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About IMPRINT

IMPRINT: Narratives on the First-Generation College Experience is a compilation of creative writing and scholarly work from Seattle University’s (SU) first-generation college community. SU students, staff, faculty, and alumni who identify as first-gen are welcome to contribute. IMPRINT is published annually and released in the Spring Quarter. A committee of first-gen staff, faculty, and students mentor our selected contributors through the creative process.

IMPRINT is rooted in 3 values:

- **Visibility:** Increase visibility of SU’s First-Generation College community.
- **Scholarship:** Helping SU’s first-generation college community to own their identity as scholars by providing an opportunity for someone to experience a supportive writing process and publish a piece of work.
- **Mentorship:** Provide contributors with the opportunity to cultivate mentoring relationships through the writing process.

To learn more or submit for the next edition, please visit tinyurl.com/imprintSU.

IMPRINT is sponsored by The Outreach Center at SU.
About The Outreach Center

The Outreach Center is a community and resource space for members of the Seattle University community who identify with the first-generation college student experience and the student veteran experience.

We acknowledge and affirm our community’s multiple intersecting identities, including low-income, international, undocumented and DACA, and graduate students.

At Seattle University, we define first-generation college students as students whose parents or guardians have not completed a U.S. bachelor’s degree. Some first-generation college students may have siblings who have completed a bachelor’s degree.

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Editor’s Note

As IMPRINT celebrates year two, I’m in awe of the students, staff, faculty, and alumni who have rallied around this first-gen publication. IMPRINT is a small idea actualized because of the people who took a chance.

There is a lot that goes on behind the scenes of IMPRINT. The call for proposals starts in October. Once the IMPRINT committee is finalized, we review proposals and select the contributors in early November. Contributors have their first meeting with their assigned committee member/writing mentor in November & December. Contributors write all of Winter Quarter with monthly mentor meetings. Contributors turn in a final draft before Spring Break.

While all of that sounds pretty streamlined and organized, I’m sure you can imagine all the things that could happen along the way.

Think about our contributors.

Perhaps they feel nervousness or excitement about submitting a proposal. When they get notified that their proposal has been accepted, I’m sure they still feel nervous or excited. Let’s be honest—it’s probably a lot of both. Then, there’s the actual writing process.

This is when it often feels very real for contributors. They are putting words to paper. Some words that feel good. Some that feel scary. Some they didn’t even know lived inside of them.
We know IMPRINT as a publication, a living document. I hope we know that IMPRINT is a journey too. It is a journey that asks us to be honest, vulnerable, and forgiving.

So, this edition is for the first-gen community members who thought about submitting a proposal and didn’t. This one is for those who submitted a proposal and figured out that this year wasn’t the right time. This is for those contributors who went through the writing process and decided along the way not to submit a final piece. We celebrate you, because you were part of the IMPRINT journey.

This edition is also for those whose voices we have yet to hear. We’re here when you’re ready.

Gretchenrae Campera, M.Ed.
Division of Student Development
A Community Invitation
Samantha Penjaraenwatana

There is something very special about having a place to call your own. As I reflect on my own undergraduate experience, there was not a single place where I felt I could call as my “home” or “community”. As a first-generation college student, I overcame many personal and academic difficulties. I found myself alone and had to find my own support system and community that I could call my own. As a full-time and commuter student, I always thought my home was a place filled with family and love. However, this definition changed as I became involved in student activities on campus. My definition of home evolved to include those that I met in college and chose to be a part of my life. While my own version of home is ever-changing, I’ve learned that home is simply where I am surrounded by people who love me, a place to build memories, and where I can truly be myself.

The Outreach Center brings visibility to the first-generation college and veteran student experience. It is our home, our community, and our support system, all in one. We are heard, acknowledged, supported, and validated. We feel that our lived experiences really matter here at Seattle University. The Outreach Center strives to make these invisible identities visible and be a new chapter in your
SU experience.

As the Graduate Coordinator for First-Generation College Initiatives at The Outreach Center, I have the privilege of providing resources and programming to students who share similar experiences to mine. The students that I work with inspire me to do more, feel more, and be more for other first-gen students. They challenge and motivate me to ask questions about how we can further support students. I hope to provide meaningful opportunities that inspires others to persist to achieve their goals.

One aspect that is common across first-gen students is that we work hard to make our dreams a reality. We are resilient, motivated, and willing to seek opportunities to help us grow as a person and succeed. As we work towards our dreams, our support system grows, and our homes are beginning to be filled with others that have been involved in our journey. With this growing support system, we are encouraged and given the confidence to persist through the face of uncertainty. We become role models and bring pride to those involved in our success stories. Our home begins to thrive and opens up opportunities for others to follow our footsteps.

My fellow first-gen peers, we hope The Outreach Center becomes your home and community. A place where you can be your authentic self. We invite you to find your own version of home at Seattle University. We hope to be the foundation to your home, where we can support your academic endeavors, share and listen to each other’s stories, and build memories together. As you begin to read the narratives in this second edition of IMPRINT, we hope you are able to reflect on your own journey. The Outreach Center is just the beginning of finding your community, and we
are grateful to provide you with this foundation. We invite you to learn more about the first-gen identity and hope we can inspire you to fill your home with your own community.
A First-Generation Experience:
Success Fueled by Overcoming Life Challenges
Alejandro Monarrez

My first-generation experience began on April 5th, 2005. On that day, my father died due to complications associated with Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. While most kids my age were playing sports and video games, I was consoling my mother and trying to be a role model for my younger siblings. I did this while ensuring I was keeping up with my academics. The values both my father and mother instilled in me, including the importance of education and courage in light of adversity developed the foundation to my character. I drew on these values to keep me moving forward despite the overwhelming emotional and spiritual struggles brought about by the death of my father. Although my father was determined terminal in the final months, he fought through pain to help me with school work. This strength and character demonstrated my father’s value in education because he always believed he should have completed his education.

After my father’s passing, my mother worked multiple jobs as a housekeeper to provide for our family. Unlike my father, my mother emigrated from Mexico to the United States at the age of 17 with only 5th grade education. Although my mother did not
obtain a proper education, she worked hard as a housekeeper to ensure my siblings and I would receive a proper education without the added worry of our financial situation. It was my mother’s determination and perseverance in light of the circumstances that gave me the strength to graduate from Boca Raton High School and pursue my criminal justice degree at Loyola University Chicago.

Being first-generation at Loyola was an experience that further demonstrated the value of education and courage in light of adversity. Although my college experience did not include experiences like the death of a parent, I had to deal with the fact that I was not privileged to accessing some of the same educational resources some of my fellow classmates benefited from in their primary education. This created challenges for me in getting accustomed to this new, higher-level learning that I was not exposed to because of my circumstances. However, this did not discourage me. I knew my education was my own responsibility and that success was dependent on me seeking out assistance in difficulties I was experiencing. This meant mustering the courage to ask questions of professors and seeking out help during office hours. This meant not being afraid to speak during lecture in hopes of having my questions answered through the class discussion. I drew on the strength of my father in dealing with his illness and the strength of my mother working multiple jobs while raising three kids in order to not shy away from the challenges I would continue to experience in pursuit of my college degree after that first semester. I saw the value of education because I had to work harder than some of my classmates to be on the same level.
After graduating from Loyola University Chicago with a degree in criminal justice and criminology, I decided to forego plans to attend law school and instead serve in the United States Marine Corps. Throughout the 13 weeks I spent in recruit training, the instructors created a high stress environment meant to break recruits down. I learned this was done intentionally because of the high-stress environment combat lends itself to be. My life experience as first-generation up until that point fueled my ability to overcome the rigors of recruit training and earn the title of Marine. When I was cold, hungry, and ready to give up, I would think of the strength my father had in confronting his illness and my mother subsequently to move forward through challenges in pursuit of earning the title.

The challenges overcome and experiences in the earlier part of my life led me to the point where I am today: a Seattle University School of Law student. However, even getting to this point was an up-hill battle. Though I did very well academically in undergrad, I did not achieve competitive test scores to be considered for admission through traditional means. I was denied multiple times from various institutions, including Seattle University. However, my strength in character and determination would not allow me give up on my law school ambitions. I decided to reapply again in the subsequent admissions cycle. On the second time around, I gained admission through Seattle University School of Law’s Access Admission Program. I could delve into reasons as to why I did not obtain competitive test scores, but my character does not allow me to make excuses or feel sorry for myself. I will say that a number has not been indicative of my propensity to succeed.
as a law student or a legal professional.

My first-generation experience is far from over. My desire to earn my JD and become an attorney has not been extinguished by past challenges and struggles. Rather, my first-generation experience continues to fuel my desire to succeed in life, both personally and professionally. I want my epitaph to read that despite overwhelming adversity in my first-generation experience, I was hungry for challenge; that I lived by an ethos that strengthened and guided me in day-to-day battles on the road to success; that I knew my worth, but humbled myself; and most importantly, that I lived a fulfilling life with the love and support of those I care about.
Skins
Kristine Dao

My mother comes from a long line of hardworking, independent, and strong women.
She comes from a lineage of brittle skin, callused feet, and sore joints.
She comes from a history of trial, error, trials, and errors.
A history of refuge and indisputable survivors in life’s test of will.

Sometimes when I look in the mirror,
it’s hard to believe that
this layer of skin encompasses every organ, every bone, every vein.
It envelopes every annoying sibling headache, final exam stress, every first date’s nerves, every last kiss heartache.
But, oh, how I’ve damaged
the only thing that seems to be
holding together
when I can’t seem to
do the same for myself.
And how I’ve tried to
escape my own skin with this blade,
to revenge it for
stabbing me in this world,
when every fiber of my body
has fought for any sort of will to stay.

Forced entry wounds from the
evils of my nightmares
plastered all along my body—
how do I prove to my mother
I am trying as hard as she is?

My skin has bruised and scarred,
callused and burnt.
My mother says these are just
signs of a hardworking, independent,
strong-willed woman.
I tell her my scars make me feel weak.
She reminds me that I can be both and that
these are also battle wounds of a survivor.
For My Mother
Kristine Dao

If I were a scientist,
the only motive I would have
to succeed in my work
would be my drive to
replicate your eyes
and the way its beauty
reflects off life
just like the way
the skylight reflects off water,
even on the darkest of nights.

I would find ways to
break down your atoms
just to see how impossible it is
to reconstruct them
to create something
just as dear, as great,
and as loving as you are.
I would crack open
the moon, pour out its yolk,
then slice the sun, in half,
just to see if their combined
radiance even compares.
I watch shooting stars at night
because I know they’re sending out their
brightest search party
because they’re missing you.
I’m convinced that’s why the sun flares
and volcanoes erupt.
I’m convinced that’s why
natural disasters happen;
they’re crying out for you.

My dearest mother,
if I am the stars,
you are my
all-encompassing galaxy.
I become nothing,
I am nothing, but flickers of light
begging to find my way home,
without you.
You are my solid,
my center, my gravity,
my life and my sacred foundation.
I am only here because you pushed back the ocean to make room for my growth. I am still here because I am lucky enough to have you steadying me in this world of instability. I am so proud to be yours, Mama, I will always be yours. But this, this love letter here, this is for you.

I love you, mama.
According to the 2018 Open Doors report, there were 1.09 million international students living in the United States (U.S.) during the 2017-2018 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2018). Every year international students from diverse cultural, academic, and intellectual backgrounds come to pursue their dreams of studying in the U.S. International students enrich the educational environment by sharing their culture, traditions, and language with other students. In addition to this, they provide a large amount of revenue to the American education system. The Open Doors report indicates that in 2017, international students contributed nearly 40 billion dollars to the U.S. economy (NAFSA International Student Economic Value Tool).

However, as these students transition into the American educational system, they face many obstacles ranging from financial to academic difficulties. There are also social challenges, such as cultural and language barriers. In a time when the world needs more cultural competence and understanding, the presence of international students on American campuses provides a necessary and valuable educational experience for all. Unfortunately, the value these students bring is often
undermined because some institutions fail to provide an adequately supportive academic or social environment. As a result, these students may not be able to fully participate in the college experience, thus depriving them and others of potential significant diverse cultural exchanges. According to Inside Higher Ed, about 50% of the international student body are first-generation students (Redden, 2014). I am a first-generation international college student, and this is my story:

I grew up in Delhi, India in a small household with my mother and my brother, who both mean the world to me. I attended the same school for 12 years, that is, from kindergarten to tenth grade. As I have grown older, I realized that all those years I felt “unheard.” I always found myself seeking opportunities to let my voice be heard because I felt this burning desire to express myself. At school I was never given a chance because my instructors would always reach out to the same selective students they deemed more intelligent. I spent a considerable amount of time comparing myself to those students and wondering what made them so unique.

However, my journey of studying at that school ended in 2012, when my mother and father separated. To save us from the emotional distress of separation at the time, my mother decided to send my brother and me to a boarding school in another state. It was at this new school that I learned more about who I am, what my passions are, and what I wanted to do with my life. In India, students choose a major in the eleventh grade, and I decided I was going to major in science. In my culture, those who pursue the science field are perceived as more
“intelligent” and will live a more successful and financially secure life.

While going to a new school was daunting, it was fulfilling at the same time. It offered me many opportunities that I could not have imagined. I remember it being only two weeks in, and a teacher walked up to me, gave me a piece of paper, and asked me to recite the poem on the piece of paper at an upcoming poem-recitation competition. I could not believe my eyes. I was nervous and excited at the same time. It was my first public speaking opportunity, a chance I had been waiting for after all those years! The day finally came, and with cold clammy hands and beads of sweat lining my forehead, I began to recite the poem. I took a quick glance across the room where hundreds of students were gazing at me and quietly listening to me. I felt important. For the first time, I felt I had something important to contribute. From that moment on, my passion for public speaking only grew. For the next two years, I regularly volunteered to anchor and write for school events which helped me hone my public speaking and writing skills. In 2014, I graduated as an apple of my teacher’s eyes, a strong leader as a school captain, and prom queen.

After graduation, I patiently waited for my high school test results. I did not score well in all of my subjects, but I did score high in English and Computer Science. When I learned that most of my friends had already gotten into top Delhi universities, I broke down. Without good grades, I did not know what I wanted to do with my life. My stepfather decided to help me by taking me to IDP, an Australia-based agency that helps students study abroad. With the
help of my parents, I decided to apply to colleges in the United States, and I was accepted into all of the schools I applied to. The only hard part now was to get my U.S. Visa and decide which college I wanted to go to. In India, U.S. Visas are considered among the hardest to get. I still recall standing in the visa interview line and studying the faces of the consular officials to figure out which ones seemed “nicer.” As an international student, there are many legal obstacles such as not being able to work off-campus and being enrolled as a full-time student at all times, except in exceptional circumstances. I felt lucky to get the visa, but the next challenge was to decide which college I wanted to go to. I looked at the financial costs, available scholarships, and living expenses and in the end, I chose to study at South Seattle College.

In Spring of 2015, I moved to the U.S. on my own to begin my studies in Communication and Media Studies at South Seattle College. Now you may wonder how I ended up in journalism when I studied science in school. I chose science under peer pressure and the cultural expectations associated with science students. In India, I had ranked in the top 0.01% of students who scored 98% in English, and I felt like it was a sign. I remembered how fulfilling my public speaking and writing experiences were during high school. As a woman coming from a patriarchal society, I chose to major in journalism because I wanted to use my writing and public speaking abilities to empower others like me who feel “unheard” or “voiceless.”

During my first few months at South Seattle College, I carefully listened to other students so that I could learn new vocabulary and understand slang words because English is my third language.
Moreover, I did not understand my identity as a first-generation college student. I felt lost and the language barrier hindered my ability to navigate the American higher education system. I was not familiar with the credit system, so my mother came with me for my first advising session to understand the “credits” system. I had to constantly meet with my advisers to ensure I was in the right classes and that I was maintaining my legal status at all times.

The classroom setting was not any easier. At first, I was a bit reluctant to openly ask questions or share my ideas because in my culture, asking questions is seen as questioning the expertise of the teachers. However, in the U.S., there is a strong emphasis on the individual and people are often very direct in their communication. I also had trouble with American culture and did not fully understand things like American greetings. For example, one time an acquaintance asked me, “Hey, how’s it going?” But while I stopped to respond, the person continued to walk. I felt ignored and unheard. It was later that I understood that this greeting was meant more like a statement. I have lived in the U.S. for over three years now, and I have learned how to navigate these cultural differences and adjust my communication and lifestyle accordingly.

In addition, with the help of my college, I was placed with a host family who I was contractually bound to live with for a year. I stayed in a small room with a twin bed, a tiny dresser, and a closet. My host family did not offer a supportive environment. I lived with my host mom’s 72-year-old sister and I faced difficulty communicating with her because of her language and hearing problems. I also had two other
roommates who were international students from China who were not any nicer. The rent seemed exceptionally high for such a small space and the commute to school was very long. Over time, I became very lonely as I didn’t have anyone to talk to, and I didn’t want to worry my parents back home about the hostile environment I was living in. The loneliness created a void in me. I was unhappy and felt confused as to how a college can recommend such homestays. During these tense times, I recalled my stepfather’s words: “You will run back to India within the next six months and you will not be able to survive there.” I took his words as a challenge, and that kept me going and gave me hope. I did not realize at the time, but they were actually words of encouragement.

Fortunately, I came across a social media post about a room for rent. I took a chance and met with the family, and immediately moved in. My new host family was a Mexican-American family. I was blessed with a loving, kind, and caring host mom and two equally loving host sisters. They took me out to eat, invited me to family gatherings, and taught me how to cook. My commute to school was no longer a burden as I was closer to the college. I felt full of life! After a year passed, I ran out of funds to pay for a roof over my head. I felt helpless and scared. But I was blessed and lucky to have a generous friend who offered me a living space free of charge.

At South Seattle College, I took diverse classes, met some new and interesting people and made many long-lasting friends. I had supportive instructors and held many leadership positions on campus. I even took multiple quarters of Spanish so that I could better
communicate with my new host family. I volunteered thousands of hours in community service with projects like tree plantations and being a student speaker for various campus events. I had promised myself that I would independently pay for my sophomore year at South Seattle College. So I worked at multiple jobs in addition to being a full-time student. It was exhausting but it kept me going through difficult times. I was consistently on the President’s List and awarded multiple scholarships. I became a Phi Theta Kappa member and an All-WA Academic Team Honoree. I graduated in June 2016 with my associate degree and I felt nostalgic as I had my first cap and gown graduation ceremony in America with my generous friend and my new host family by my side.

Following graduation, I was faced with the options of going back to India or continuing my education. I was unable to choose either. I could not start school immediately because of the unfavorably high currency exchange rate between India and the U.S. meant I had no more savings. I did not want to worry my parents since they already had debt from my time in community college, work, and paying for my brother’s education in India. So I decided to apply for a work permit which had a waiting period of three months. For international students, it is very hard to find employment opportunities. It is very time-consuming and complex paperwork, limited hours, and inability to speak English fluently which a lot of jobs demand as their primary qualifications.

In the interim, I was able to briefly visit my family for the summer and create a financial plan for my university education. When I came back, I started filling out three job applications every week and
waited to hear back. Soon, I began working three jobs: as a publications intern at South Seattle College, a retail associate at Old Navy, and an editorial intern for Alaska Airlines Magazine. Having to manage all three was very difficult, and it drained me. However, by the time my work permit ended, I managed to save $10,000. I had gained strong and effective marketing skills, wrote compelling pieces and fact-checked for the magazine. At Old Navy, I was named as a Brand Associate of the Month, the top sales associate in Washington state and ranked second in the Pacific Northwest. I felt like all my hard work had finally paid off.

I finally decided to go back to school and work on getting my bachelor's degree. I chose to come to Seattle University for several reasons. First, Seattle University offered the specific Journalism program of study I was looking for. Second, the class sizes were small which made communicating with professors easier and more personable. Third, the University offered me the Messina transfer scholarship, which made paying for school a little less stressful. During my application for Seattle University, I was selected for the Alfie Scholars Program, which offers professional development opportunities in addition to financial assistance to transfer students who have demonstrated exceptional leadership abilities, academic excellence, and service to their community. I was selected for this program which helped me with my tuition expenses. Fourth, the university was a close commute and in the vicinity of diverse cultural and ethnic eating spots. So commuting and eating were much more convenient than before. All of these factors led me to believe that I made the right choice.
Today, I am at Seattle University studying journalism, and with the help of my Alfie community and the transfer scholarship, I have successfully made it through my first year of school. The university has provided me with rich and fun experiences ranging from podcast and news reporting for the campus radio station KXSU to my first ever ball dance in the U.S. I have also established long-lasting connections with my campus community. At Seattle University, a first-generation college student is someone whose parent did not earn a U.S. bachelor's degree. And it was at Seattle University that I learned about my first-generation identity. Through this understanding, I have learned more about myself, and I have learned to embrace the challenges I have overcome to come to this point in my life. At Seattle University, I am a journalism student, an Alfie Scholar, Tau Sigma and Alpha Sigma Honoree, and a first-generation college student. For all these experiences and more, I have my continuous hard work and parents to thank.

My story is one of many of being an international student here in the U.S. I share this story with you because as an international student from India studying in the United States, I have often felt excluded from classroom and campus conversations because I am not well-versed in the American culture and don’t speak English as my first language. I have encountered difficulties in communicating with the campus community because of language and academic barriers and risks to my legal status. I am sure other international students have had similar experiences. I think there is a strong need to address these challenges because universities as a whole must be mindful of the diverse backgrounds and cultures that international students come from. They must work
to provide adequate support to these students so that we can allow them to have a fulfilling and holistic college experience.

So how can our institution make this student population feel more supported and connected to the campus community? Of course, providing more financial support is helpful and being mindful of the disparities in the different currency exchange rates and tuition costs around the world and the high cost of housing in Seattle. However, there are other ways in which universities, faculty, and staff can support these students. For example, we can incorporate the observance of all religious holidays into our academic calendar, include subject matter from other countries in the curriculum, and train faculty and staff on cultural competence and understanding challenges of ESL (English as a Second Language) students. In addition to this, more academic support systems, such as a cohort model like Alfies that includes academic enrichment programs, leadership training, individual advising, and quarterly retreats, as well as having counselors with cross-cultural competence would be helpful. As an international student community, we can make a concerted effort to invite more domestic students to international students' events, such as various cultural information sessions or celebrations. Likewise, domestic students can invite international students to events, such as their traditional celebrations like Thanksgiving and Christmas giving them exposure to their American traditions and customs. In this way, we can build cultural competence, increase global awareness among all students, and create leaders for a just and humane world.
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“NAFSA International Student Economic Value Tool.” NAFSA, Retrieved from https://www.nafsa.org/Policy_and_Advocacy/Policy_Resources/Policy_Trends_and_Data/NAFSA_International_Student_Economic_Value_Tool/

Continuing to Navigate My First-Gen Identity
Tasmia Moosani

I am celebrated as an individual who graduated from college and was the first in my family to obtain a bachelor’s degree. I beat the odds as most people would say. Considering the shortage of resources from my low-income high school, the accomplishment is impressive and I am definitely proud of myself. But no one really talks about being first gen after you graduate.

I was very involved in undergrad. This meant that I also had a lot of supervisors who served as mentors in various positions on campus. In my last year of undergrad, I was doing a lot of interviews to have a job post-graduation. I found nothing that excited me and was feeling very lost. I talked to a few of my supervisors about it and reached to the conclusion that I wanted to do what they do: to work in positions that support college students, specifically underserved college students. I did not know much about the graduate school application process, so I “Googled” mostly everything and submitted a few applications. I got accepted, but I was trying to figure out which school was the best program for me. I knew my main priority was a program that was financially best, so
after much deliberation I chose the Student Development Administration Program at Seattle University. It provided me a Graduate Assistantship which would help me pay for basic necessities. As I transitioned to my master’s program and my Graduate Assistantship as an Academic Advisor at Seattle University, I expected to feel less confused and more belonging as I am now at par because of my degree with my non-first gen, low-income peers.

A little over a month into my program and my job, this “out of place” feeling still had not gone away. In addition to feeling out of place, I began to feel like hiring me must have been a mistake or that I was not capable of doing this job right. Seattle University is a Predominately White Institution (PWI), and this was a new environment for me to be in as a first gen, womxn of color professional. I thought about who I could talk to about what I was feeling. I grew up with an independent mindset, so asking for help felt odd and unusual. When I thought about turning to my parents, I did not want them to think that I was struggling or that I would fail to achieve the “American Dream” they worked so hard to give me. I was also worried they would not understand because they have not been in a situation like this before. I was the first of my siblings to attend college and navigate higher education so I am the person my siblings turned to for questions and advice for everything. My mentors from undergrad supported me with their time and energy and were so proud of me for pursuing my Masters. I felt pressured to succeed for them and ashamed to seek help from them. I did not want to run the risk of my family, mentors and peers doubting my abilities, achievements, and performances. Being underestimated by others is a reason why a lot of
first-gen students will either not seek out for help or choose to remain invisible.

It was difficult to imagine that someone could understand my complex experience that included my multiple intersecting identities, and could help me navigate all of these overwhelming feelings of imposter syndrome. I stayed with these feelings for almost a year. It was not until I did my research project which focused on first-generation students of color that I began to unpack all of this. I read similar stories and research done specifically on first-gen, low-income students which focused on their sense of belonging and imposter syndrome. I realized my background as a first gen low income identity is seen as a deficit rather than a strength. I do not want to be pitied by others for not being able to afford a better education or for not having parents familiar with the higher education system to help me navigate it. Instead, I bring other values that I learned being first-gen, low income & South Asian womxn of color. I will continue to persist and stay resilient in the face of adversity. Learning that I am not alone in this journey is helping me lean on the people closest to me and actively seeking out mentors who share similar experiences. This June, I’ll be the first womxn in my immediate and extended family to graduate with a Master’s degree.
When I say fine
I mean F.I.N.E.
Fucked up - Insecure - Neurotic - Emotional

When I say fucked up
I mean F-U. C-K. E-D. U-P.
Felt-Up - Coerced-Kisses - Enforced-Dilemmas
Unceasingly-Perpetuated

When I say insecure
I mean in-se-cure
I mean in-search
of the cure for what
I see in the mirror
I mean in-search
of the elixir for me to be
the object of your desire
When I say neurotic
I mean crazy
  prescription crazy
I mean pill poppin’ crazy
  therapy on Wednesdays crazy
I mean, do you hate me? - crazy
  cancelled plans crazy
I mean late nights and early mornings crazy
  one too many Amazon orders crazy
I mean should I even get out of bed today? - crazy

When I say Emotional
I mean e-motional
  electricity required for movement
motivation for the
  initiation of feeling
feeling around
  for life-giving batteries

  perseverance pushes
past pain, past plight
  pushes
past peril, past problem
push
past fine, and you will find
that I am, just, F.I.N.E.
First-Gen Guilt and Learning To Understand It
Dom Friz

i used to ...

call my mom three or four times a day - in fact, i judged people who didn’t call their family as often. while i physically existed at seattle university, my presence remained at home. i had a difficult time connecting to people, because i actively resisted it. i told myself, why bother connecting to people here? i know i am going home, i know i don't like it here, i know i can’t stay here. in fact, i thought the only way to make it out of here, was to keep to myself. i didn’t let myself have fun, because i thought it reflected on how much i didn’t miss my family. if i was having fun, it was because i was not working hard enough and i needed to do better. i actively deprived myself of fun because the guilt of being a first generation college student consumed me. on the rare occasion i did have fun, i instantly regretted it.

then, i started ...

gaining tools to cope. i went to a conference about access to higher education where a speaker addressed the concept of “bringing it back to your
community”. She rejected the idea that everything we learn in college needs to be brought back to our communities. She highlighted that our communities are knowledgeable, despite stereotypes and misperceptions. In fact, she asked us to do the exact opposite — bring our communities into higher education. She says, “I never wrote an essay without a chola character in it. Sometimes it got me in trouble with my grades or my reputation with the teachers, but my love for my neighborhood is more important than that”. So, I took a chance. I realized that I needed to have fun to survive four long, difficult years. While I felt less guilty about having fun, I slowly felt more and more distant from home. I was surviving at school but only because I was further away from home. I had the privilege to look the other way whenever I wanted because I wasn’t living that struggle at home anymore. At school, I talked to people with PhD’s and had access to luxurious spaces on campus to study.

Now, I know..

How to address that guilt and channel it into the labor of creating greater access to higher education for first generation college students. When I think about first generation college students, I think beyond that, and about those who are not in the room because barriers were so significant that it pushed them out of the opportunity. When I think of first generation college students, I think of the community that we need in order to survive when we are able to make it in here.

Guilt is an expected process of higher education for first-generation college students. It often gets
mislabeled as homesick or being on academic probation. While I might not live the struggle at home anymore, I can talk about it, learn from it, share it, and bring it into my higher education. But, that doesn’t mean everything miraculously becomes perfect. There is a sense of guilt in sharing my post-graduation plans, because there are more pertinent things happening at home. I’m three months away from graduating and my family has no idea what my plans are, even though I’ve been working on that plan for months, years even. Although she doesn’t know everything going on, she knows so much more than I planned to tell her. It’s a different type of guilt.
My Red Childhood
Bilen Ozlem “Oz” Sener

I was looking forward to every spring to see the poppy field right by our neighborhood. One of my earliest memories, I and my friend were running in field with joy and lost in the color of the poppy field.

One day, my mom brought home roll of red ribbon. Seeing the red ribbon in her hand made me happiest girl on the world. I asked my mom to make the biggest red bow, like a poppy, for my hair. She said, “Not now, we have to save the red ribbon for your first day of the school.” Weeks, months, and maybe about a year, I waited for the big day. Finally, I had a big red bow on my hair with a big smile on my face and ready to go the school.

I remember standing up by myself in asphalt schoolyard and watching the children who were dressed black uniforms with a white collar running around me. There were no flowers to smell or trees to climb in the asphalt schoolyard. Everything was concrete cold.

At the end of the day, I went home holding my red ribbon in my hand. My teacher told me that the red bow was not allowed at the school. I wanted to asked how it was possible that they didn't like my red bow. I couldn't. I thought maybe they haven't seen
the poppies yet? I sat on the couch in living room, and my tears went down my face. My mom held my little face in her palms and said, “Don’t worry, we can cover your books with red.” She put some red in my childhood world again to make me excited about my schooling.

From the first day, I learned that school was going to tell me who I supposed to be as a girl: What I should wear, how I supposed to run, what I supposed to learn, and which major I supposed to pick for my future.

My mom has never gone to school. She learned how to write and read in her twenties when nationwide education reform targeted adults. Whenever I struggled at school, I remembered my mom’s words, “I have never had the chance to go to the school like you. I have never had a job because of that. I want you to study hard for me, and show everyone that a girl can be successful and stand on her own two feet.”

I carried her education dream with me to every classroom I was in and promised to bloom for her. She did everything to make sure that her daughters get an education and become independent women. Her work paid off. My sister and I became the first females who completed college in extended family.

I hope you are proud of you with your little poppy, Mom.
"¡Ay mijo! Estás muy flaco," my mom exclaimed as she bear-hugged my skeleton body at baggage claim. It was 15 minutes to midnight, and I had finally touched down in Seattle. I was away from home and away from "real food," i.e. mom's cooking, for three months.

February 22nd, just a few days after my 22nd birthday, I received an email from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health (HSPH). Amy Wooldridge, Associate Director of the Office for Student Affairs (OSA) authored it, leaving the subject line to simply read "Offer." I had applied, and interviewed, for several internships months earlier -- Harvard was one of them. I figured this was that, so I immediately opened it. I was offered a paid internship in Boston with free housing included. Thrilled as I was, I was reluctant to accept the position right away. I asked for a day to think it over.

Pursing this opportunity was scary. I was afraid it would further increase the distance between my family. And, I was afraid I wouldn't fit in where I was going.

As a full-time student with a graduate
assistantship and a part-time job, I was spending more time with my reflection on the computer screen than with the people that raised me. I spent little time with the people that saw little Memo take his first steps on his first birthday, and, ten years later, walk face first into a tree. When I wasn’t in the office or class, I was stuck in I-5 traffic or reading a higher ed book in bed.

Distance was created not just by the amount of time I was spending away from my family. I was learning bigger words. I was supervising college students. I was rubbing elbows with people in higher positions. I was becoming part of an institution that my parents had never set foot on.

But, I never fully felt like part of the institution. I was poor. I didn’t come from a family of scholars. I was an introvert pursuing a degree to work a profession where extroverts shine. But, Harvard chose me. All things considered, I emailed Amy back and accepted.

I hopped on a plane and went to Boston upon wrapping up my final exams. Things were different -- the work, the weather, the culture, the food, and the lack of people I knew. I lived in a one-bedroom apartment within five-minute walking distance to Fenway Park and ten minutes from about seven other colleges. I tried to be optimistic that I’d click with people, since it was a young neighborhood. Most people though already had their circles, their families, and partners. Being the introvert that I am, I didn’t want to join and be the extra wheel.

One time, I got brave and attended a social event with a group of Harvard graduate students. I sat there feeling dumb, because they were having a deep conversation on biostatistics and immunology --
things I had no clue about. What I had feared was becoming reality. I didn’t belong.

Some days, I’d put my headphones on and start walking into the city with no destination. I’d walk for about an hour, listening to anything from J. Cole to Prince Royce. When I was lost enough, I’d pull up my map and find my way back. By the time I got home and cooked dinner and showered, it was time for bed. That was often my routine.

About a month into my internship, upon returning from one of my walks, I noticed a package addressed to me in mom’s handwriting. It was a heavy package -- beat up around the corners with scuff marks. I ran it up to my room and opened it. The scent of gorditas de azucar instantly ran up my nose. I saw Gansitos, Rebanadas, horchata mix, sopa de fideo and a can of jalapenos, amongst other things. My family had filled a box with things I’d eat back home and a card. For those 15 minutes that I sat opening the package and reading the card I felt a strong sense of belonging. It didn’t matter that I was three thousand miles away at an Ivy League institution working in a field they knew little to nothing about. I was a permanent member of my family.

This increased sense of belonging motivated me to further dive into my work. During orientation week, I got the opportunity to co-lead a day-long program titled, “Self, Social, and Global Awareness: Capacity Building for a Public Health Professional.” As I stood in front of a group of 22 Harvard graduate students covering topics of identity, power, and privilege, I felt a deep sense of gratitude for the experience. I was showcasing what I knew and breaking down barriers. I was getting to know the students beyond their
education status. In the days to come, I found my circle. We went out museums, ice cream, and even caught a Red Sox game.

My last day in Boston arrived before I knew it. I took off with a renewed sense who I am.

Landing in Seattle, I had on a light-jacket, unzipped, and a backwards hat. An outfit not suited to shield me from the brisk cold air making its way in through the ever-opening sliding airport doors. Walking with my family, I was finally home.
Series of Firsts, Series of Generations
Erick Yanzon

Series of firsts, series of generations
From trial and error to fake it till you make it
From passed on trauma to manifestation and liberation

Attending an American university
For my family was a big opportunity
From migration to adaptability
To education as a tool for mobility

SERIES OF FIRSTS

The first time I stepped foot in this country
My body rejected the cold
Being removed from home, detached from my environment
For the sake of security and stability

The first time going to high school
Where I felt alone and didn’t belong
Sitting by myself trying to look cool
But really it was home, that I longed
From taking ELL classes to AP courses
From joining clubs and getting involved
My parents never knew how much it took
To assimilate to look the same

Doing things because that’s what everyone else did
Applied to college, imagining a future for myself
Not knowing the process, but I tried my best

From scholarship applications to college fairs
To financial aid and writing essays
Selling my experience of trauma and adversity
To prove I can take up space in a university

_The first time I went to college_
I felt great excitement and glee
Moving away from home
To finally be independent and free

Being immigrant and being queer,
I always live in contradiction
Because I’m not really from here,
yet I cannot claim my home
And I’m not really the man who they want me to be
Yet I cannot claim being neither gender nor both

_The first time i had the language to define who i am_
The intersection of my identities to my lived experience
Realizing it’s rooted from trauma and oppression
Being conditioned to feel as if I’m other
But having this knowledge comes this privilege
Thinking about who has access to this language
How am I really me, if I can’t explain it
To my own family, they won’t understand it

Feeling like an imposter
Am I meant to be here?
Questioning my own existence
Was it all just false pretense?

Expected to keep working hard
Expected to be the model minority,
The model immigrant, the model child
Constantly proving my presence, my pride

SERIES OF GENERATIONS

Looking back to move forward
Connecting the past to my present
Paying tribute to my ancestors
Who dreamed of my future

The generation of erasure
Being stripped away of our own culture
What does it mean to be Filipino?
When colonial mentality is all that we know

Three hundred years of Spanish militia
Then come the United States of America
Seven thousand islands of identity coma
Words can’t even describe the generational trauma
We are a matriarch
We are queer
We are warriors
We are fierce

Hundreds of dialects, folk dances
Ancestral spirits are our culture
Our lands, our waters
Our beautiful rich nature

The generation of survival
From saving every grain of rice
To conserving water
As if you may not have tomorrow

My grandmother lived through wars and poverty
Raised ten children, mostly on her own
She was strong, she was witty
She is why I am even here

The generation of perseverance
Conditioned to work hard and to persist
Breaking down the cycle of succumbing
Doing whatever it takes, giving up everything
Packed up our whole lives
Crossing waters and borders
Doesn’t matter how
coz pesos will always be less than dollars
My dad went from a business manager
in Saudi Arabia
To a graveyard shift janitor in America

My mother left her own family
So she can give my sister and I a life of quality
Hiding secrets from her past
How long will these contradictions last

The generation of dreaming
For my parents who gave me the life that i have
To thrive
To think of a future for ourselves

Learning, growing
Finding a sense of belonging
Transcending assumptions, disrupting systems
Becoming a force to be reckoned with

And I am the first generation
Who got a degree
A piece of paper

The generation of freedom
To my future children, know that you are loved
And i hope wherever you go, whatever you do
That you feel accepted in all aspects of who you are
Your brown skin, your thick hair
Loving who you love
And becoming who you want to be
Embracing the shape of your body,
The make of your being
The history of survival, perseverance
And dreaming seeped into your veins

You are strong, you are beautiful, you are resilient
You are every fiber of the generations that came before you
You are a changemaker, you are a fighter
You are our ancestors’ wildest dreams
Sometimes I need to be reminded of my name
I need to be reminded of the boiling blood
of the womb
and of the frozen blood of my veins

inundated by arousal
and carnage,
this instinct nurtured by my seclusion.

it roams endlessly.
as darkness is a lover so shall
Light be the affair.

isolation; my sustenance
swallowed by shame of virtue
relaying signals to the oscillations of
my appetite
words make for poor firewood
writing with a pen soaked in kerosene and sparked
with petulant doubt

they both fail me,
the food and the words.
and I begin to mistake them
for the other

the pins and the pines are mine,
the few things I can keep
while they fall as I do
ideas so splendid, yet so artificial

it's my own garden
even Lilith could have loved
smooth and dry, synergy unexpected

the branch so beautiful
and the loneliness so divine
even Cain neglected silence this still

“am I not my sister's keeper”
as Eve so cleverly reminded me
so she kept me breathing,
snapping and twisting the branch
which darkness clung to
selected for redemption
by the One I damned;
rejecting nights of chewing blank pages
and crying gasoline tears

greed no longer spoke to me
it no longer had its clutches on my mortality;
its hands faded around my ankle

and the branch no longer looked beautiful
and neither did the tree it hung on
they all just looked like buried treasure
long belonging to others strayed from the path.
positivity, Exploration & Responsibility: An Open Letter

December 28, 2018

Dear Dad,

It has been almost eight years since I have been home for the holidays - eight years since I moved from Texas to pursue a new life full of positivity, exploration, and responsibility. During this time, I have come to understand myself and the intersections of my identities; in particular - what it means to be first-generation.

Not everything is what it seems. I remember walking through the halls of my high school known as the guy who was overly involved, smiley, and questionably queer. The four years that I spent within the halls of Round Rock High School were some of the best and most challenging years of my life. It also was a time where I feel as though I needed you the most and I questioned: How does my father perceive me?

Living with mom was a rollercoaster. A home filled with love, housing and food insecurity hindered our sense of stability. I knew I never would have to worry about things like this with you.
I never had to worry about having a roof over my head or clothes on my back. However, I didn’t feel comfortable. I felt I didn’t quite know you. I felt like you didn’t quite know me.

On the outside, I showed up as this positive and upbeat spirit. On the inside, I was truly struggling to keep it together. I knew that it was important for me to keep my chin up and to remain persistent. When I reflect upon my high school experience, I think about how lucky I was to have met the people I did, to be involved in the clubs I was a part of, and to have the support of teachers who truly believed in my potential. I realize that I was one of the lucky ones. While I did not have the same privileges or lived experiences of some of my white peers, I was a Black/Latinx student who defied the odds—personally and systemically—to successfully complete high school.

This reinforces the positivity and light I try to bring into the spaces I am a part of.

When I “left the nest,” it allowed me
to transition into adulthood in a way that was exciting but unfamiliar. Being first-gen, I had no idea what I was getting into. So much of my experience was trusting my gut and engaging in courageous conversations; both are qualities I believe I got from you. We aren’t so different, Dad. I remember you telling me about your experience leaving the nest to go into the military after high school—how hard that was for Grandma Christine—but how proud she was of you when you returned.

I have always been someone who wanted to make the most of any opportunities I am provided. Moving to Wisconsin for my undergraduate program at the University of Wisconsin-Stout allowed me to explore the different parts of my identity. My involvement with the Queer and the Gender & Sexuality Alliance allowed me the freedom to explore my sexuality and educate myself on issues impacting others like myself. I was able to feel love and acceptance from such a tight-knit community and develop programming that would create a safe and welcoming campus culture, one that I
Also wanted to feel a part of.

Joining Pi Lambda Phi Fraternity empowered me to become a prominent student leader of color on a predominantly white campus. Being away from home made me feel like an outsider at times to my own cultural background—feelings of not being Black enough or Latinx enough. However, being a part of this brotherhood family taught me how to advocate for myself and those who aren’t always able to advocate for themselves.

Joining the McNair Scholars program completely changed the trajectory of my life. I had no plans of continuing with my education beyond my bachelor’s degree. If it wasn’t for my incredible advisors, Sarah and Jen, I wouldn’t have pursued a master’s degree and become the first male on either side of the family to do so. They showed me how resilient I was and encouraged me to reach for the stars, even when I didn’t think the stars were possible. From these experiences, I learned to celebrate my queerness, my multi-racial first-generation identities in ways that would uplift me to the highest caliber.
That is something I wish I hadn’t of waited until college to do. Ultimately, this taught me to be proud of who I am and where I came from.

When I think about who I was eight years ago and how that has shaped who I am today, I can’t help but feel proud. Eight years ago, my sense of responsibility was to myself. I worked so that I could provide for myself without placing any financial burdens on the family. Being home this holiday season has reminded me of how much we are alike. It has reminded me of how important family is to me. I am grateful to have a father in my life who accepts me for me. No matter how many miles apart, I have been taught a sense of responsibility and maturity that I will carry with me for years to come, which I learned from you.

While I know you and the rest of the family are proud of my accomplishments, I can’t help but feel this sense of guilt for pursuing my education and focusing on my own development knowing that it ultimately came at a cost.
My biggest regret is sacrificing my time with you all in order to move forward. I have missed out on many birthdays and holidays. This realization came during my recent visit home for the holidays when my cousin, Anden, who I hadn’t seen since he was about four years old, didn’t even remember who I was. That was so hard and honestly broke my heart. That’s not how I want things to be. I am committed to coming home more, and I want to soak up every opportunity I can to be surrounded by the ones who matter most in my life.

Despite everything we have been through, Dad, I wouldn’t trade it for the world. I have been able to understand the different facets of my being; what it means to be Black, Latinx, Gay. I have been able to meet and make beautiful connections with some of the most amazing communities. Whether it was high school teachers, college advisors, or colleagues from graduate school or my profession, I believe now more than ever that it truly takes a village. The last eight years taught me who all of this was for. My sense of responsibility has
Shifted. As a first-generation college graduate, my responsibility is to role-model and represent what is possible for our family, to make you and mom proud, and to ultimately have an impact in my profession.

I'm sorry it has taken me so long to share all of this with you, but I felt like now was the perfect time. It was important for me to share this experience with you, because you deserved to know. The road hasn't been easy, but I hope that you are proud. I hope you know that at the end of the day, all of this was for you and the family. Thank you for everything. I love you.

-D
January 13, 2019

TO my mentors,

I do not think I would be where I am today if it weren’t for you encouraging me to think outside the box, step into leadership roles I never imagined myself in, and follow my passions. As a first-generation college student from a separated family and low socioeconomic background, I did not have the resources or support that my friends had. I was the author of my own experience with some help from all of you. In each chapter of my life, you have stewarded me towards success. I hope to uplift you, because you did the same for me.

As a recent master of Education graduate from Seattle University, I have the honor of serving as a High School Mentor with a national non-profit in Seattle who supports high school students navigating a similar path as I did. Everyday, I get to connect with over 30 students to assist them in reaching their dreams. Through the highs and the lows, I get to share my wisdom and learn alongside them. Doing this work is everything I could have asked for and more...
Mentorship can be a valuable thing, and I know this both as a recipient and as a professional mentor. Sometimes I must remind myself to “claim my excellence”, because you never know what could come from it.

So, from the bottom of my heart, I just want to say THANK YOU.

With Gratitude,
De'Andre Jones, M.Ed
Dear Chef Reed,

Thank you for always being real and seeing something in me that I often didn’t see in myself. You helped to bring out the positivity within me in some of the darkest moments of my life.

My passion for helping others, innovative thinking, and optimism are largely attributed to you. Lastly, I hope to impact my high school mentees to the level of which you impacted me.

With love and gratitude,

DeAndre Jones, M.Ed
Round Rock High School Culinary Arts
Class of 2011
January 15, 2019

My Incredible McNair Scholars Advisors,

I am so thankful I took a chance
and applied to McNair! Sarah and Jen...
If it weren’t for you believing in me
and introducing me to the possibilities of
graduate school, the entire landscape
of my life would be different. The skills
you taught me and the encouragement I
received when applying to Seattle
University is something all first-gen
students deserve.

Appreciate you more than you will ever
know, and the students at UW-Stout
are lucky to have you!

With love and gratitude,
DeAndre Jones, M.Ed
UW-Stout McNair Scholar
Class of 2018
January 16, 2019

Dear SDA Faculty,

The past two years in the SDA program have been AMAZING! I learned so much from each and everyone of you and I am honored to have been a part of such an effective and intentional graduate experience. As a result, I have become a more reflective practitioner and my passion for our field/work provides me with a sense of meaning and purpose.

Thanks for everything and your mentorship in my life even beyond the walls of Seattle U.

With gratitude,
DeAndre Jones, M.Ed
Student Development Administration
Class of 2018
Dear Grah,

[Handwritten date: January 17, 2019]

Where do I even begin? You have provided me with many opportunities to engage with the Seattle University Community. The creation of the Outreach Center served as a safe haven for me. I was able to develop a community, understand and explore my identities on a deeper level, and witnessed the significant impact we as people of color can have in the workplace as an example of your leadership. You are so humble, thoughtful, and such a valuable asset to our field. If I can even be a 1/4 of the professional and genuine human being you are when I grow up, I’d be happy. Thank you for inspiring me to be better and for becoming one of my dear friends.

With love, gratitude, and appreciation.

DeAndre Jones, M.Ed.
February 13, 2021

Last and certainly NOT least, Theree.

1. Thank you for being a mentor, colleague, advocate, and friend.
2. Thank you for believing in me even when I was experiencing some serious imposter syndrome.
3. Thank you for teaching me what it means to use my voice and to claim my excellence when it's truly deserved.
4. Thank you for exemplifying what it means to be a strong person of color in our fields of higher education and college access.
5. Thank you for never judging me and challenging me to not become jaded in the difficult moments.
6. Thank you for the continued impact you have had on my life and the lives of our students. We are all better for it!
7. Thank you for the shared inside jokes, lunch runs, and reminding me to have fun!

Grateful our paths have crossed!

Much love and gratitude, friend.

Mr. DeAndre Jones, M.Ed.
2017 Summer Fellow & Program Associate, Leadership Advisor

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About the Contributors

Tyler Bean, or Ty Bean as his friends and most professors call him, is a person who dreams of a world without barriers. A world where access is granted equitably to underserved groups and where those with privilege answer this call with open arms and good hearts. He would also like Gemini slander to be eradicated, and to understand that they are possibly the most misunderstood sign in the astrological zodiac. With both of those hefty goals in mind, he currently studies Student Development Administration at Seattle U and hopes to make a difference in the lives of the students he works with.

Kristine Dao is a first generation immigrant Vietnamese-Chinese-American student. She is the child of two resilient parents who raised four daughters despite the adversities and limitations of poverty and immigrant status. Throughout her childhood she has found poetry and writing to be her safe place where she can express herself without feeling invalidated or as if she has to filter herself to make others comfortable with her existence. Kristine will be entering her senior year as a nursing student where she hopes to one day provide healthcare to marginalized/disadvantaged families, specifically women and children.

Dominique Friz is a first-generation college student in her 4th year of nursing school at Seattle University. She
is expecting to graduate with a Bachelors of Science in Nursing in June 2019. She grew up in the San Fernando Valley where she hopes to return to work as a nurse with people who are currently and were formerly incarcerated. She spends her time studying, cooking for friends, and exploring new things about Seattle. She is the co-founder of the Equity and Justice Committee in the College of Nursing - dedicated to the needs of first-generation college students, low-income students, and students of color. She believes the biggest contributors to her success include her family, friends, and mentors. She is especially thankful for the support from her family - Mom, Ado, Mela, Nicky, y Jessica. She couldn't have survived and thrived in college without the support of mentors including Josué Reynoso, Jennifer Fricas, Therry Eparwa, Gretchenrae Campera, and Tyrone Brown.

Mykal Green was born Christopher Mykal Green in Seattle on December 19, 1996. Currently attending Seattle University, he will graduate June 2019. With his English Creative Writing Degree, Mykal wishes to enter the education system to increase diversity surrounding students and their exposure to literature. Being a queer person of color, Mykal aims to create the images and stories he doesn’t see in the world, so the world can hear one more perspective on what it means to be both black and gay.

De’Andre Jones is a native Texan, De’Andre relocated to the Midwest where he attained his Bachelor of Science in Family & Consumer Sciences Education
from the University of Wisconsin - Stout. In 2018, he attained his Master of Education degree in Student Development Administration from Seattle University. Go Redhawks! De'Andre's open letter highlights the importance of mentorship; especially for students with marginalized identities and the power of resilience. In his free time, he enjoys spending time with his partner and friends, giving back to the SU community as a member of the Graduates of the Last Decade Alumni Council, and eating all the seafood the Pacific Northwest has to offer.

Chhavi Mehra is a Communication and Media Studies major with a specialization in journalism. She is an international student from India who came to the United States at the age of 19 to pursue her dream of attaining a university degree. As a woman coming from India, she experienced first-hand how she was once among the “voiceless” and wants to use her writing abilities to give voice to the underrepresented communities in India and America. She dedicates her story to her campus community and fellow international students. Through her story, she also hopes to bring pride to her ethnicity and her family and thanks her family for believing in her and supporting her in her educational and career endeavors.

Alejandro Monarrez is a Mexican American, first-gen, Loyola University Chicago graduate, United States Marine, and Seattle University School of Law student. He was born in Chicago, Illinois, and raised in Boca Raton, Florida. When not attending class, Alejandro
enjoys exploring Seattle with his wife, Iliana, and their Golden Retriever named Wrigley. Go Cubs!

**Tasmia Moosani** is a graduate student at Seattle University. Tasmia was born and raised in Southern California and attended the University of California, Irvine for her undergraduate degree. Some of her identities include being a first-generation student, Pakistani Muslim woman. Tasmia loves listening to music, hanging out with friends and family, watching Netflix for hours, playing basketball, and finding new ice cream shops!

**Samantha Penjaraenwatana** is a First-Gen, Asian American born in California and raised in Bellevue, Washington. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Community Psychology from the University of Washington Bothell. Samantha is a first-year graduate student at Seattle University pursuing her Master's in Student Development Administration. As the Graduate Coordinator for First-Generation Initiatives, Samantha supports First-Gen students in their transition into college through educational programming and the First To Soar peer mentor program. Samantha's interests includes playing as a tourist around WA state, crafting ideas from Pinterest, and spending time with her dog, family, and friends.

**Guillermo Sandoval** is a first-gen, Mexican-American, educator born in East Los Angeles, California, but raised in Tacoma, Washington. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Communications with a Minor in Global Engagement from UW Tacoma and a Master
of Education in Student Development Administration from Seattle University. His interests include playing soccer and tennis, and hanging with friends and family.

Bilen Ozlem “Oz” Sener is originally from Turkey. She lived in the capital city of Ankara, as well as the historical city of Istanbul. She received a B.A. degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey. She actively worked as a curriculum developer for grades K-12 at the Turkish Ministry of Education for a decade. She received M.Ed. from University of Washington, Bothell. Her study abroad experience and educational work in the USA led her to focus on equity in education, global citizenship, immigrant children during Master’s degree. Oz has worked as an educator in higher education over 10 years in the U.S. as an advisor. She is currently working as a Graduate Program Specialist in the College of Nursing at Seattle University. Oz loves reading Paulo Coelho, listening to Erik Satie, and spending time with her family.

Erick Yanzon is a first year graduate student at the Student Development Administration program. Their undergraduate alma mater is Western Washington University where they studied American Cultural Studies and Sociology. Erick was born and raised in Quezon City, Philippines, and they moved to the US 9 years ago, and have not been back ever since. The immigrant narrative is often about overcoming, but they think it’s also about reclaiming the parts of who you are in spaces you take up. It’s defining your own truth. It’s being resilient.
IMPRINT Committee
2018-2019

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