 national mean: 28.7%**

So, while financial concerns might be leveling off among college students, it is clear that, compared to 2007 and 2008, the issue is being felt at an elevated rate in the current economic climate. First-generation students may benefit most directly from interventions, but in reality, a large proportion – nearly one-third – of all students could benefit.

These data and other information found in the [2011 National Freshman Attitudes Report](#) highlight the complex nature and unique characteristics of the newest class of college students. The full report offers valuable insights that can help your institution better understand today's incoming freshmen.