

Chapter 1 : First-Generation College Students Struggle

The Struggle to Be First: First-Gen Students May Be Torn Between College and Home By Alina Tugend Currently, 17 percent of Berkeley undergrads are first-generation—a group that struggles to cope with the transition to college.

A native-born citizen or resident of a country whose parents are foreign born, or a foreign-born citizen whose parents immigrated when that person was very young, that is, the first native-born generation. A foreign born citizen or resident who has immigrated to a new country of residence, that is, the first generation to immigrate. OED definition of "generation," section 6b. They earn the label the "1. Oftentimes, in the case of small children, a battle of linguistic comprehension occurs between their academic language and the language spoken at home. Sociologist Ruben Rumbaut was among the first to use the term to examine outcomes among those arriving in the United States before adolescence, but since then the term has expanded to include foreign students, as well as other unique individuals. However, their identification is affected by their experiences growing up in the new country. Second generation[edit] The term "second-generation" extends the concept of first-generation by one generation. As such, the term exhibits the same type of ambiguity as "first-generation," as well as additional ones. Like "first-generation immigrant," the term "second-generation" can refer to a member of either: The second generation of a family to inhabit, but the first natively born in, a country, or The second generation born in a country In the United States, among demographers and other social scientists, "second generation" refers to the U. Generation labeling immigrants is further complicated by the fact that immigrant generations may not correspond to the genealogical generations of a family. For instance, if a family of two parents and their two adult children immigrate to a new country, members in both generations of this family may be considered "first generation" by the former definition, as both parents and children were foreign-born, adult, immigrants. Likewise, if the two parents had a third child later on, this child would be of a different immigrant generation from that of its siblings. For every generation, the factor of mixed-generation marriages further convolutes the issue, as a person may have immigrants at several different levels of his or her ancestry. These ambiguities notwithstanding, generation labeling is frequently used in parlance, news articles [1] , and reference articles without deliberate clarification of birthplace or naturalization. It may or may not be possible to determine, from context, which meaning is intended. Likewise, Statistics Canada defines second generation persons as those individuals who were born in Canada and had at least one parent born outside Canada. Rumbaut has coined the terminology "1. Children who arrive in their adolescent years ages 13–17 are referred to as 1. Immigrant children usually have more in the way of family obligation than children not born of immigrants, so they are more likely feel pressure to study seriously at school and gain the ability to provide for their relatives. As bilinguals, they have "advantages on all tasks especially involving conflicting attention".

Chapter 2 : Advice to a First Generation Graduate Student -- The Struggle Continues | ACPA

In June of , I became the first in my family to graduate high school on time, and the following autumn, I became the first in my family en route to graduating college.

Life in Two Cultures: To be a part of two communities but neither of them feel like home. I was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota to two immigrants from Liberia. Both my mother and my father are from there. My father came much earlier than my mom and when they met, fell in love, got married, and had me. I never asked my father what made him come here; my mother came due to the escalation of the civil war that gripped the country. I grew up loving these foods. I would remember the times I would come home from grade school and the aroma would hit me at the door. At a young age, all I knew was the American culture. I had a greater love for McNuggets than I had for the traditional food my mother would make. I loved Bruce Lee movies and Power Rangers. My mother having a heavy accent with her speech did not impact my English abilities; I spoke with no accent and had quite an expansive vocabulary for a young child. The only friends I knew were Black and White. First-Generation Struggle As I reached my middle school years, all my friends identified me as being African American. Through all the confusion and questioning, I still managed to assimilate with ease. I was given names like: G-Way and Gonweezy by my black friends. At times, they would poke at my name but, it was never anything serious. Black kids were the only group of people I saw on a consistent basis until I reached high school. High school was a different animal. It was in high school, when being exposed to kids of my own background on a social level. In my school age years, the only time I was exposed to Liberians, was in church. This limited expose to people of my own heritage affected the way I interacted with both African Americans and Africans in general. I spoke with black mannerisms and never disclosed my ethnicity. Sometimes, I even told people that I was Black and Liberian, to try to mitigate the stigma that was attached to being African. A very large part of this came from how other African kids were treated around me. Things like African Booty Scratcher, the taunts about hunting lions, the walking around butt naked jokes, and more ways of taunting and insulting. Many of these kids, were involved in fights; the continued treatment can only be tolerated to a point until one feels the need to retaliate. I never took part in any of the taunting or subjugation of these students. It was a strange and difficult position to be in, to say the least. By my sophomore year, I was not ashamed to be seen with them. To a young mind, it was quite liberating, but it was not full-fledged by any means. I still hung on to my Black associations. I would still hang around my Black friends, most of the time. Even though I was making progress with accepting my heritage, I was still attached to the Black community. Growing up in a rough neighborhood with my grandmother and cousin, I was always considered one of the Black kids. My grandmother being Liberian herself and was well known in her non-Liberian circles, I was still considered Black by most people I encountered so it made sense to hold onto my affinity for the community; because it was all I knew. One day, the security I thought I knew, the camaraderie I thought I had, and the brotherhood I felt a part of, was pulled from under my feet and would set the pace of the evolution of self-acceptance. During art class in my junior year of high school, my friends and I were joking around. The topic of my name came up. I know some niggas that got African names like Hakeem and Mohammed, but I never heard your name before. Where is your name from? My mom and dad are from there. We have been friends all this time and I thought you were Black. I bet your mom was one of them females on National Geographic with their titties out. We hung out, I helped them with lunch money and other things when they needed it, and at times, even got into a little trouble with them. I was even initiated into the same gang as these guys at one point. It certainly made me question not only my friendships with them, but also, my friendships with others who might have had the same assumption as them. I knew a lot of these kids and hung around them a lot. I never considered myself one of the cool kids. They liked hanging around me and we would share jokes and laughs, although there was never a bond or anything tangible that came from the friendships. This time, I knew it was coming; I had prepared myself for it. The way I looked at some the guys I hung around did change. I am still close to these friends today. Post-Secondary Madness The time I spent in community college was impactful in many ways; ways that shaped the person I am today. But I had not yet reached the cataclysm.

By the time I had entered community college, I had made a significant number of Liberian friends. This brought on a different set of issues although, these issues were internal and not external influences. While attending college in my freshman year, one of my friends was sitting at a table with a group of guys. As I walked closer to the table, I could recognize the accents they were speaking in. There was a mix of backgrounds at this table: Nigerian, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. Even in college, my demeanor and style stayed the same. When I approached the table and introduced myself, I faced a moral dilemma I had not faced prior to that moment. Say it the way your mom and dad say it. We both had a mutual friend whose family was close to mine. He was one of the Liberian friends that I knew growing up and was a great friend. The guy asked me to pronounce my name again. Say it like your ma call you. I had to slay this dragon at some point, why not now? I told him my name with the thick Liberian accent like my mother and father say it. Damn, took you forever. Now sit your ass down and relax. I grew comfortable with speaking in the traditional Liberian Broken English. I had a talent for switching it on and off; sometime, I would do this with my Black friends as a joke or to be sarcastic. I also began to branch out into my own community and became more comfortable being around them. I continued to speak spoke with an accent and learned cultural norms and vocabulary while I was at it. I could see myself evolving. One thing was certain, I was enjoying the process. I never stopped hanging with my Black friends and, made new ones while in college. They found it cool how I was able switch between accents with ease. I would make jokes in the Liberian English and go back to speaking like them. I would even talk to non-Liberian women in the accent be different. They found it cute and it was a good way of disarming the wall they would put up. Friends and I dressed in traditional West African clothing at an event. A Lion with No Pride Though I made tremendous progress, there was always a void and wanting to feel at home somewhere. The missing ingredient was always shared experiences. Being Liberian-American who could also pass as Black, made it difficult to form bonds on a deeper cultural level. I mean, one of my good friends of 13 years is from the St. Croix Islands in the U. S Virgin Islands but beside him, there was no one else I could say I formed a tight bond with; who accepted me based on cultural merit. I had a few Caucasian friends, but only trusted about It was the same with my Liberian friends also. Many of these guys would have stories of the games they would play when they were back home. Stories about how they escaped death in the Liberian Civil War that ravaged the country. Stories about having to share food and not having enough to eat; not being able to go to school because the parents did not have the money to pay for their tuition at times. My Black friends spoke of how their family members were killed in gang violence. Stories of how brother and sister fighting other people on their behalf; playing the neighborhood games and learning how to dance. Though i could relate to them on some levels, the things that connected them on a deeper, more intimate level was missing.

Chapter 3 : The struggle and honor of being a first-generation student – North Texas Daily

A First-Generation College Student's Perspective: The Power of Professional Mentoring in Helping to Change a Life I was born into a working-class family in Cambridge, Massachusetts, home to Harvard and MIT, but ironically, neither of my parents knew much about higher education.

When Christopher Curran started looking for the right university, his parents had little advice to offer. They had never attended college. Curran, from Whitman, Massachusetts, is the oldest of five children. Curran said he worked hard to impress his parents in school and daily life. His parents decided he would have what they never did. But they worked hard to send him to Boston College High School, a well-known and respected private high school, in He says he always felt different from his classmates. They had money for new clothes while he worked at a part-time job to pay for his transportation to and from school. Also, the parents of his classmates could share advice and connections from college. He is not alone. The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce studies the link between education and career success. Research from the organization says that almost 32 percent of undergraduate students in the U. The research also suggests first-generation students have a more difficult college experience than those with college-graduate parents. Researchers found only about 40 percent of first-generation students completed a degree or certificate program after six years. Compare that to 55 percent of students with college-graduate parents complete their programs in the same amount of time. In , Curran chose to attend Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts because it was close to his family. He could not ask his parents for advice about choosing classes. His mother was more worried about risky behaviors that happen at colleges, like alcohol use. Curran says he had to work harder than other students to prove himself. He wanted to show his parents that their effort of sending him to a special high school and to college was worth it. But he also realized, he said, that lacking some resources helped make him the man he is today. He says his path was long and never easy. But, he says, if a person never tries they will never know if they can succeed. Maria Urena is a college adviser with the College Success Foundation. Her organization works to improve college graduation rates among first-generation students and other minority groups. Urena notes that not all first-generation college students are the same. They may be from high- or low-income families. They may have been born in the U. Urena works with students at A. Davis High School in the northwestern state of Washington. About 80 percent of the students there live in poverty, she says. Also, 49 out of 50 students in her program have parents who never completed high school. Most of these students also have had to deal with traumatic experiences in their lives, Urena adds. This includes family members dying or going to prison. Also, families often need older children to work to provide extra income. Many of her students believe they will never go to college, she says. Those who choose higher education do not know what it requires. Urena meets regularly with students and parents to discuss their goals and how to reach them. She brings community members in to help students with their application materials. The library at A. Davis High School stays open late so students can apply for financial aid in their free time. Nichole Smith agrees that first-generation students need extra help with applying to schools. She says colleges should ensure that information to prospective students is clear. Even when a student is accepted to college, barriers persist. First-generation students often feel they do not belong. They feel greater stress and pressure to succeed, she says. They fail their parents. They fail their other relatives. That way, the dream of a college education can come true for them and hopefully their children as well. Did your parents attend college? Are your children first-generation college students? What do you think are the best ways to support them?

Chapter 4 : The struggles of being a first generation college student - USA

That constant struggle of being practically force-fed at the dinner table, followed by being told you've gained weight.

As the associate provost of Chaminade University of Honolulu, Curtis Washburn has met many first-generation college students. The majority of these students are low-income and the first in their family to go to college, Washburn said. That should last you four years. Now, go save the family. If so-called helicopter parents typically hover above students from more elite and educated families, many first-generation college students have the opposite problem: A study published in the Journal of College Student Retention in found that first-generation college students receive far less emotional, informational, and financial support from their parents than continuing-generation students. Those less-supported students also reported having higher levels of stress and anxiety than the few first-generation students who did feel supported by their parents. In many cases, the parents want to be involved, Washburn said, but they are not sure what level of involvement is appropriate and what advice to provide. In other cases, he said, parents may not understand the value of college, even encouraging students to drop out so they can more immediately help support the family. They have no map. That child is lost. First-generation students consistently take fewer classes, complete fewer classes, and earn lower grades than their classmates whose parents attended college, according to the NCES. As part of a recent program funded by the Walmart Foundation, 50 member institutions of the Council of Independent Colleges received grants to improve the retention of first-generation college students. Several of the colleges focused on parent involvement, among other solutions including building a community for first-generation students, providing mentors, and tracking their progress. At Chaminade, the university created brochures, handbooks, and videos in Samoan and Micronesian languages to better communicate with students and their parents, who may not speak English. Students are also invited to share cultural dances, legends, and myths as part of the curriculum, and these too are video taped and shared with family members back home. The College of Mount Saint Vincent, in the Bronx, started a program called the Parent Support Initiative that helped educate parents about the rigors of college. At the College of St. Scholastica, parents were invited to a two-day "Summer Launch" event that included a family luncheon and a break-out session for parents about adjusting to college life. The College of Idaho reimbursed the travel expenses of families who made the trek to its summer orientation for first-generation students. At Florida Memorial University, a college preparatory program called Black Male College Explorers helped first-generation students graduate from high school and college, providing them with mentoring and other help along the way -- including buying them their first suits. Strand, a sociology professor at Hood College who wrote a report about the initiatives. Not all professors and administrators are hoping for more parental involvement, however. At an event promoting the CIC programs, several faculty and staff members expressed apprehension toward, as one audience member put it, "inviting parents in even more. Often times, with these students, a parent may be his or her only advocate.

Chapter 5 : First-Generation Students and Their Struggle to Succeed | Diversity Journal

First-generation college students, or students whose parents have not earned a four-year degree, face unique psychological challenges. Although perhaps supportive of higher education, their.

A student can feel as if this large responsibility is placed upon you all at once. The feeling of honor at being the first from your family to go to college can quickly be overshadowed by the notion of not feeling prepared for the experience. At times it can feel like you are the trailblazer for your family. Everybody is looking to you to fulfill something that has not been done yet and is something to be proud of. Then you become blind-sided and hit hard when you are finally dropped into the college experience. Applying for financial aid, scholarships and all that comes with registering for college can be overwhelming. It can be tough even with support from family who have done so before. In cases of not being supported by family at all, a student can especially feel lost. Integrative studies senior Kendra Eakles has overcome this obstacle. My main memory was the first time I tried to fill out college applications, my parents were clueless, so I relied a lot on teachers in high school. My stepfather refused as well. I was completely alone in trying to figure out how to get student loans and grants. That causes a lot of self-doubt, which can translate into your academics and overall experience. Eakles often felt alone. She was perceived as anti-social and had to force herself to open to others. A lot of students in these circumstances can miss out on the social aspect of networking or knowing where to go to ask for help. UNT has a lot of resources to help students adjust and become well equipped. The Division of Student Affairs has a list for first-generation college students to utilize. It offers tips on how to navigate through the struggles they often face. Business sophomore Brooke Roberson is a transfer student. Roberson came to Denton after her freshman year at Louisiana State University. She assumed college would be something similar to high school. This can lead to a blind leading the blind situation and gives people a false sense of what college is. College is more than the financial aspect. It is the academics, the living situations and the connections with others as well. Having the knowledge of the process to get to college and access to the resources to help combat those difficulties should be a top priority for universities in helping students know what they have to do. UNT is doing its part. Featured illustration by Max Rain Tags.

Chapter 6 : The Struggle, First Generation (book) by Karen Palumbo on AuthorsDen

The struggles of being a first generation college student Benjamin Bui | January 23, in Pearson Students Thirty percent of current college students are first-generation.

The Struggle to Be First: Ledezma, 23, was born in Mexico and came to California with her family when she was 3; she currently has a student visa. She always knew that her parents put a high priority on education, even though neither had attended college. She was encouraged and discouraged by her family at the same time. Many receive these kinds of mixed messages from home and friends. Not all first-generation students are low income, but there is substantial overlap in the demographics. Less than two-thirds Of course, wide variations exist. Generally speaking, the more selective the college, the higher the graduation rate. Schools that are open to virtually all students have a graduation rate of Of transfer students almost one-third of the total number of new students at Berkeley, usually at the start of junior year and typically from a community college in 2011, 83 percent graduated within three years of transferring. Students at more selective universities often arrive better prepared and they often have access to more resources aimed at helping them stay in college, compared to those who enter less selective colleges, experts say. Last year, First Lady Michelle Obama released a video that deftly shows what experts say is the key challenge facing first-generation students: Mine were way too short. The programs that enrich the college experience, such as study abroad, working for a professor, or playing intramural sports, may seem to be a waste of time, Pike says. David Beard, associate professor of rhetoric, scientific, and technical communication at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, was the sixth person in his family to get through middle school, the fourth to finish high school, and first to go to college and then graduate school. Cal gets in touch with such students even before they even enroll, says Mejia. Although such ongoing support programs are needed, even seemingly small initiatives can make big differences. Along with coauthors MarYam Hamedani, associate director of the Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity at Stanford, and Mesmin Destin, assistant professor of psychology at Northwestern, Stephens conducted an experiment at the beginning of the academic year. In one intervention, third- and fourth-year students with widely varying backgrounds talked to a group of incoming freshmen—some first generation, some not. In another intervention, older students discussed the same issues without reference to social class. Beard, of the University of Minnesota, who has experienced the difference of being a first-generation student as well as a first-generation professor, said he strongly feels the need to mentor first-generation students who, like him, often feel lost and out of place. Besides double-majoring, she holds down three part-time jobs: She is now debating whether to go to law school or get a Ph. She hopes her younger brother, now in high school, will have it a little easier. She has Berkeley degrees in history and journalism.

Chapter 7 : The First-Generation Struggle: A Letter From My Year-Old Self - Noble Impact

*The Struggle, First Generation [Karen Palumbo] on calendrierdelascience.com *FREE* shipping on qualifying offers. Join a loving immigrant family as they leave their homeland of Italy and arrive in America to begin a new life.*

Friday, 27 February, - Despite our for I include myself in this population awareness of various resources on campus as student affairs professionals and graduates of four-year institutions, there was no connection to how we could use these resources as graduate students. So, the struggle continues. These are just a few strategies I have thought about to navigate graduate school as a first generation graduate student, some of which stem from hindsight and some I have utilized: Identify and Locate Campus Resources. Before arriving to campus, identify resources you used as an undergraduate. Then, evaluate whether these resources were helpful in navigating through your collegiate experience. You have already gained significant social capital around what to expect. Trust that you have the knowledge and skill sets to learn what you do not have. After arriving to campus, walk around to become familiar with the new institution. How far is it to walk from class? Where is the career center? Whatever questions come up for you—answer them through the walk around campus. This does not have to be alone. When I arrived to the University of Vermont I rode the campus bus several times a day to acclimate myself to where things were. I spoke with the bus driver and asked about buildings we were not stopping at. I worked to build connections and learn what was going on around me. This is another essential step as a first generation graduate student—create your support network and build familiarity. I felt lost when I arrived on campus. This feeling came back when I started graduate school. As a first generation graduate student, I could not go home and ask my family what it means to be a graduate student. Yet, I felt empowered because I at least had a better understanding of questions to ask and resources to locate. Different campuses have different resources. Schedule a meeting with the research librarian assigned to your department or field of study. The research librarian will help you save a significant amount of time in researching and developing your papers and research proposals. Just as there was an elevated level of quality and quantity of work from high school to undergrad there are elevated levels of quality and quantity of work from undergrad to graduate school. Begin by setting up appointments at the writing center before they are completely booked even if you do not have your assignments yet. After your first class with the professor schedule an appointment with them during office hours immediately. Write a set of questions to ask them and enter the space with the mindset that they do not know anything about you and your interest. It is your job to dialogue and engage with them. The goal is build a relationship with them and make yourself visible. Through training I was able to build connections with those in my department—both graduates and full-time professionals. The goal is to start building a relationship with them and find a network of those who can understand struggles you may encounter as your program goes on. Do not forget your friends and family back home and from your previous institution. While your family and friends may not understand what it means to be a first generation graduate student, they are pillars of support to talk about life outside of the professional world and outside of academics. It is a wonderful reminder that you have cheerleaders cheering you on towards success and completion of your degree. Transition is difficult and you will encounter new challenges and obstacles. Be proactive in taking care of your mental health and schedule an initial appointment with a counselor. Counselors can also help talk about things your family and friends cannot understand or have the full context form. Build in your schedule the chance to go to the gym and schedule an appointment to learn about what your student health insurance if applicable covers. As an undergraduate I under utilized this service—and lost out on free eye exams and dental check-ups. Graduate school is the space for you to continue to developing and learning about self-care. This list is not exhaustive of all the things a first generation graduate student can do to navigate graduate school. The tools for success as a graduate student is usually the same tools you used as an undergraduate to succeed. I am writing here to serve as a reminder of what to do. This information may seem obvious, but transparency is key and that helps first generation graduate students, such as myself, realize the amount of social capital we have gained from our undergraduate collegiate experience but are not consciously aware of. I welcome for others to add to this list and to reach out to me to learn of other strategies

I have used.

Chapter 8 : 1st Generation College Student: The Struggle – Karlaslifernote4note

In , Brown University started a first-generation college student network, 1vyG, that has now spread across the Ivy League, raising awareness of issues facing these students.

Eighty-five percent of those first generation college students are considered low income. Only eleven percent of those low-income students will be the first in their family to graduate from college. We are more than a statistic though. We are the new adventurers embarking in this new foreign world. I am a first generation college student. What does this mean? Well, it means that my parents never had the privilege to go to college. At the age of 18 and 15 my parent escaped from Vietnam after the Vietnam War. When they came to this new country, they went straight into working to give me a chance to succeed in the world. They sacrificed everything for me and always told me their greatest gift was to see me gain an education. My experience has allowed me to grasp opportunities while balancing school, family, and life. I had to quickly adapt to this foreign environment by learning how to file my own FAFSA, develop different payment methods, learn how to study and enjoy the college experience all at the same time. I feel if I fail in college I am not just failing for myself, but I am failing for my parents too as they invest time, money, and love into my education. My education is a gift from my family and the best way I can thank them is by graduating and putting my degree to work. This means spending long nights at the library to strive for the best grades while balancing different clubs, internships and a scholarship to set me apart from other students. My sophomore year of college I balanced three leadership roles on campus with intensive reading-heavy courses and finally a scholarship on the side. As my life became focused on school and accepting the challenge ahead of me, I started to forget what it means to spend time with my family. I rarely have time to see my parents who live only an hour away due to all the different extracurricular I am in. This difference causes a rift, and sometimes I feel like an outsider to my own family. Even though this rift exists, I always know I am striving to succeed in college for my family. Every decision or move I make impacts myself and my family. While balancing everything above, I am also living my own life. My parents are unable to help me navigate my course to a career in law because they have no prior knowledge. I lacked confidence in my dream of becoming a lawyer, because of the lack of resources. But, I was introduced to an amazing program called America Needs You which assists low-income, first-generation college students graduate through workshops and mentorships. The program has helped me build skills such as financial literacy, professionalism, networking and confidence. I understand the challenges that come with being the first family member to go to college. Keep pushing through your struggles and pain because in the end it will be worth it when you can walk across the stage with a college diploma for yourself and your family. I know what it feels like when the whole world is against you, or that your only option is to give up. I have been there. What I have learned is that you can achieve anything that you put your mind to. Please, go out there and raise the statistics that people have placed upon us. Let us be more than the eleven percent to graduate college, make it seventy-five percent or more. I believe in you, and I understand your struggle, but I know you will be able to do it. Benjamin is currently a junior at DePaul University. He is majoring in political science with a minor in philosophy. His career plan right now is to go to law school and either practice in immigration, corporate, or criminal law in the future. Outside of school, he loves to explore the beautiful city of Chicago and try the wonderful food!

Chapter 9 : Colleges struggle to engage parents of first-generation college students

First Generation Struggle: Activism and the "American Dream" As a first-generation Latina, I struggle. At times it feels as if I am being pulled in two different directions.

I re-discovered it today and am reminded we still have a long way to go until everyone, regardless of their personal backgrounds, has equitable access to education. But I am hopeful, and I hope this letter spreads that optimism. As a first-generation college student first in my family to attend college and Pell Grant recipient which is awarded to students from low-income families, I had always dreamed that education would change my path, but reflecting upon my life so far, it is almost surreal how much education has made a difference in my life. The below email was sent on September 18, to Dana Rasso, who was a content writer for NYU at the time and in charge of the newsletter to parents of prospective students among other publications in which my story eventually appeared. I was 22 years old and had made it through the toughest times in college, including a semester when I nearly dropped out due to financial constraints. I am forever grateful for programs like the Pell Grant and the many scholarships and loans that got me through college. I hope the following words can provide hope for students like year-old me who scrape by every day, encouraged by a vision of a better life. I only had a few hundred dollars saved for college, since I worked in a pizza shop, but had to pay for my car insurance and gasoline to get to school. It was hard, but I managed. If you want to cut it down, feel free. My mother is a single parent, earning an annual wage well under the poverty line. Most recently, she has undergone multiple surgeries, making it impossible for her to work. She now has no income and has lost a lot of our belongings as a result. Financial aid is crucial for my enrollment at NYU. Luckily, I am within the small percentage of students who get a large amount of scholarships. I also use my credit cards to pay for my remaining bill balances on most semester bills. Lastly, I receive Federal Work Study, which enables me to work 20 hours a week at an NYU job, earning money, which usually goes to food, my credit card bills, or the occasional splurge. It has been one big spaghetti marathon! But every now and then, I treat myself to a night out, a fancy dinner, or some great shoes. I figure that everyone has to live a little bit. Each year, after applying for the FAFSA you will be tearing out your hair wondering what the damage to your credit will be this time. The Financial Aid Office has a great staff, though, that will try their best to work with you. The biggest piece of advice that I have for you is perseverance. Keep calling, keep asking, keep applying. There are a ton of scholarships out there. Education is the most important asset a person can have. Do not miss the opportunity to have a great education at NYU, just because your family is not financially stable. Education is an investment in the future. I had a dream and I was not going to let it go. Hopefully when I graduate and get my first job, I will be making enough money to get my loans and credit card bills paid off within the first few years. Then, I hope to give back to NYU and the institutions that made my education possible. I hope that you, your student, and your family will have the spirit to challenge the system and dream your wildest dreams. This is a very sensitive subject for me, but I am more than happy to share my insight with anyone who is worried about financial aid at NYU. Please feel free to contact me with any further questions at [email]. Reading it, I can see myself back in my dorm room, typing away at my desk, loving the mind-expanding experience of rigorous, thought-provoking, life-changing academic discourse an experience I had rarely had growing up in Arkansas. That things are going wrong left and right. That people I love very dearly are falling into the tragic situations that statistics said they would, and that I should. Unemployment, addiction, homelessness, violence, abandonment, illness. This week has been a time of reflection, and I just happened upon this letter, because I had forgotten what I knew about the Pell Grant back in my days at NYU. I knew I had received it, but that was about it. Education equity was a topic that came up many times, even in talks in which it was not the focus. It is, of course, a highly important topic. Not everyone in America receives the same education and has the same access to opportunity. College graduation rates for Pell Grant recipients was a topic that hit my radar randomly as I was scanning the conference schedule. There is, on average, a 5. The increased national average is due to larger gaps at institutions where graduation rates are low overall for all students regardless of Pell status these are the institutions, sadly, where Pell Grant recipients are more likely to attend. At NYU, the gap is

smaller than average, but still present, at a 4. I wish I knew more Pell Grant recipients, more people who shared a difficult financial path through school. I wish I had known that when I was in college. I felt that same isolation in graduate school, which I completed last year. I finally had the courage, though, to share my story in a public, student-led storytelling forum. I spoke about how those labels “low-income and at-risk” can weigh on a person, and how they had for me since I was a child. There is a social stigma that keeps people from sharing these parts of their lives. Instead, I have taken jobs that appeal to my passions and contribute positively to the world, and I have been able to give back along the way. I still hope, though, that one day my work will scale well beyond my reach and my life. Without it, nothing I have achieved would be possible. I am completely changed because I had the opportunity to learn. I hope that one day we will live in a world in which everyone who wishes to study will have the opportunity to do so. Through education, we can change the world. Header image courtesy of New York University, circa