

# Breaking the Barriers:

## Forum on First-in-Family students in university

An OLT Seed Project

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# Welcome to the project team

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# Why first-in-family/ Why now?

- The first in family cohort cuts across various demographics, is not currently defined as an equity category and within Australia, does not necessarily have targeted support.
- Most recent OECD (2012) figures suggest that approximately half the university student population in Australia (51%) are derived from first in family backgrounds (defined on parental educational levels) which is close to the OECD mean average of 53%...

**SO could we argue that we are in the “era” of the first-in-family student?**

# Why first-in-family? Why now?

- This student cohort reported internationally as not achieving to the same level academically compared to peers
- Within Australia, 26% of first-in-family students are reported as considering leaving university in the first year of university study, a figure that increases to 34% for later year students (Coates & Ransom, 2011).

# Summary Literature review

- Exploring the literature is hampered by a range of factors and there are gaps in understanding .
- Focus on school leavers who come to university directly from school
- The most recent review of literature Spiegler and Bednarek (2013) report that most of the research in this field identify first in family students as simply ‘coping’ and collectively have a lower sense of belonging within the institution

# Project details

For the purposes of this research, first in family status has been defined as:

***no-one in the immediate family of origin including siblings or parents having previously attended a higher education institution or having completed a university degree.***

Inclusion of family members – looking at this return from the perspective of the student and their family members

# Project details

- Survey and interview methodology
- Three cohort groups – online learners (OUA), Access program participants (UoN) and domestic on-campus undergrads (UoW)
- Family and student survey
- Interviews with students (and family members where possible)

# An evolving project...

Decision to focus on surveys for family members rather than interviews

Surveys were largely open-ended and generated much descriptive data

Initially we planned to focus on mature age students (over 25) but instead we have focussed on all ages

Participants requested a way to find out the 'results' and so the website emerged

A coalescence of our various professional backgrounds, personal histories and interests...

# Student Data

## Interviews

Total females interviewed

**Total**

**101**

Total males interviewed

70

33

## Surveys (2 incomplete)

Total respondents

**Total**

**171**

Total females surveyed

**169**

138

Total males surveyed

33

# Family Data

**Of the 171 Surveyed, 43% had children.**

## **Family Interviews:**

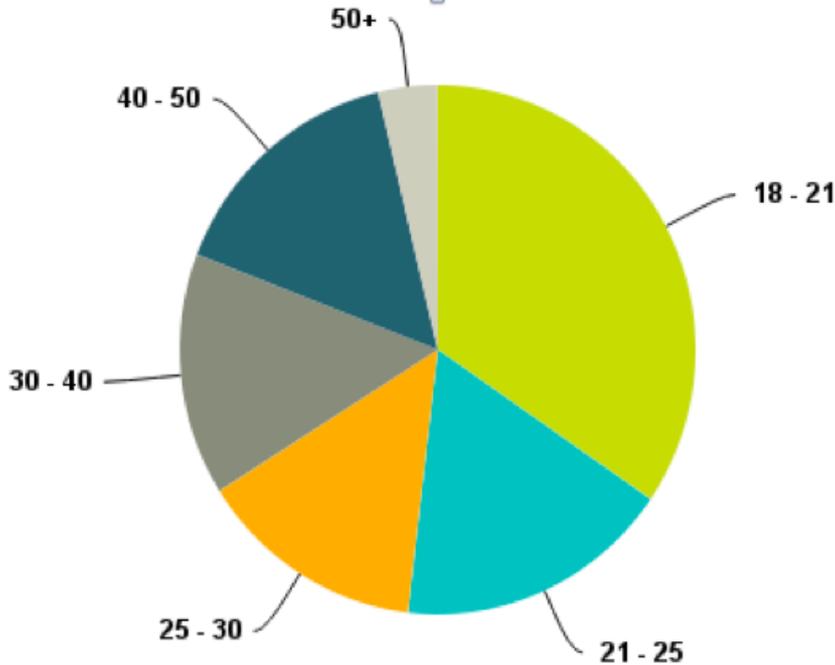
We conducted four interviews with a family member present, this included a parent, a grandparent and two children

## **Family Surveys:**

### **Total respondents 40**

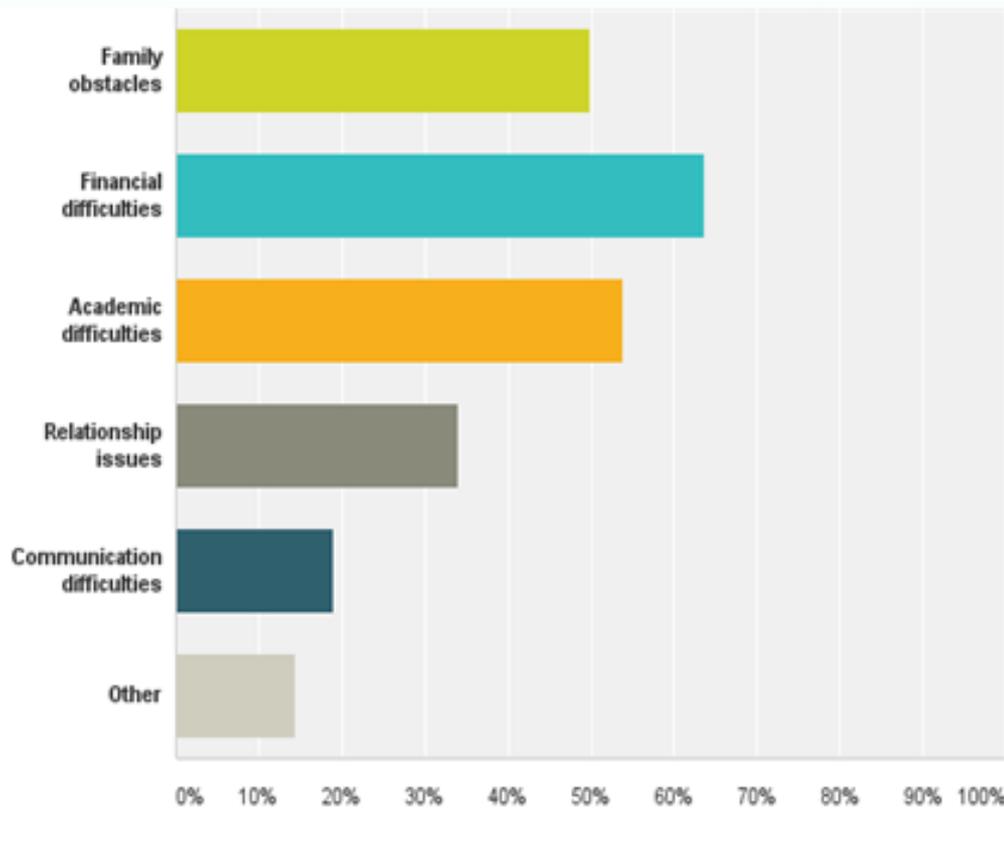
Children	9	(The student is my mother)
Parents	18	(The student is my son/daughter)
Partners	7	(The student is my partner)
Siblings	5	(The student is my sister / brother)
Grandparent	1	(The student is my grandchild) <b><u>Of the</u></b>

# The student survey data & age range



Range	%	No.
18 - 21	32.7%	56
21 - 25	16.3%	28
25 - 30	15.7%	27
30 - 40	14.6%	25
40 - 50	15.7%	27
50+	3.5%	6

# Hurdles and obstacles (Students)



# Some reasons for attending university

- 1. UNFOCUSED or FRUSTRATED LONGHELD AMBITION or DREAM:** Always intended to attend university, but didn't know what to study or circumstances prevented them from doing so.
- 2. FOCUSED LONGHELD AMBITION or DREAM:** Always intended to become a teacher, nurse, accountant, lawyer and so on, but needed a push
- 3. REACHING FOR BETTER:** Job choice and career opportunities / change of career / job-related study / work-motivated study
- 4. GENERALISED ALTRUISM:** Wanted to do more with my life / help others
- 5. FAMILIAL ALTRUISM:** Be a positive influence on children
- 6. HONOURING THE SELF:** A gift to yourself
- 7. MATURITY:** Realising it's never too late

# Always wanted to....

Ever since I could remember all I ever wanted to do was go to University

... but our family was poor

... do something for myself. I have always regretted not having the chance to go to Uni after high school

... when I felt that it would fit in with my family. Now is that time!

Before I studied at university I felt like I was just living but for not much of a reason. Now I feel like I'm going somewhere and working towards a goal that's always been in the back of my mind.

... but could never decide just what it was that I wanted to be "when I grow up!"

... but thought I wasn't 'smart' enough

Always wanted to, it was just a matter of when circumstances allowed

... I come from a town of low socio-economic status, and I didn't want to be stuck there all my life, I want to get out and explore the world.



# Making a difference...

... I admired the doctors and health professionals whom looked after me

After I left my abusive husband, I decided to pursue my dreams and gain a career where I could support my children and help other children

My mother had cancer when I was younger and I had to care for her, which sparked my desire to be a nurse

I want to become an educator who could make a difference to children's lives

I want to be able to help others with these issues, especially in a world where obesity and unhappiness are becoming very common

... wanting to 'do more with my life' [after a trip as volunteer for children with AIDS/HIV]

I felt that I could do so much more in my life that "meant" something more than sales

# ...so I can be a positive role model for others

I wanted to show my girls that they can do anything they want if they try and that it doesn't matter when you do it

I also want to set an example for my children regarding life long learning

I want to inspire my son

I wanted to be a good role model for my children

My two older children will completing high school this year and next year. I want to show them what study was all about

... wanting to ... make my family proud

I used to hear people ask my daughter what her mum did, and she would reply, she is just my mum. As much as I love being their mum I also want to be something else for them. To show them that if you put your mind to something then you can do it

# “I want to prove / give something to myself...”

I felt that I had nothing holding me back except myself

education is the greatest gift you can give to yourself

I sold myself short through high school, not thinking I was 'smart' enough to ever get into university ...

I love the idea of being at University, I love learning, I love that I can do anything.

I have the intelligence but not the confidence and I needed to challenge myself to prove I'm not stupid

I had regretted not staying in school and going to uni and he said it's not too late and said he believed I could do anything I want to do

I also want to be the first in my family to have gained a higher degree

I just wanted to do something more with my life. Be something more

I wanted to do something for myself. I ... wanted to prove to myself that I could do it

... it finally dawned on me! I can give it a shot ... I am surely not that stupid. I tried a unit, and to my own shock, I got a credit!

# Witnesses to Changes

## Different conversations

Mum is very busy and stressed. Mum talks about her studies a lot, and it gives me a good insight into what I should look forward to when I go to university. (Son, 14 )

She tries to talk me into doing more homework and study  
(Daughter, 15 )

Her views on everything have developed ... She has even started challenging common or normal aspects of life.  
(Mum, 55)

## Positive changes

She's more willing to make friends and is more sociable  
(Sister, 16)

Already she is starting to discuss very in-depth global topics and starting to observe the way people behave around her  
(Husband 48)

She seems happier and motivated  
(Brother, 32)

## Negative changes

'[She's] more anxious  
(Mum, 59)

She became confused with her career choices  
(Mum, 66)

# The Interview Data

- Interviews enabled ‘close-up’ analysis of this field
- Students have been encouraged to ‘story’ their perceptions, expectations and motivations about university.
- Informed by narrative inquiry: Polkinghorne (1995) emphasises how ‘storied memories’ are able to ‘...retain the complexity of the situation in which an action was undertaken and the emotional and motivational meaning connected with it’ (p11)

# Main Findings

**First in Family as Supra Category** that shares salient narrative features about the HE journey, among others such as

- Placing a high value on engagement in higher education
- The role of altruism in their stories
- The move into HE viewed as launching the self (and the family) on a positive, albeit challenging, trajectory
- The hesitations and apprehensions around doubting the capacities of self or about how to navigate this new, highly valued context
- The transformations of internal and external contexts as they move through their education.

# OUR VISION FOR TODAY...

- Have fun!
- Take one new idea or strategy back to your professional contexts
- Continue the conversations
- Consider how you might like to be involved...

# Network, network, network!

