

Part 3: Where I'm Going

Scene 1: I stand on the shoulders of my parents who want the best for me, my siblings who I watched grow up and I know will always be in my corner, teachers who believed in me and understanding friends who were great resources. Growing up low income and being first gen did pose a lot of barriers but I was able to find the help I needed to be successful, and I had people in my life who pushed me to be successful, who taught me to want more for myself, that hard work can overcome most barriers, and communication can solve the others. I had parents who wanted me to go farther than they did and make something of myself and teachers who were willing to help because they saw how hard I worked. I'm still in contact with a teacher from 5th grade who challenged me to participate in every geography and spelling bee and perform well on tests. The memory that sticks with me though is my dad admitting he doesn't have the finances to send me to college, but that he knows I have the wits to find a way to get there. Now I would like to use my experience to support and be a resource for upcoming first gen college students.

Scene 2: I want to stand for helping first gen feel less burdened by feelings of loneliness and confusion. I know being first gen can be scary especially with the added financial strain of college and the extraneous college applications that feel never ending, but we first gen worked hard to get to college just like everyone else and then some. The power change I would like to see through my message would be shifting power towards first gen students by encouraging them to be confident in their abilities and work ethic. This can be a form of power once fear can no longer hold you back.

Scene 3: This is an important message because the added barriers first gen students face is not made up. In an article by Pew Research Center, evidence has supported that students coming from households with degrees have higher incomes than those who are first gen. That "70% of adults with educated parents also completed a bachelor degree" (Fry). The most shocking finding was that the wage for first gen students "after obtaining a college degree is 99,600 and 135,800 for second gen students after a degree" (Fry). This is apparently reflective of accumulative wealth and savings as well as differences in how individuals financed their college. This finding makes my message which is intended to empower first gen students even more critical because of how research has discovered that even after first gen students beat the odds and get a bachelor degree, they're still behind. That message can be detrimental for students already unsure of obtaining college degrees because of added barriers.

Scene 4: Hampden Sydney College also offered insight to how limited knowledge of campus life has the potential to lead to college drop out. First gen students often have "different experiences stemming from coming from working class families, living off campus, working, families not understanding college demands, and increased pressure to succeed for the family" (Hollemon). Further, that first gen is also susceptible to doubts abt academic abilities and

difficulty integrating to college life. I especially liked this source because it dives into the added guilt of being at school while family members were suffering financially. Even how first gen students can be embarrassed about their socioeconomic status or level of knowledge within their families. It is important to acknowledge these barriers to illustrate how far the first gen student truly has to come to beat the odds.

Scene 5: Now that I have completed my first year of college I feel equipped to be a resource to my younger siblings who in a matter of years will be applying for colleges and needing assistance. This is a common phenomena and many “studies have suggested that siblings play an important role in transferring information and helping first-generation students with the college application process” (Roksa). Researchers have also linked “effective family engagement during children’s high school years to positive academic outcomes” such as increased college enrollment rates, dropout prevention, and academic achievement (Wang). Researchers have also demonstrated that students who have parents who are engaged in their education perform better on academic measures. For example, student achievement, student attendance, student behavior, self-efficacy about education, educational expectations, educational planning. Through this research I gathered that parents and mentors are extremely influential on the students' success. This makes me confident that my message can make an impact even if I do not have personal relationships like I do with my siblings.

Scene 6: Family members may not be able to provide advice to first gen students about what to expect and how to succeed in college. Higher levels of family responsibilities or a strong identification with family ties can also mean that first gen students spend more time off campus making integration to the college environment more challenging. First gen students also may not feel at home in the college culture and may find themselves straddling home and college cultures. Finally, first gen students can experience family achievement guilt as they surpass their family members’ educational achievement. These struggles are what make my message so important because they are universal to the first gen student. I hope to provide some peace through my message that first gen students are not alone in their difficulties and that time and hard work can overcome most obstacles.

Scene 7: When I interviewed my siblings we discussed their experience with choosing careers and concerns for gaining acceptance and choosing the right college. They noted that family discussions concerning matters of affordability were influential in motivating them to find other means of financing college. However, my siblings do acknowledge that after their older sister has completed her first year of college they feel less concerned regarding applying for college since they have a resource now. They also agree our father will be more open to the idea of attending college since their older sister proved scholarship and financial aid achieved by hard work can be sufficient even for a private university.

Scene 8: Other prevailing themes found within my interview are themes of aspiring for more and experiencing obstacles to the dream of college. My siblings were able to reflect on our parents' lives and acknowledge they wanted a life that had more opportunities and this heavily influenced their dream of attending college and aspiring for specialty careers such as engineering. They reflected on conversations they had with our dad regarding making a better life for themselves and the importance of earning a degree as a means to acquire access to opportunities that were not available to him. Lastly, even with having an older sister in college they agree that they have been at a disadvantage from the beginning. That throughout their primary education they struggled to convince our dad to allow them to be involved in school clubs and programs like band because he did not view school involvement as necessary and that they had to find their own means of financing their endeavors.

Scene 9: After my research and interview, I have decided on creating an Instagram page dedicated towards giving advice and sharing knowledge with other first gen students who cannot rely on family due to their lack of experience. I touch on topics of Roommates, Making friends, college course work, and campus involvement. I hope this page can be a step towards shifting that needle of power towards the first gen student, that they can be confident in their abilities and take pride in their efforts.

Bibliography:

Hollemon, John. "First-Generation College Students." *Hampden-Sydney College Homepage*, 2022,
<https://www.hsc.edu/student-life/campus-culture/equity-and-inclusion/first-generation-students>.

Fry, Richard. "First-Generation College Graduates Lag behind Their Peers on Key Economic Outcomes." *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*, Pew Research Center, 28 May 2021,
<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2021/05/18/first-generation-college-graduates-lag-behind-their-peers-on-key-economic-outcomes/>.

Roksa, J., Silver, B.R., Deutschlander, D. and Whitley, S.E. (2020), Navigating the First Year of College: Siblings, Parents, and First-Generation Students' Experiences. *Social Forum*, 35: 565-586. <https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12617>

Wang, T. R., & Nuru, A. K. (2017). "He wanted me to achieve that for our family and I did, too": Exploring first-generation students' experiences of turning points during the transition to college. *Journal of Family Communication*, 17(2), 153-168.
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2016.1264401>