

FIRST-GEN FACULTY STORIES



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What was your experience like as a **FIRST-GEN STUDENT**?

Being a first-generation undergraduate student was challenging. I enrolled in a primarily White institution, because I received a scholarship that would pay for four years of college. Having this financial stability was a privilege I had earned but being in this environment with many students who had unearned (class and race) privileges was a daily reminder that I did not quite belong. I did not know how to be a student: how to take notes, how to study, which classes to choose, how to become involved in campus activities, how to engage with faculty, etc. By the end of my first year of school, I had determined that I was going to quit and move back to my hometown in Southwestern Colorado to be closer to my family. The only reason I stayed in school was because of a TRiO mentor who encouraged me to keep trying. And I did, eventually graduating and deciding to enroll in graduate school, which was even more difficult as a first-generation student. However, it was in graduate school that I found my voice, found my people, and found my calling as a teacher. I still experienced imposter syndrome, I still doubted myself and my abilities, but learned that I deserved to be in the classroom and I deserved the opportunities afforded other students.

What advice do you have for other **FIRST-GEN STUDENTS**?

Don't let the system or the people within it bring you down. People and institutions may make you feel as if you do not belong, but you do! Systems and bureaucracy may make it all feel pointless at times, but your work is not. Keep pushing forward and making space for yourself and those who follow. Keep asking questions, even when you think you are the only one with them...you are not! Find your people--even if it is only one person, find that one who is able to help you celebrate your successes. Don't forget those who helped you along the way, because they are still rooting for you.

How did you get to where you are **T O D A Y**?

- I had a mother who always believed in me and wanted more for me...still does.
- I had a passion for books and for learning...still do.
- I had a TRiO mentor who encouraged me to keep trying.
- I had some awful faculty in graduate school who said I would never make it...I pushed harder.
- I had grad school friends who made me feel at home...RIP Matt and Zach.
- I was in the right place at the right time and had a supervisor who believed in me... thanks, Arlene!
- I work hard and dance harder.