

***First generation college student's perceived support and depressive affect:  
Examining the similarities and differences by parental education status***

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Existing research on first generation college students (FGCS) documents the unique academic and psychological challenges they face. Current literature demonstrates that perceived social support is an important predictor of student adjustment, including depressive affect. Students' perceptions of support and its relationship to depressive affect among first and second generation college students (SGCS) were studied by conducting a secondary data analysis. A third intermediate generation student group (e.g. parents with some college) was also examined. Participants were applicants to the CIC Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP). Firstly, similarities and differences in perceptions of five dimensions of support received from different sources (e.g., faculty, family, and friends) were explored. Secondly, the relationships between support and depressive affect were analyzed. Thirdly, I examined whether students whose parents have had some college experience should be considered separately from the conceptualization of first and second generation college students in the analyses. Some researchers have included students in the some college group with FGCS, while others have included those students with SGCS. Findings from MANOVA's indicate that only perceptions of advice/guidance support from family differed across groups, with FGCS' perceiving less support than SGCS. Correlational analyses showed that, overall, the five dimensions of support were negatively related to depressive affect. Further examination, however, of the correlations within each student group shows that perceived support and depressive affect are unrelated for FGCS. Suggestions for future research and implications of the findings for policy and practice are discussed.



# First generation college students' perceived support and depressive affect:

## Examining the similarities and differences by parental education status

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### Abstract

- This study examines perceptions of social support for undergraduate students whose parents' educational levels vary. In addition, the study examines the relationship between social support and student adjustment. Lastly, the study examines an alternative categorization of students by parental education status.
- The sample includes 259 students who applied to the CIC Summer Research Opportunities Program (SROP) and similar research programs.
- My study addresses these questions related to parental education status:
  - Do perceptions of support differ between the parental education groups?
  - Are dimensions of perceived support related to student adjustment?
  - Should "some college" be considered its own distinct category?
- Findings from MANOVA's indicate that only perceptions of advice/guidance support differed across groups.
- Overall, the five dimensions of support were negatively related to depressive affect.
- Suggestions for future research and implications for policy and practice are discussed.

### Introduction

- First generation students are an increasing population on college campuses for various reasons including increased opportunities, financial aid, government mandates to diversify universities.
- First generation college students (FGCS) face greater challenges in addition to the typical stressors of college. Evidence has shown that FGCS often lack knowledge regarding higher education expectations and plans. In addition, they also are more likely to suffer from depressive symptoms and perceive a smaller support network in college.
- FGCS' parents are not able to offer first-hand college support regarding college expectations and planning that SGCS' parents are able to provide.
- Perceptions of support has been shown to be a strong predictor of life satisfaction and decreased negative affect.
- There is some disagreement regarding the categorization of parental education groups. Students whose parents have some college experience (less than a Bachelor's degree) are often placed into either the first generation or second generation category, but not often are they considered as a separate group.

### Method

- Data originated from the first wave of a longitudinal survey study. There were 259 participants in total (FGCS n=51, "some college" n=58, SGCS n=150)
- Students answered questions regarding their parents' educational status. The scale was as follows: 1=1-8 years, 2=9-11 years, 3=High school graduate, 4=Some college, 5=Four year degree (e.g., BA, BS), 6=Master's degree (e.g., MA, MS), 7=Doctoral degree (e.g., PhD, MD), and 8=Not sure.
- FGCS were defined as students whose parents had no previous college experience. SGCS were defined as students whose parents had a Bachelor's degree or more. The final category of students referred to as "some college" indicates students whose parents had some college experience but did not attain a Bachelor's degree.
- MANOVA's were conducted to determine if perceived support differed across the 3 student groups.
- Correlational analyses were executed to determine if perceived support was related to depressive affect.

### Measures

- The modified SS-B (social support behaviors) scale assesses support from three sources (i.e. faculty, family, friends). It also measures support on five dimensions (i.e. emotional, socializing, practical, financial, advice/guidance). Higher scores indicate greater levels of perceived support.
- The modified CES-D (Center for Epidemiological Depression Studies) scale assesses depressive affect in nonclinical populations. Higher scores indicate higher degrees of depressive affect.
- Additional questions assessed student's background characteristics.

**Table 1.** Correlations between sources of support and depressive affect

Sources	FGCS	Some college	SGCS	All groups
Faculty	-.257	-.285*	-.023	-.415*
Family	.030	-.323*	-.293**	-.215**
Friends	-.030	-.314**	-.193*	-.203**

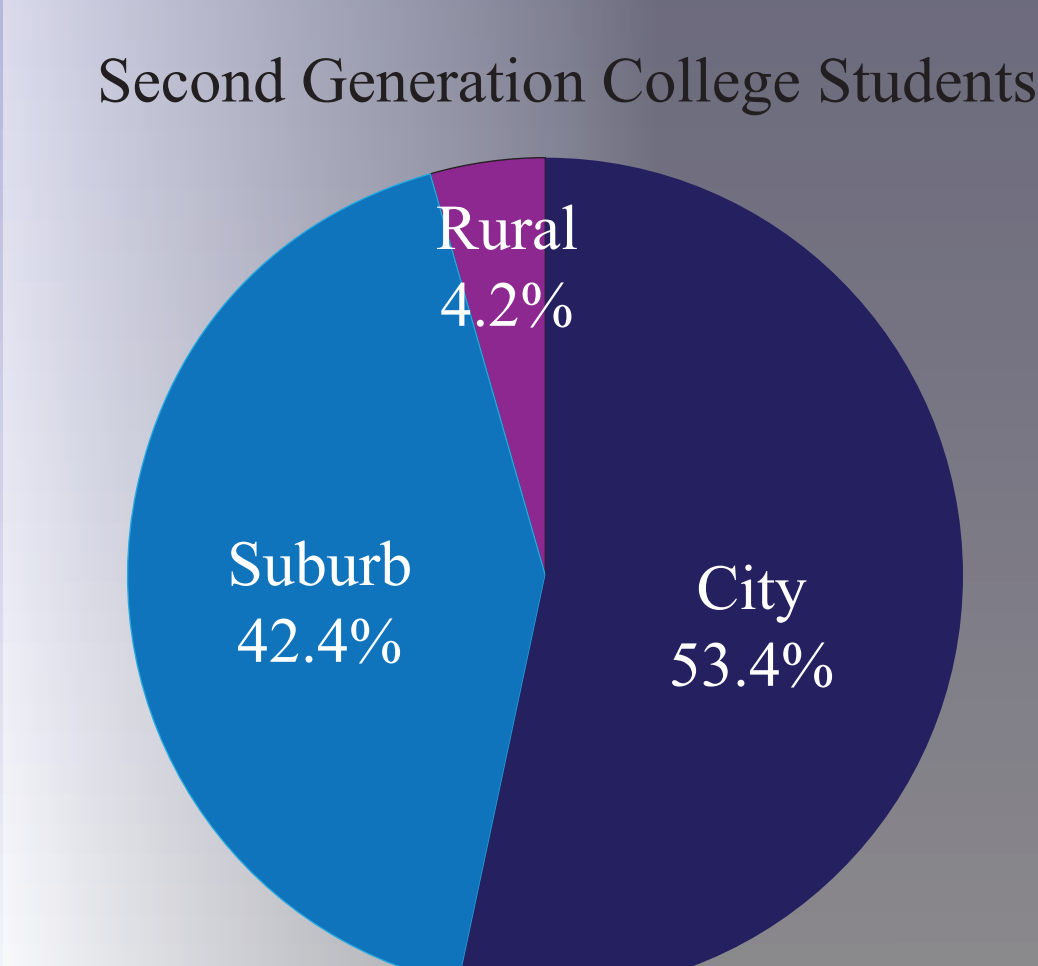
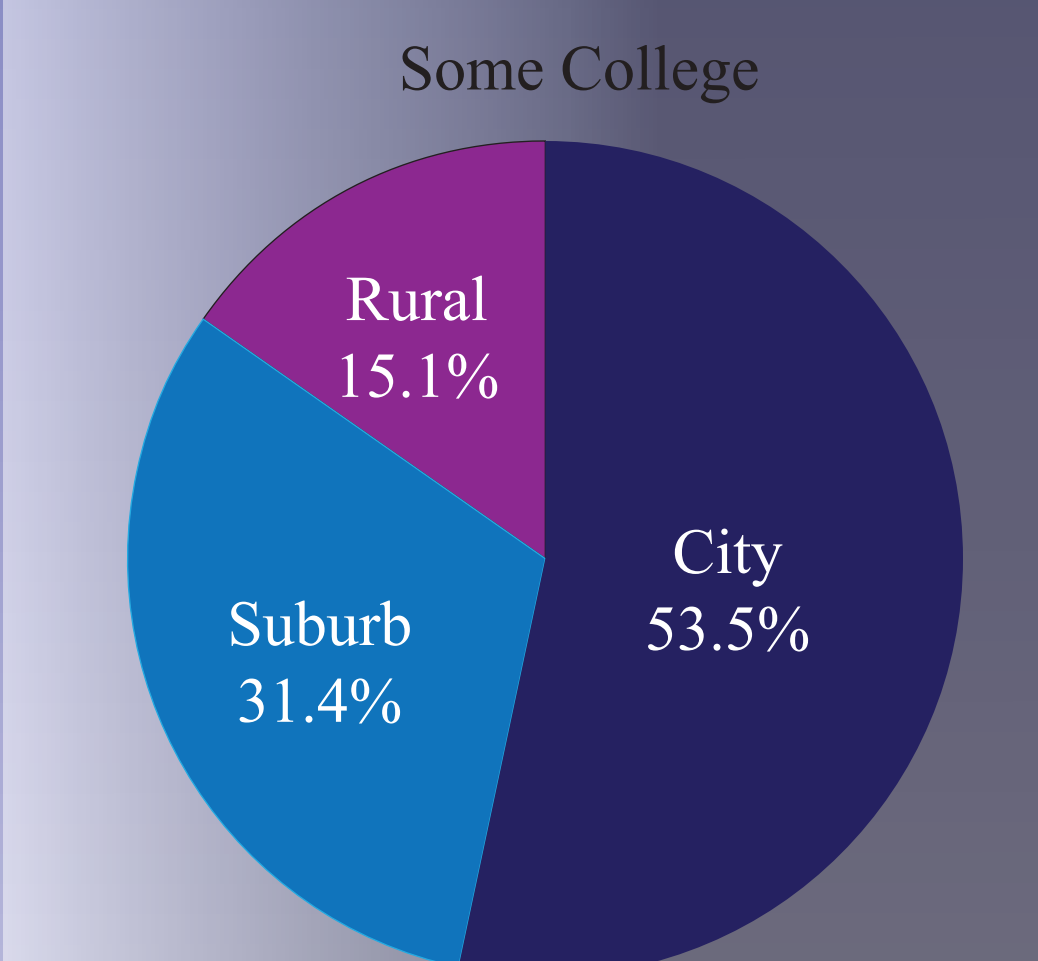
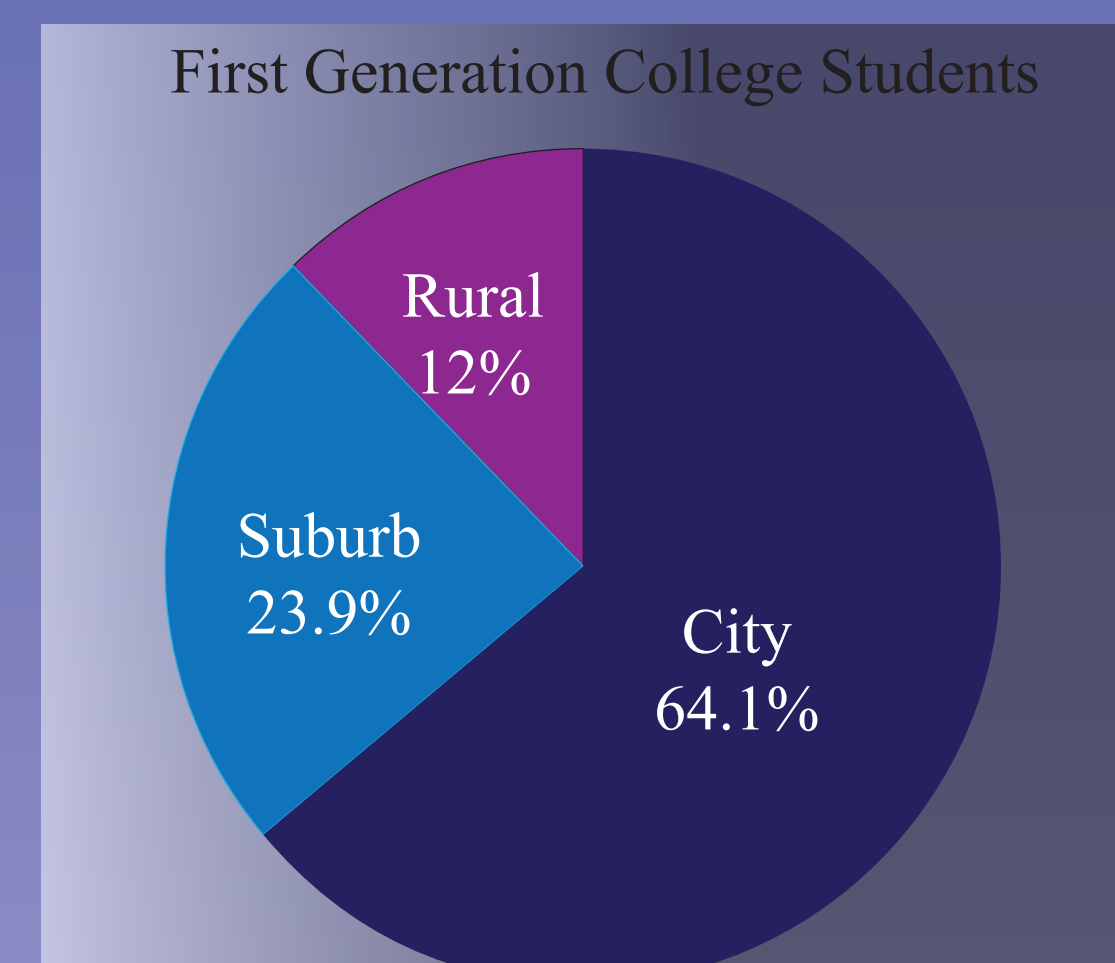
\* p < .05  
\*\* p < .01

**Table 2.** Correlations between sources of support and depressive affect by first generation status

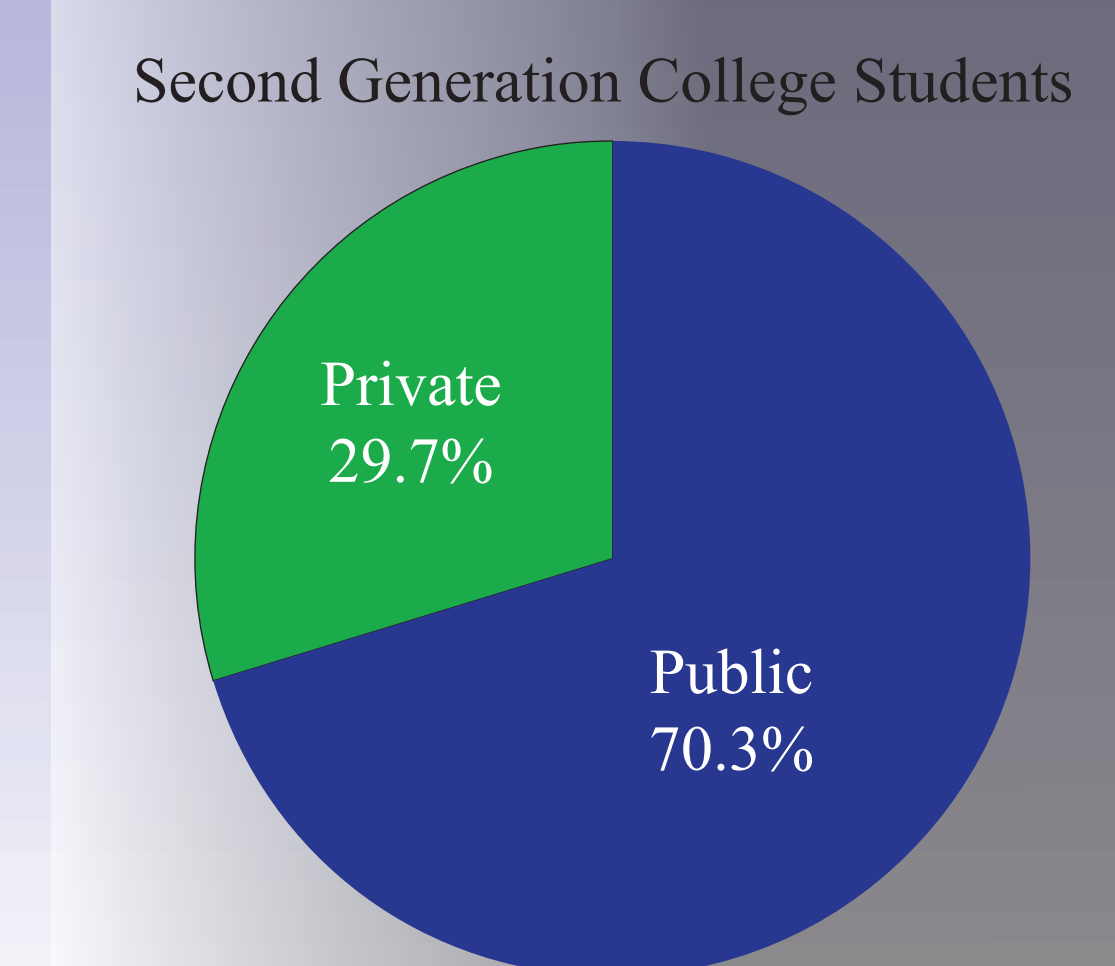
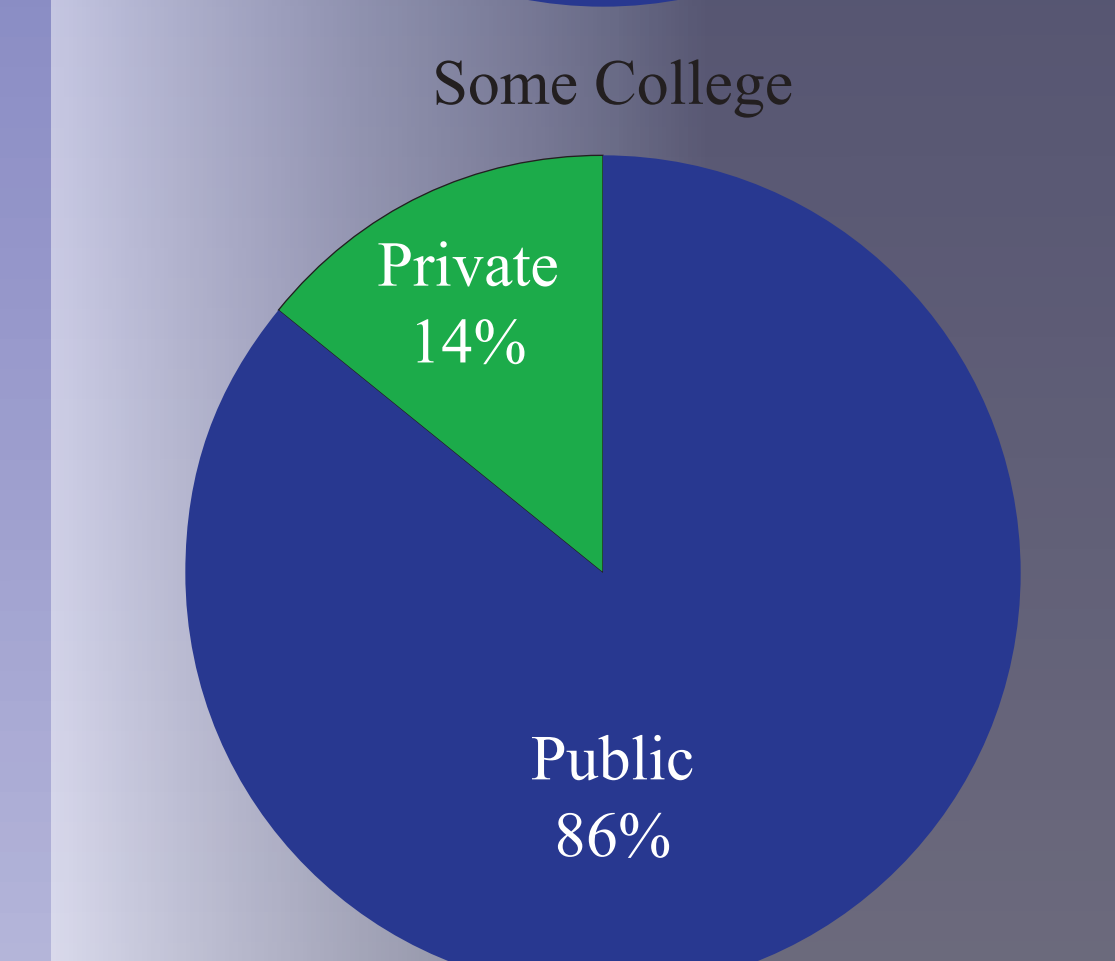
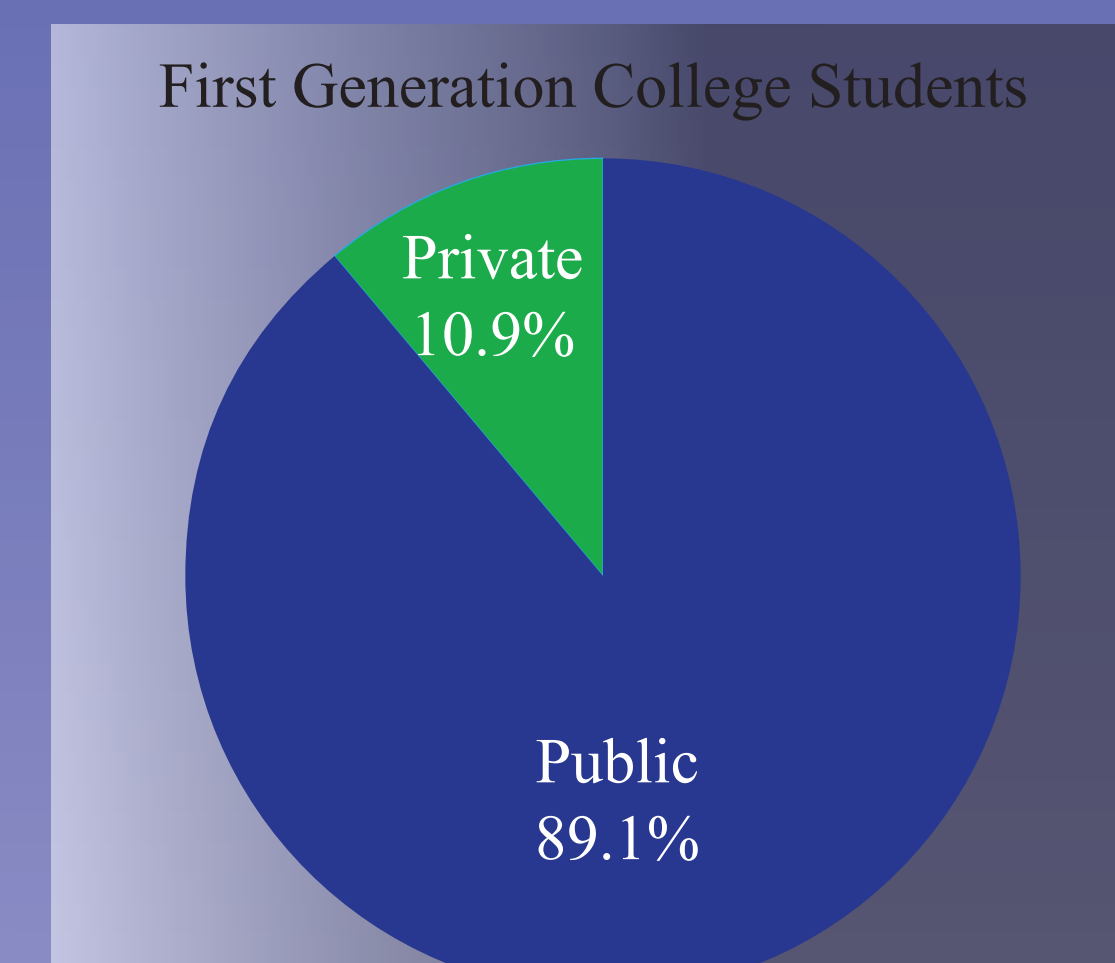
Items	FGCS	Some college	SGCS	All Groups
<b>Emotional support</b>				
a. Faculty	-.232	-.284*	.057	-.095
b. Family	.023	-.208*	-.277**	-.210**
c. Friends	-.043	-.171	-.200*	-.181**
<b>Socializing support</b>				
a. Faculty	-.209	-.251	-.054	-.133*
b. Family	.009	-.254	-.232**	-.181**
c. Friends	.005	-.139	-.190*	-.154*
<b>Practical assistance</b>				
a. Faculty	-.256	-.197	-.076	-.152*
b. Family	.058	-.183	-.190*	-.137*
c. Friends	-.008	-.277*	-.212**	-.198**
<b>Financial assistance</b>				
a. Faculty	-.108	-.344**	.032	-.092
b. Family	.042	-.295**	-.261**	-.199**
c. Friends	-.017	-.327*	-.110	-.152*
<b>Advice/Guidance</b>				
a. Faculty	-.348*	-.164	-.077	-.169**
b. Family	.020	-.399**	-.247**	-.218**
c. Friends	-.050	-.339**	-.173*	-.196**

\* p < .05  
\*\* p < .01

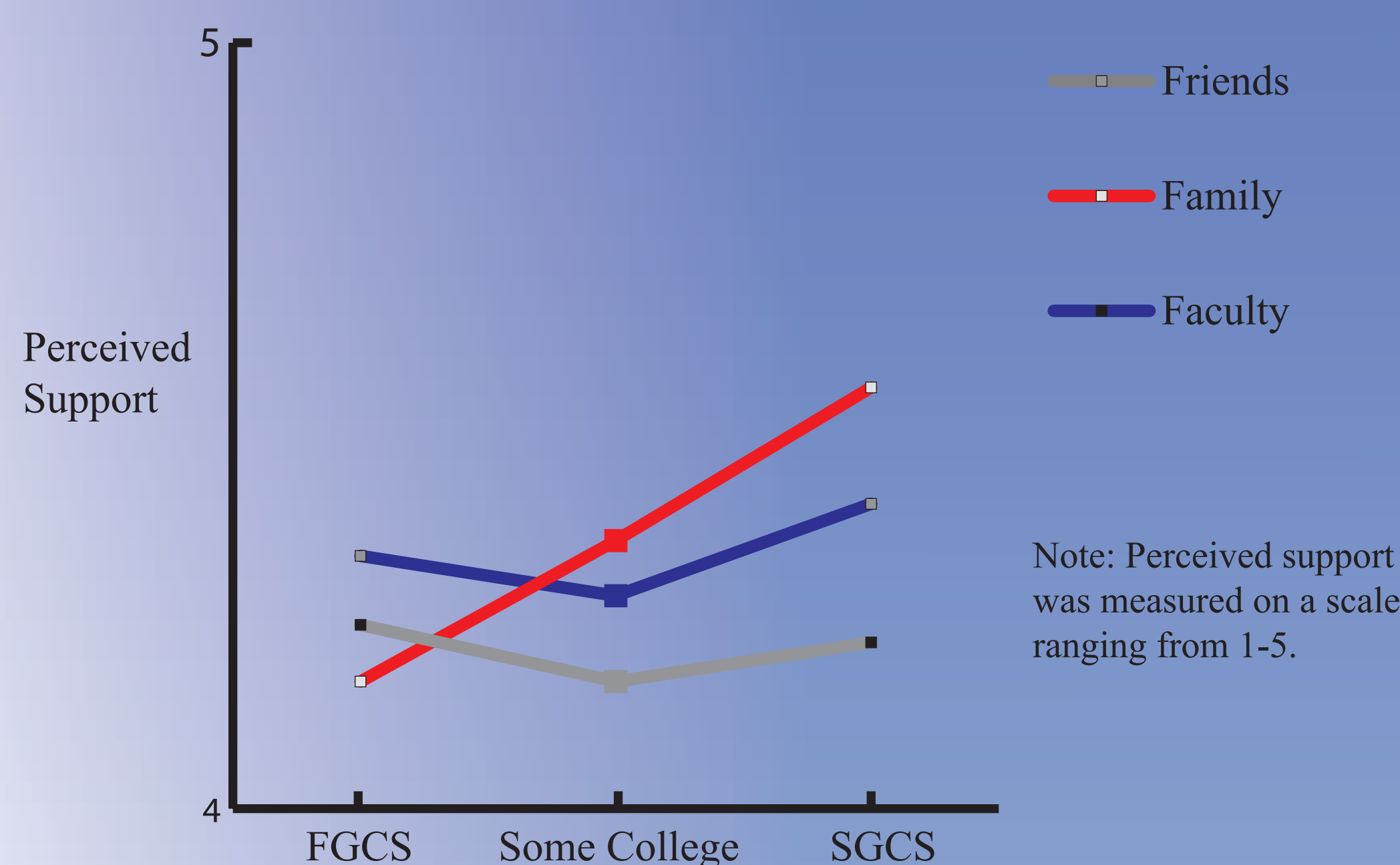
**Figure 2:** Type of Community Lived in during K-12



**Figure 3:** Type of High School Attended



**Figure 1:** Differences in Perceived Advice/Guidance Between Parental Education Groups



### Conclusion

This study examined FGCS, some college, and SGCS' perceptions of different dimensions of support from different sources. It then explored the relationship between perceptions of support and depressive affect. Our findings suggest future research questions that can attempt to further explain what different student groups perceive to be important for adjustment. Additional research can investigate why perceptions of support do not differ between these 3 groups of students, as well as why perceived support is unrelated to depressive affect for FGCS. The findings have practical implications for programs, services, and faculty members on how to better serve and understand this population of students. Hopefully, this research will be a welcomed addition to the current FGCS literature seeking to diminish the presence of depression on college campuses.

### Acknowledgements

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**Table 2.** Dimensions of support as perceived by different sources by first generation student status

Support dimensions	FGCS	Some college	SGCS	F	P
Emotional support				2.23 <sub>a</sub>	.040 <sub>a</sub>
a. Faculty	3.53	3.48	3.36	.90	.41
b. Family	4.37	4.45	4.65	3.87	.022
c. Friends	4.58	4.65	4.67	.55	.58
Socializing				2.37 <sub>a</sub>	.029 <sub>a</sub>
a. Faculty	3.14	2.97	2.90	1.82	.16
b. Family	4.33	4.43	4.60	3.07	.05
c. Friends	4.60	4.69	4.70	.86	.42
Practical assistance				1.37 <sub>a</sub>	NS
a. Faculty	3.06	2.92	2.86	1.21	.30
b. Family	4.54	4.60	4.72	2.06	.13
c. Friends	4.37	4.40	4.39	.02	.98
Financial assistance				3.33 <sub>a</sub>	.003 <sub>a</sub> *
a. Faculty	2.11	1.86	1.73	4.10	.02
b. Family	4.29	4.29	4.55	3.48	.03
c. Friends	3.60	3.53	3.45	.47	.63
Advice/Guidance				2.65 <sub>a</sub>	.015 <sub>a</sub> *
a. Faculty	4.24	4.17	4.22	.13	.875
b. Family	4.17	4.35	4.55	5.77	.004
c. Friends	4.33	4.28	4.40	.77	.47

A=multivariate F Test

\* p < .05

\*\* p < .01