

User Research

First-generation and Immigrant students

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Executive Summary

This research is based on first-generation and immigrant students.

The goal of this research is to better understand how first-generation immigrant student populations can be supported in order to ensure their preparation for academic success. It is important to highlight the essentials in which 1st-gen and immigrant students depend on. More importantly, in what ways may they rely on, in addition regarding aspects of life that others do not?

Research conducted highlights how students' uphold their life, school, work, family balance, whilst navigating through college. We sought out participants who are University students as well as faculty to obtain their perspective and input on how DePaul may further betterment the college experience for first-generation and immigrant students.

Research we conducted included methods of 1-1 online Zoom interviews and responses from our Google surveys. In addition, we created personas, scenarios, and an affinity diagram. Through these methods and representations, we're able to communicate our findings and go forward with our research.

Through these interviews and methods, we found that a majority of our student populations are in dire need of financial help with tuition costs due to work and life responsibilities. They are also in need of assistance with language and cultural barriers. There can be resolutions towards these aspects listed that can accommodate DePaul University 1st-gen and immigrant student populations; and, our research guides us upon what potential solutions those may be.

Method

Our main method used for observations was through interviews. Prior to starting interviewing our target audience, we had to recruit them through the use of screeners. For our screeners, we had to search for people who identify as first-generation and/or immigrant students. We also had the opportunity to interview faculty who oversee DePaul's Office of Multicultural Student Success and Division of Student Affairs. After we found our target audience, we would ask for verbal consent, and make sure that they knew what the research was about and how sharing their college experience would benefit our target audience student populations. When they agreed, we then conducted our recorded interviews to gather insights. As a group, we were able to interview 11 people in total. The individuals we interviewed were university students and faculty who experienced what it is like first-hand to be a 1st-gen and/or immigrant student; or having knowledge of the challenges that these students face. The screener questions, verbal consent, and full interview scripts can be found in the appendix.

For the interview, we started with background questions to get an understanding of who the interviewee is and what their college experience is like by either being a 1st-gen and/or immigrant student. Going into the general questions, we would focus on what their main challenges would be and how they navigate college life through financial, commute, language, cultural, and social situations. In our follow-up questions we would ask interviewees how they are affected by their own personal experiences and how they feel regarding those. The interviews were not conducted face-to-face due to the global pandemic and the need to take safety precautions, so most of the interviews were conducted over Zoom and all were recorded.

To analyze our insights and observations, we transcribed the recordings and took notes on the main takeaways. The transcripts can be found in the appendix. In a shared Google Document and Drive, we all posted our notes and highlighted our target audience student population shared experiences. After this, we created an affinity diagram to organize the main points of our observations. We utilized Miro.com to create the diagram and had categories for shared challenges/obstacles, accommodations used, and suggestions/recommendations in relation for the needs of 1st-gen and/or immigrant student populations. This diagram can be found in the appendix. By gathering this data, we were able to find common shared student challenges and accommodation methods that exist or those that DePaul University may benefit from. This will guide and lead us in the next steps on how to potentially improve 1st-gen and immigrant students' academic and social college life.

Lastly, after we compiled our data, we created 3 different personas that match with each insightful aspect, as well as including an appendix that represents interviewees' personal perspectives.

Findings

After coming together and sharing our interviews, we were able to find similarities. We found that many of our interviewees were a majority of people who are somewhat independent while navigating through their college life. The main challenges for most of the interviewees were financial, social, linguistic, and cultural related, and the COVID-19 pandemic. All of the interviewees have their own way of overcoming their challenges, and the common methods were doing independent schoolwork, work, keeping in touch with family and friends through social media/phone/in-person, extracurricular activities/hobbies, etc. Overall, most of the interviewees are interested in more available accommodations offered through their university.

In addition to our interviews and overall findings, we wanted to provide representations of our findings through personas, scenarios, and an affinity diagram. A **persona** is a fictional person that is used as a representation of the type of target audience who identifies as either a 1st-generation and/or immigrant student/faculty that may potentially benefit from our research in the hopes of bettering the academic and social success of these student populations. They are based on the data we gathered from conducting our interviews. Personas describe the potential target audience's goals, needs, and challenges. An **affinity diagram** is a tool used to organize data and ideas. It helps organize information into groups of similar items to further analyze qualitative data or observations.

The main takeaway from creating personas is that we are able to visualize and understand interviewees' point-of-views and personal perspectives with being a 1st-gen and/or immigrant student. Understanding who our target audience student population are allows us to move forward in creating potential suggestive/recommended improvements based on our research because we want to hopefully provide more needed accommodations for the betterment of 1st-gen and/or immigrant student experiences at DePaul University.

The following pages will show all of the representations.

Insights

Immigrant students

-Support to learn a language

Immigrant students saying all sorts of classes and programs that help to learn a language were useful

-Support to use to an educational system

Educational systems are different around the world and immigrant students have to adapt to how this system works in a country they moved to

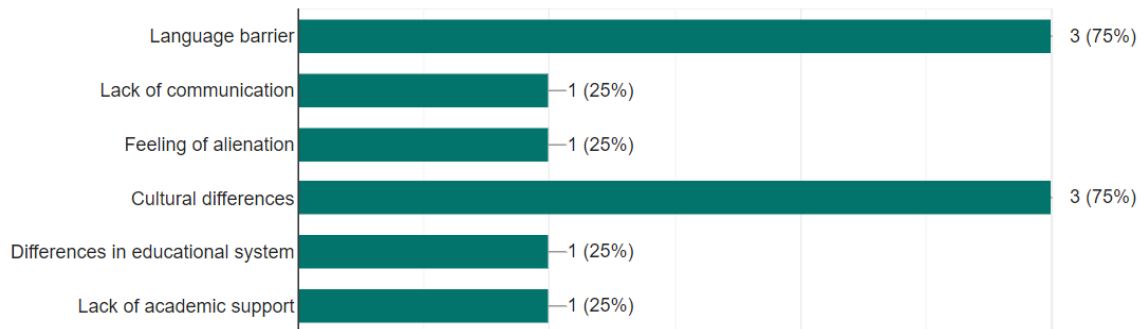
-Support to assimilate into a new culture

Some cultures are very different and the same action or phrase can be interpreted differently in different cultures. That is why immigrant students need a person or service that will help them to assimilate.

-Introvert immigrants have harder time in school in comparison to extroverts

While introverts prefer solitude and enjoy spending time alone, extroverts are more socially engaged, thriving on the energy of people around them and frequently finding themselves the center of attention in big social groups. When it comes to immigrants, it's harder for them to adjust in school when they are introverts.

What challenges did you face during the first year of any institution in the US?



First-Generation Students

- Academic and financial support

First-generation students need extra support from faculty like advisors to help with academic and financial questions.

- Support for parents

Since parents of students from this population are not familiar with how education in the US works, students have to educate their parents on this topic by themselves. University services and meetings for parents are very helpful in bringing parents closer to the topic of education.

- Connection with other first-generation students

Meetings and clubs that help to build connections between students from this population are very helpful in the context of building a social life.

Similarities and Differences

Similarities

- Lack of support from family

Both immigrant students and first-generation students feel a lack of support from their families, mostly parents. Since their parents were not able to get an education in the US, they do not know how the education system in the US works. Because of that, they can't help their children to assimilate into high educational institutions.

- Financial support

Even if immigrant students and first-generation students receive financial support, they face financial challenges in the process of paying for the tuition at a university. Because of that, they have to work and break their time between work and classes.

- Academic support

Both populations are facing not understanding how the educational system in the country where they live works. Because of that, they need more advising and time to stay on the same level as other students.

Differences

- Language barrier

Unlike immigrant students, first-generation students who were born in the US have no problems with language.

- Educational background

Immigrant students who came to the US at an adult age mostly have a degree or general educational experience in institutions outside of the country. Because of that immigrant students can have more educational experience than first-generation students.

Personas

PERSONA #1



NAME: KHRYSTYNA

AGE: 28

OCCUPATION: LOGISTIC MANAGER

LOCATION: CHICAGO, IL

Personality

- Introvert
- Calm
- Optimist
- Easygoing
- Hard worker

Needs

- Learn a language as fast as possible
- Financial support
- Advisory to plan the academic process.
- Communication with relatives

Obstacles

- New language
- Different culture
- Lack of communication
- Different educational system
- Expensive tuition
- Lack of support

About

Khrystyna is a student who had the experience of being an immigrant student and a first-generation student in two countries: Poland and the United States. While taking classes in both countries she had similar experiences and challenges of being a student.

PERSONA #2



NAME: ANASTASIA

AGE: 22

**OCCUPATION: UNDERGRADUATE
STUDENT AT DEPAUL**

LOCATION: CHICAGO, IL

Personality

- Introvert
- Responsible
- Shy

Needs

- Finding school clubs/communities where she wouldn't feel like an outsider.
- Scholarships for immigrants
- Clear academic advising

Obstacles

- Works full time besides school
- Long school commute

About

Anastasia moved to the US when she was 19 years old and reunited with her mother, who lived here for 10 years. She is an immigrant student; however, she is not a first-generation student because her mother got a master's from UIC. Anastasia is pretty introverted, and it's hard for her to assimilate into a new culture, although she doesn't have a problem with English.

PERSONA #3



NAME: LEA

AGE: 24

OCCUPATION: GRADUATE STUDENT

LOCATION: CHICAGO, IL

Personality

- Introvert
- Relaxed
- Independent
- Hopeful

Needs

- Assistance in financial situation, relies on scholarship
- Support with academic decisions
- Some support for coping with stress

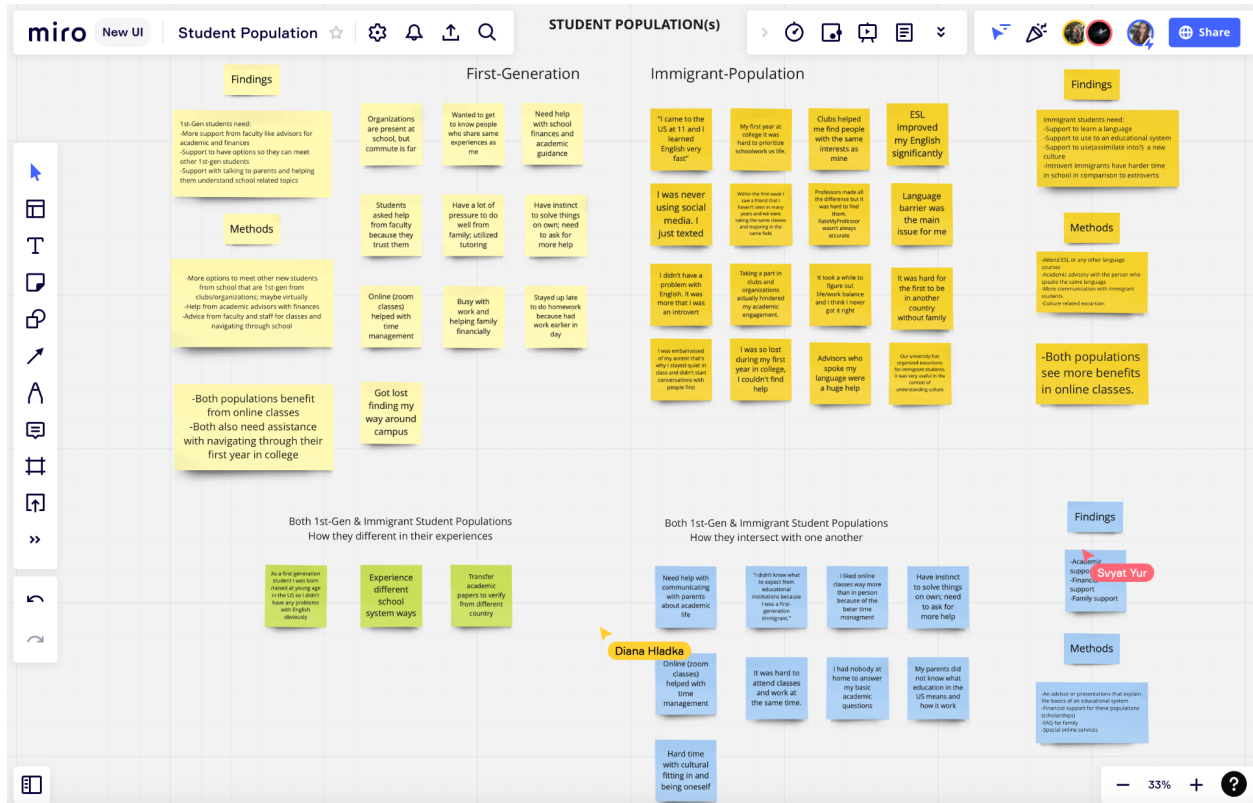
Obstacles

- Leads busy life, full-time student
- Difficulty in translating language terms

About

Lea is a first-generation university student. She speaks fluently in Mandarin and is independent. She is a graduate student and has a busy schedule due to work and school-related projects. Lea also lives with a roommate; in her free time, she likes to draw and have coffee.

Affinity Diagram



Link: https://miro.com/app/board/o9J_IR2LVkl=?invite_link_id=769355367429

This is the affinity diagram that was created to organize the data we collected from our insights, interviews, and gather any new ideas that can be used later on. For our affinity diagram, we had 4 different sections and put notes in each category. We have a category that displays common shared findings for first-generation and immigrant student populations while also adding some differences between one another as well.

Summary

As a group, we were all able to conduct 2-3 interviews each, with a total of 11 interviews. We wrote down our insights and main points from findings. And, our affinity diagram helped us further organize and compile our observations. Jannah wrote the executive method, finding summaries, helped create a persona, and added to the affinity diagram. Syvat wrote the insights, created a persona, qualitative insight graph from interviews, and helped with the affinity diagram. Diana helped edit summaries for method and findings, wrote the insights, created a persona/design element, and organized the affinity diagram. Our collaboration together was insightful and easy during our research process; everyone contributed to the project.

Appendices

Interview Protocol

Introduction and Verbal Consent:

The goal of this questionnaire is to gain important insights and guide this research project to highlight the importance for improving the 1st-generation and immigrant student experience at DePaul. The feedback you provide for this survey questionnaire will not be shared with anyone else outside of the UXD 394 Project 1 class.

Consent:

Before we begin with the interview, I want to let you know that no personal information will be disclosed, and that the data from this interview will be compiled with other interview data for further analysis. Are you comfortable with this interview being recorded? Can we begin the interview?

Svyatoslav's Questions

Questions for Immigrant Student Population

Section1 General Experience

1. When did you come to the US?
2. What is your native language?
3. Did you attend high school?
4. Did you attend any other institutions before DePaul?
5. Were you able to communicate with your classmates easily?
6. Do you see yourself as an introvert or an extrovert?
7. What challenges did you face during the first year of any of these institutions?
(Language barrier, lack of communication, etc.)
8. What services, clubs, or groups did you find helpful in your institution?

Section2 DePaul Experience

9. What is your level at DePaul?
10. Where do you live during your classes?
11. If out of campus, how do you get home?
12. What challenges did you face during your first year at DePaul?
13. Did you try to build friendly relations with DePaul students?

14. Is there any group that you wanted to be included in?
15. If yes, how did you reach that?
16. What is the main reason for you to build a connection with other students? (friendship, academic activity, etc.)
17. Are you a member of any club or organization at DePaul?
18. What groups, services, or clubs did you find helpful in overcoming these challenges?
19. Are you communicating with your classmates/roommates outside of campus?
20. If yes, what social media are you using?
21. How do you feel about taking classes at DePaul during a global pandemic?
22. What do you prefer more online or in-person classes?
23. Why?

Interview Notes

Svyatoslav's notes

Interview 1:

- The respondent came to the US in adult age;
- The respondent educational experience from three countries (Ukraine, Poland, United States);
- The respondent both immigrant and first-generation student experience;
- The main challenge for her was learning languages during an academic year;
 - ESL courses were helpful;
 - University staff who knew her native language was very helpful;
- Academic systems in all three countries are different;
 - She needed additional support to use to the academic system;
 - Her parents could not help her to use the academic system;
- Cultural assimilation took time during an academic year;
- Tuition at all institutions was high, so she worked during an academic year;
- The respondent was communicating with countrymen more during an academic year;

Interview 2

- The respondent is a current DePaul student.
- The respondent came to the US at a young age, she had no problem with language;
- Cultural assimilation was easier because of young age;
- Parents did not have experience of education in the US, so they could not help a lot;
- In the context of communication, college experience was more positive than university;
- Communication with students from the same population (immigrant students and first-generation students) is preferable;
- The respondent uses a train to take to the campus;

- The respondent started attending classes at DePaul at the beginning of the pandemic, so most of her experience was from online classes;
- Online classes are more preferable because of the saving of time;
- In-person classes have benefits in the form of in-person clubs meetings;

Interview 3:

- The respondent is a current DePaul student;
- The respondent came to the US in an adult age;
- Language barriers and cultural differences were serious problems;
- Her father finished university in the US, so she is a representative of a much smaller population of immigrant students who are not first-generation students;
- The respondent finished community college before taking classes at DePaul;
- On campus life at community college was more enjoyable compared to DePaul because;
 - DePaul have less immigrant students;
 - Location is very busy;
 - There was not that much time on campus because of pandemic;
- Educational system in the US is very different from the educational system in the country where the respondent came from.
- Advisors and all sorts of programs for academic success were very helpful.

Interview 4:

- The respondent is an immigrant student who have experience of educational systems in three different countries;
- Language barriers and cultural differences were serious problems;
- Financial situation required him to work full-time to pay for tuition;
- Communication with other immigrants was more preferable than communication with locals;
- Cultural excursions were very helpful in cultural assimilation.
- Language courses were very helpful;

Jannah's Questions

Questions for faculty at DePaul

1. 1st-generation/immigrant student experience at DePaul:
2. What resources do 1st gen/immigrant students utilize most? Least?
3. How do 1st gen/immigrant students feel in their 1st year?
4. Are 1st gen/immigrant students confident with academic preparation?
5. What do students share in common?
6. Events they like to attend? Or organizations/clubs? Etc...
7. What group(s) do they associate with?
8. What groups do they need that are not already existing?
9. Living situations? Commute concerns?
10. Financial stability/ opportunities that exist/that do not?
11. What do you feel/think?
12. What does DePaul do to help accommodate their needs? What do you think is missing that DePaul can further help them?

Jannah's Notes

Interview 1:

He is a faculty member from Student Division Affairs at DePaul University.

- States that immigrant students rely on resources from the international office at DePaul, they don't utilize Student Affairs the same way.
- First-generation students seek guidance through the 1st-generation Success Program. Two courses of discovery that have about 20 students or so. These are run in the Fall. In the Winter, there are some activities and support provided as well. Celebration during the Spring for graduation and goal for more outreach within the community.
- Support services like Student Affairs, tutoring; Self advocating and finding to actually use resources offered is important, mentorship. Most 1st-gen and immigrant students are independent and have cultural capital and consumer mentality; they are confident to ask help when need be. Some students do need more guidance.
- University satisfaction survey -happens every few years, what students do on campus
- Parents are not so involved, could be with decision making for which school they go to. Help with tax from parents. His goal is to help with outreach for parents and to help them understand the college experience from students' perspective. Also to provide help in communication between college students and their parents.
- Another goal is to develop services that help students with different statuses to be at DePaul financially, citizenship wise.
- Students feel anxiety, anticipation, and a new environment... pressure to do well and feeling like they should go through by themselves. Need more information and support; maybe from mentors to ask for help and support. Maybe they are not able to ask their parents. Goal is to empower students.

- Academic scholarships that help with tuition are also based on financial situations. Support funds to aid students to stay and graduate. Need students to continue in their education.
- More commuters, they go to class then go to work or straight to schoolwork versus students who live on campus. More difficult for accessing after school activities.
- OMSS, would like to form a possible 1st-generation student organization; can use virtual/in-person strategies.
- Subsets of students do require help with food and housing support. There is assistance through DePaul for them at the Lincoln Park location.
- To figure out what are more ways to help 1st-gen and immigrant students to more easily understand college, language and education levels. Create a more informative and accessible atmosphere for them.

Interview 2:

She is a faculty member from OMSS at DePaul.

- States that 1st-gen and immigrant students may not know resources that are available. Availability concerns due to work and busy schedules. Language barriers, some students seek guidance from the institution; more growth is needed. Advisors will provide academic help, but not so much with financial guidance. Students need more advocacy for seeking resources they need. Culturally, stigma for asking help from others.
- Most feel nervous starting out at DePaul. There is pressure to do well in college for family's sake. Feeling like they compare with other students and not have much in common.
- The need to feel comfortable and find more culturally based communities. Shared experiences are important with students to be communicative. Outreach from the Office of Multicultural Student Success helps students to feel not so alone in navigating college.
- Commuting to attend events are difficult for students and sometimes DePaul is not aware of. Metra is not covered by UPass. Commuters are oftentimes tired whilst traveling back and forth. There should be more engagement for the Loop and Lincoln Park locations to enhance university experience, to decrease the fear of missing out.
- Students are immediately directed to OMSS, but should also be provided help from the university as a whole.
- Retaining and the graduation for students is important. Some students cannot afford tuition and have to leave. They rely on financial aid especially beginning at DePaul in their first year as incoming freshmen. There is a timeframe where students are provided this. If they happen to miss it, there is an offer for Spring. Scholarships are not awarded for every quarter. Students do have the option to submit a financial aid appeal; but, sometimes they are not aware. Overall, scholarships should be more accessible.

Questions for 1st-Gen & Immigrant Student Populations

1. Are you or have you been a student at DePaul U?
2. Recall your first year attending DePaul or your College via in-person/virtual...
3. *Tell me about the first time(s) you were on campus...
4. *Tell me about a time that was memorable for you via class/friendship?
5. How were your experiences?
6. *What were some negative/positive(s)? (Remote/In-Person)
7. How is your commute? *What are the pros/cons for you?
8. Do you feel prepared with necessities for i.e (technology/laptop/books)?
9. *How do you obtain academic items? *Any websites or directly from school?
10. How do you feel overall as a college student?
11. Why? What makes you feel like this?
12. Do you work? (Yes/No)
13. (IF Yes): What is your job?
14. Do you live on-campus/off-campus?
15. How do you socialize and keep in touch with friends outside/from school?
16. Social media? If so, Which platforms?
17. Do you speak any other languages other than English? If so, which?
18. *Are there any communication barriers that you have experienced? With Family/School/ etc.?
19. Are you a part of any student group/organizations at DePaul or at your College?
20. *If so, Which one(s)?
21. *How do these student groups support your academic engagement?
22. *If not, Which group(s) would you like to be a part of or even see at DePaul or at your College?
23. How do you balance life/work?
24. *How do you manage your time/ What is your schedule like?
25. *What do you like to do with your free time when you're not doing schoolwork or work?
26. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Interview 3:

Student is a DePaul and first-generation student

- Student at first had difficulty navigating campus and finding correct academic advisor
- Quarter system and academic life was a bit confusing to him, quarter hours vs. regular credit hours semester hours
- Experienced language barrier, and challenge of difficult how DePaul functioned vs. other schools
- He is independent, parents didn't know how to help, more independent in that way
- Seeks academic relations and networking
- Commutes via Ventra/ Blue Line; Negative: to have to take a train. Not good as sitting on laptop, extra 2 hours back and forth
- Positive to learn material, listen to books. Extra time to learn
- Finds free books through internet
- Utilizes Online dictionary, previous institution; cannot find same language speaker at DePaul, would be helpful for translators, no other services existing yet
- Communicates with classmates through zoom, slack, discord platforms
- Would like to see a platform can be made to show all events in real time and to share it
- Would like to be a part of sports club, IT/programming clubs, subscribes to news through email, HandShake, Workshops, looks forward to 3D printing in person again as well
- closed access, during pandemic life was not too lively, not attending any clubs since virtual
- In free time, takes extra courses outside of class, works outside of campus; part time work, attends gym, watch tv shows/ movies
- Would like to see more services provided, maybe DePaul can send information for services through email, specifically for students from different populations. Let them know that there are services for their hardships and issues.

Interview 4:

She was a student who attended University in Chicago.

- She is a first-generation and immigrant student. She recently received her citizenship in the US. She speaks Mandarin and has difficulty translating what to say in English with others.
- She is independent and has a busy schedule with working and roommate.
- Communicates with friends through Instagram.
- She works part-time, does school projects for her masters, and interns at a startup company.
- She relies on financial help from her school for her academic success.
- She has friends who mostly speaks the same language and they communicate through Zoom, phone call, in-person when in the same location, Instagram.
- Her challenges are coping with stress and finding resources that are available. She would like a service that is provided, like a therapist at school who is capable of speaking in Mandarin.

Diana's Notes:

Interview 1

- Senior at DePaul University
- Have trouble finding the right community within DePaul and that's affecting the overall mental health. Covid 19 increased this issue because all the classes were remote and there were no one to socially with.
- Parents can't help with remote learning nor financially.
- Have to work besides being full time.
- Money is a big issue, especially when it comes to university tuition. Lack of scholarships. Worries that will not be able to pay out tuition after graduation.
- Immigrants can find friends beside other immigrants faster

Interview 2

- Came to the US at 11 that's why picked up English very fast.
- Very introverted person.
- Graduated DePaul 3 years ago that's why can't say anything about online classes because never took them.
- School clubs influenced a lot of the way the school was approached. Clubs sometimes can get in a way because they take a lot of time and effort and that's way credit classes were neglected.
- Being a student when you're immigrant and introvert is twice harder than for extroverts
- Had a pressure from family to go to college because

Interview 3

- Came to the US before 20s.
- Community college helped a lot with smooth transferring to DePaul.
- Natives can't relate to immigrants. It's a struggle to find friends.
- ESL classes were really helpful because there people had similar journeys of assimilating into an American culture.
- It was hard to start college and find resources that would help with this process.
- Lack of school clubs with active events and collaborations.