



The Unfavorable Impact that Financial Aid has on Low-Income Undergraduate College Students

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Literature Review

When exploring how financial aid impacts students from low-income households, Bernal et al. (2023) concluded that canceling scholarships that only these students can access severely limits their access to higher education. Access to education has increased for many more students than in the later decades, but there are still concerns about affordability and resources (Long & Boatman, 2016). A study conducted by Long and Boatman (2016) examines how students who receive a renewable grant for marginalized students from low-income families are more motivated to succeed than those who do not. Mowreader (2024) stated FAFSA reports showed that 79% of students did not complete the FAFSA because they thought they would not receive any aid, although they came from low-income families. These students were also worried about the 2025-2026 FAFSA.

Methods

The research question guiding this study is, what is financial aid's impact on low-income undergraduate students? This study used a quantitative research method approach for its design. This study was conducted in a regional comprehensive university in the Southeastern United States. I administered a survey geared toward undergraduate students who considered themselves from a low-income status and are currently enrolled at the university. Students were asked about completing the FAFSA as well as receiving aid from FAFSA.

Survey Questions

This research project uses a quantitative method where Undergraduate students were asked 8 questions pertinent to the research study. The questions are as follows:

1. What class do you consider yourself?
2. Did you fill out the 2024-2025 FAFSA and receive financial aid?
3. Did you have to apply for student loans outside of FAFSA?
4. What income class do you consider yourself?
5. Have you or are you currently experiencing food insecurity?
6. Have you or are you currently experiencing housing insecurity?
7. How has your income class affected your college experience?

Introduction

Some undergraduate students from low-class families only get a few scholarships, which leads to those students having a hard time paying for college. My project focuses on asking undergraduate students how financial aid has impacted their college experience. One scholar has stated that even though access to higher education has increased over the years, affordability has come into question because it has also increased over the years (Long & Boatman, 2016). Another scholar stated that these students who face financial aid challenges while attending college might need more assistance and support from student affairs professionals (Pierce, 2016). Studies have also shown that financial aid positively affects academic performance, college success, and social behaviors (Long & Boatman, 2016). Students who come from low-income families and do not receive financial aid will most likely attend colleges that are not a good fit for them, which leads to inadequate information and less support from faculty and staff (Long & Boatman, 2016).

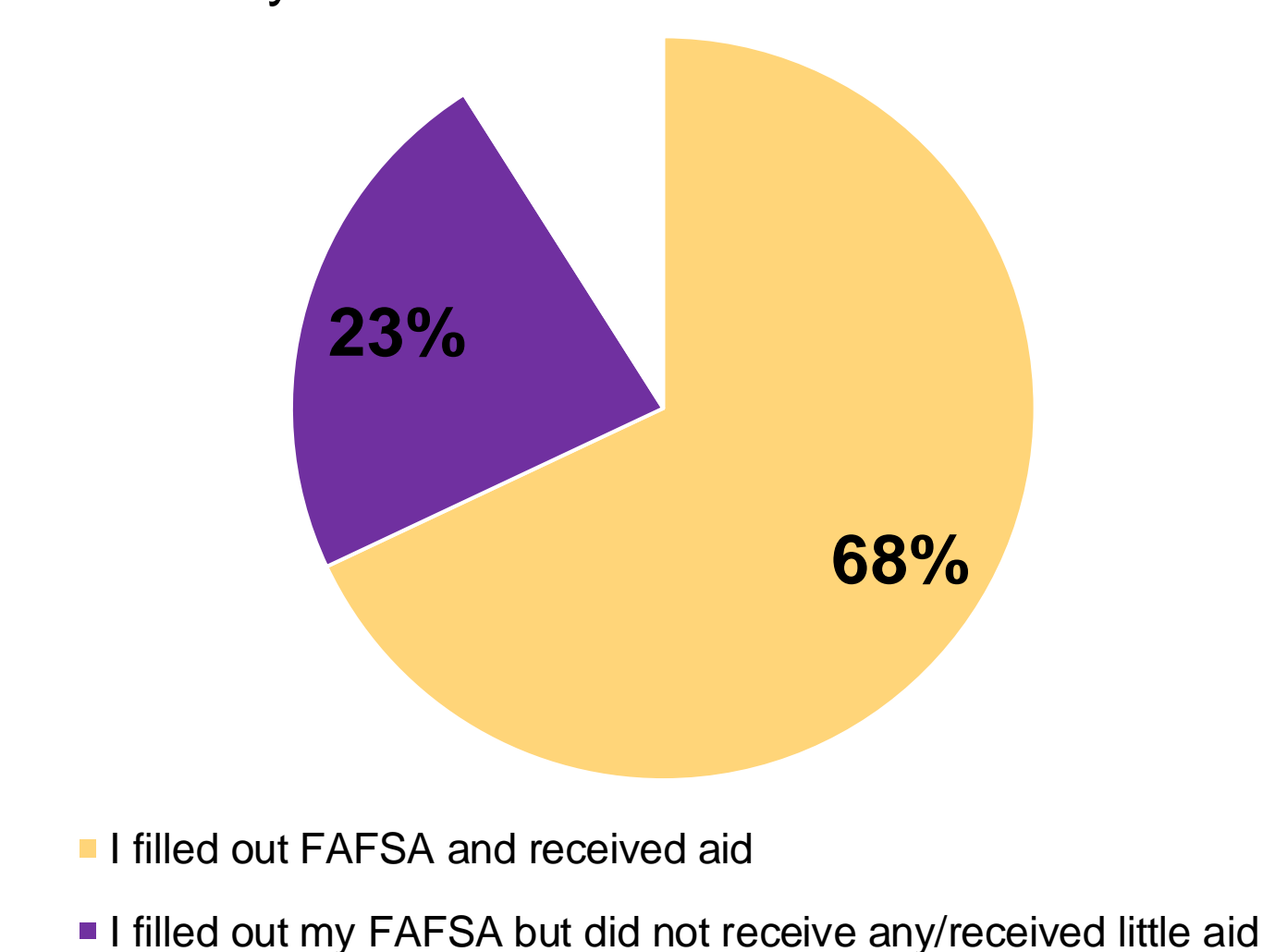
Analysis

I conducted a Qualtrics survey using an ordinal and nominal type of measurement to ask students about the students' financial class, the students' school standing, and whether the students completed the FAFSA. I had one open-ended question to ask students how their income class has affected their college experience. Some of the answers from the open-ended question were incorporated in the discussion/implications section of this poster to give a better perspective on how students' income has impacted their education experience. I used the data analysis tool provided by Qualtrics to give the descriptive statistics report on the data that was collected from the survey.

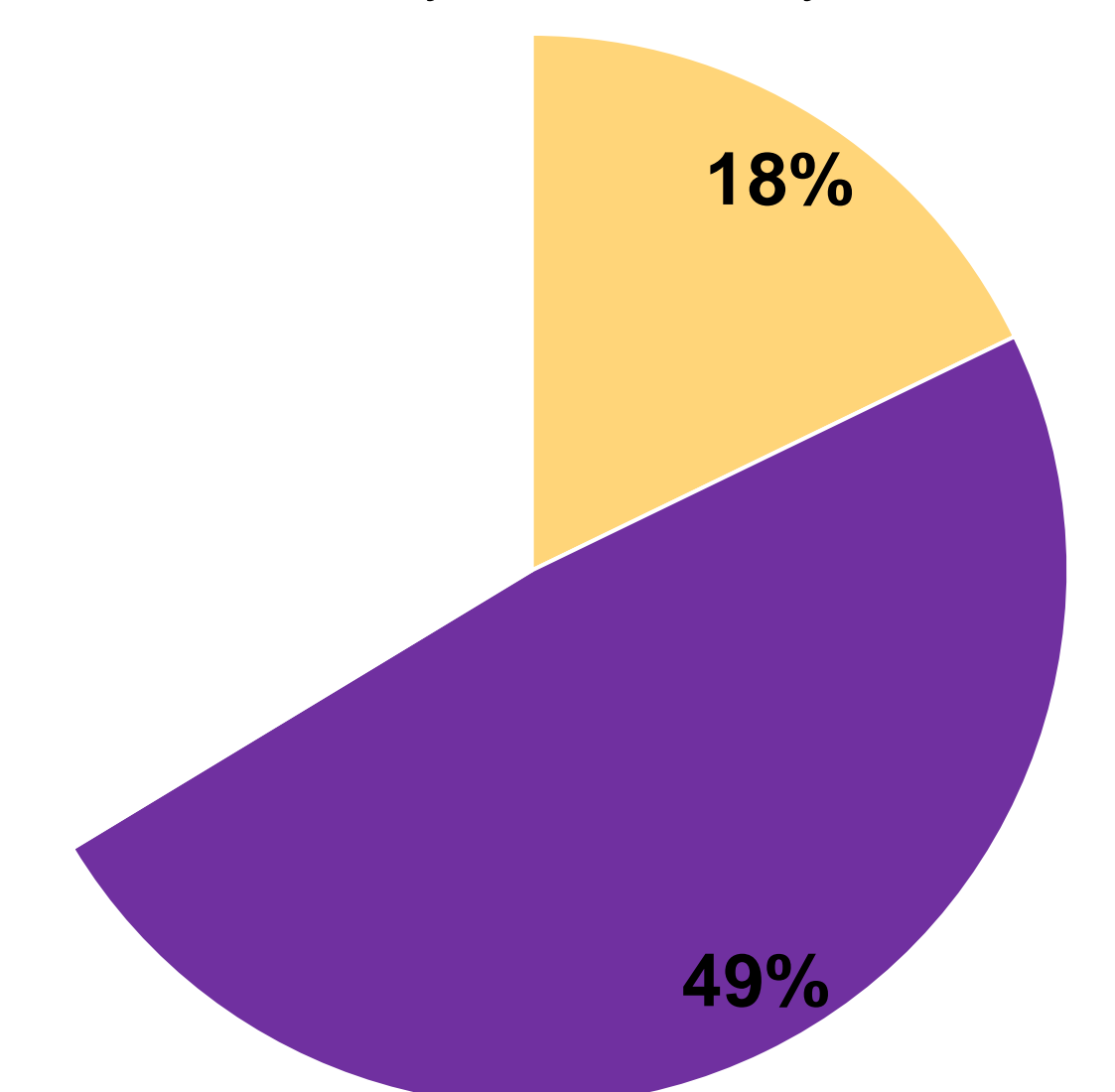
Findings

90 Undergraduate students from freshmen to seniors from Western Carolina University responded to the survey and some of the major responses are reported below.

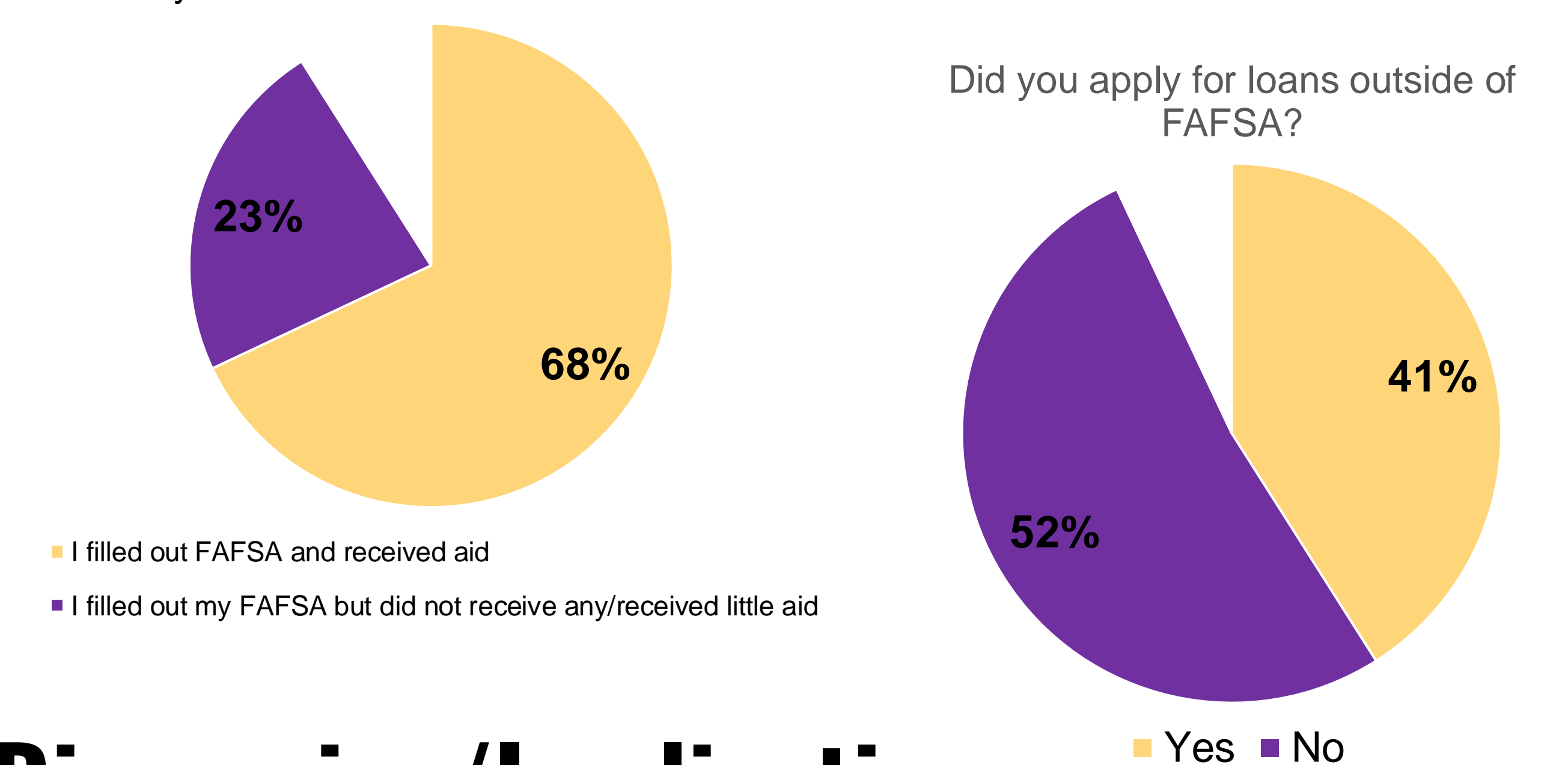
Did you fill out the 2024-2025 FAFSA?



What class do you consider yourself?



Did you apply for loans outside of FAFSA?



Discussion/Implications

As we can see, most of our students consider themselves as low-class or lower-middle-class, and when completing the FAFSA, most of the students did receive aid or very little aid to cover the cost of college. Some of our students even had to apply for loans outside of FAFSA to cover the leftover expenses. When filling out the survey, students were asked how their income class affected their college experience. Some students reported that it "makes my grades lower because I work a lot" and "it has affected my college experience because I always must work, which means spending less time on school...". The implication here is that most students work while getting an education and miss out on a lot of the college experience. To be able to get an education at a college or university, one needs to be able to have the experiences as well.

References

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