

FIRST-GEN FACULTY STORIES



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

I had a great time in my classes, where I felt like I knew how to be a student. But I struggled with the processes of college - figuring out a major, trying to find a way to pay for my rent, bills, and eat. I also worried a lot about what I'd do after college but had no idea how to actually figure out a career plan. I also felt a kind of disconnect when I went home - like I couldn't really talk to anyone in my family about what my college experience was like because it felt too fancy or out of touch. None of my friends at school were first gen (that I knew of) and my friends from high school who went to college all seemed to have a very different experience because their parents were paying for school and their rent and even giving them spending money! I felt kind of in my own little bubble where I couldn't be my full authentic self with anyone.

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

Three things: (1) Ask for help! You can say 'I don't even know what I am supposed to be asking but I need some help.' The faculty and staff at MSU Denver are here because we want to support students in achieving their dreams. Reach out and we will help you. (2) Don't let failure get you down. The more you strive to stretch yourself, the more you will struggle and the more you will fail. Instead of thinking that it is a sign that you are not good enough, think about it as a sign that you need to figure out a new way to solve the problem. For example, recently I ran for an elected position and lost and then sent an email asking about it to the whole College of Letters and Sciences faculty email list by accident (eek!). It stung and I was super embarrassing for a day. But, now I know that I need to be super careful about not hitting reply all and if I want to run for another position I need to do more active campaigning. (3) You are not alone in being first gen (half of our student body is!) and it is something you should be really proud of. It was not easy to get to where you are today. You are an inspiration for your younger siblings and cousins and young people from your neighborhood. And, you make MSU Denver a better place by being here. Bring your voice and your experiences to your classes - your classmates can learn a lot from you.

How did you get to where you are **TODAY**?

A mix of luck and hard work. I learned how to study when I was in college and I spent a lot of time on it. I also took advantage of every opportunity that was presented. For example, the picture of me in college is from my first poster presentation at the Cal Poly research symposium (similar to the URC here at MSU Denver). I also worked several jobs (as a house cleaner, working the register in a pizza restaurant, and in my campus library on work study funds), volunteered as a Girl Scout troop leader, served as a research assistant for a psychology professor, and was very involved in my university honors program and the psychology honors society. It was exhausting but I think all of this bolstered my applications for PhD programs. And I also got really lucky in that I was wait-listed at my first choice school and got into the program because someone else declined their offer.

I'm a developmental psychologist so I think a lot about why people end up having the life paths they do. The science clearly shows that there is a piece that has to do with your personal characteristics or behaviors, but there is also a huge piece that is environmental. Being a first-gen, female student coming from a low-income family the odds were stacked against me in some ways. But, as a multiracial person who is White presenting, I have also benefited from White privilege. And being cis-gender and heterosexual, I have faced less discrimination than many others in our community. So I have been able to 'make it' in spite of and because of the system. I hope that by making your way through school and by becoming a leader in our community, that you can help to change the system so that it is more fair and just for future generations of young people.