FIRST GENERATION INITIATIVE

FIRST-GEN PROFILES

December 12, 2017
In fall of 2016, UC Santa Cruz welcomed 16,962 students. Forty-two percent (7,124) of those students were first-generation students, those whose parents have not graduated from a four-year American institution.

Following the pioneering leadership of the University of California, Irvine and with support from the UC Office of the President, in spring 2017 UC Santa Cruz joined a UC system wide launch of the "#First-Gen College Grad" initiative.

This effort is focused on responding to and supporting the fast-growing first-generation college student population on the UC Santa Cruz campus. Our goal is to create a welcoming and supportive campus environment for all of our students.

“We don’t always know who the first-generation students are in our classrooms," notes First-Generation Initiative faculty director, Dr. Rebecca Covarrubias, an assistant professor in the psychology department. "In drawing attention to the shared identities among students, staff, and faculty we send a clear message that we want you here, you belong here, and you will succeed.”

The goals of this initiative are to:

- Raise the visibility of first-generation students at UCSC, and recognize the challenges and strengths they have as well as the unique gifts they bring to the university.
- Foster a positive campus climate that welcomes first-generation students and begins to build long-term relationships of support, understanding, and learning between students, faculty, and staff.
- Provide information and encouragement to first-generation students helping them identify and make strategic use of campus support services.
- Create spaces for discussion about how department-, college-, and division-specific policies and practices can best facilitate and support first-generation students’ academic success, belonging, and wellbeing.
- Build a network of allies with shared interests and a common goal in support of first-generation students.

Phase one, the "First-Gen Faculty Campaign", was launched during Student Achievement week, the last week of classes in spring, 2017. This initiative served to raise visibility of first-gen faculty and those faculty who signed up as first-gen supporters.

In fall, 2017 the campaign expands to include all faculty, staff and graduate students.

For current faculty, staff, or graduate students please sign up to join the campaign!

For more information, please contact firstgen@ucsc.edu.
My two older brothers and I were born and raised in San Francisco to parents who immigrated from Hong Kong. My parents are high school graduates who learned of the American grading system when we entered public school. My parents knew they were limited in how much they could help us in our studies, so they were more concerned with us passing with “C”s than excelling with “A”s. Instead, they stressed hard work and best personal efforts, over the more commonly measured success of comparison to others, be it with regards to grades or anything else.

What motivated me to go to college: While I vaguely remember an uncle graduating college when I was very young, the idea of higher education remained foreign to me until I saw my older brother go to UC Santa Cruz, moving first into Crown College before transferring to Oakes the following year and graduating from there a few years after. My most vivid memory from my brother’s time in college is his moving into Crown’s Maxwell House, and seeing his name on his dorm door on a construction paper cut-out of a coffee cup. That moment solidified for me what college was --- moving away from home, and fully immersing yourself in school as you really started traveling the path of what you wanted to be when you grew up. For the first time, chasing a dream career wasn’t a theoretical ice breaker game of filling in the blank, “When I grow up, I want to be…”. No, for the first time, I was watching the pursuit of a dream career happen. There was a tangible path and I wanted it for myself.

What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it: I rarely visited my brother in his time at UC Santa Cruz, and he spoke more to my eldest brother than to his bratty younger sister. So, I had no idea what to expect from college, no benchmark of what was normal with regards to school, classes, dorms, food, people, or anything else. I lumped any doubts I had with knowing that there’s always an awkwardness in acclimating to a new environment. Still, my awkwardness seemed very pronounced in my first year at UCSC, 1995-96, when I was getting used to the lower ethnic diversity of a small town in comparison to the San Francisco Bay Area. Although playfully said, my floor mates dubbed me “City Girl”, and often asked, “Are you API [happy] today?” in referencing the Asian Pacific Islander acronym. Always inclusive and nurturing, I knew my floor mates meant only fun. But it made me wonder what strangers were thinking of me if my friends were already teasing me. How much was I sticking out, and how much more would I be sticking out once people noticed I didn’t know how to navigate through office hours, sections, or being a single face in a sea of hundreds in a Classroom Unit 2 lecture?

I’m not sure how much of that awkwardness is attributed to being a City Mouse versus Country Mouse, a first-generation college goer versus the latest in a long line of the same. I think ultimately college is a culture shock for everyone as you take your own experiences and mix them with others. That said, I felt a tremendous amount of pressure knowing I was the first
female in my family to go away to school, even with Mom and Dad’s mantra of “just work hard and try your best” ringing in my ears. The biggest challenge as a first-generation student, then, is KNOWING you’re a first-generation student and wanting to do right by that opportunity. And one of the reasons I wanted to participate in #FirstGen is because I never really overcame that. Being a first-generation student is a weight when you are going through school, and a medal when you graduate, knowing the whole time that you’re doing something your parents never did. It’s a journey that changes you, and I can only hope that the #FirstGen campaign will help current students find a solace I missed.

How my background has helped me: My dad worked two and a half jobs when he first immigrated to the U.S. from Hong Kong. As a new immigrant, my mom learned how to be a mother, cooked for an entourage of extended family, and took night classes to improve her English, before going to work herself. I learned firsthand that hard work can pay off, and that refraining from playing the martyr during the journey leaves more time to focus on the goal. Having the chance to talk now about my first-generation experience, then, is refreshing, cathartic, and something that I didn’t know that I needed until I started to write this.

What I would tell my first-year self: I would tell my first-year self that a 10-minute call to mom can do wonders for the soul. Even for first-generation students, while your parents may not understand the circumstances first hand, they will understand the emotions so long as you start with, “Everything is just fine. I just need to vent.”

The best thing about my college experience was: The best thing about my college experience was changing from majoring in Biology to double majoring in Psychology and Sociology two years in. It is horrible to feel like you’ve wasted half your undergraduate college career, but freeing to accept what you do not enjoy, and to learn what you do. The best thing about my college experience, then, was learning to listen to my heart and discovering that its often not too far from what my gut is telling me.

How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now: I am asked often by work superiors why I’ve chosen to be an office manager and executive assistant when my two degrees suggest that I could be challenging myself more. Beyond questioning folks on how easy they think herding cats in a start-up actually is, it is a reminder to me of my mom comforting me over the phone as I cried about failing organic chemistry and wanting to change majors two years into the game. Mom said, “I don’t care what you study. I just wanted you to go to college so that you could learn how to really think and analyze things for yourself.” Having been a first-generation student allows me the daily reminder that college was not about a degree, but rather an opportunity to open my mind to deeper thought; an opportunity to choose what to do and what not to do to earn my living; an opportunity to HAVE opportunities.
I was born in Hawaiian Gardens, CA (near Long Beach), and grew up in Modesto, CA. Three of my four grandparents did not complete high school due to family obligations (e.g., helping to raise siblings). My parents are both high school graduates. My dad is a mechanic and worked 10 hour days, standing in an open garage, for most of my life. He rarely called in sick and never took vacation time. My mom (now deceased) was a secretary. I have a younger brother who is also a mechanic and works with my dad now. I was raised in a working-class neighborhood and was told from a very early age, especially by my mom and aunts, that I would go to college. I learned about hard work and to aspire for a college degree from my family.

What motivated me to go to college: I grew up in a neighborhood with a lot of violence, including domestic violence. I knew from an early age that this was not the life that I wanted for myself. Between this, and the encouragement of my mom, aunts, and teachers, I knew that, one way or another, I would go to college. Of course, no one in my family knew what this meant, but it was still my and my community’s dream for me.

What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it: I faced three big challenges: expectations, finances, and lack of preparation. Considering expectations, I had a high school guidance counselor who did not believe in me. When I told her I wanted to go to Stanford and become a lawyer, she told me that kids like me do not go to places like Stanford and become lawyers. Instead, I should go to Stanislaus State University and become a paralegal. I never applied to Stanford. Instead, I applied to four UCs. I got into UCSC and wanted to come here, as it was the only college campus I had ever visited (thanks to a friend’s mom). I was supposed to get financial aid to cover about half of my expenses, but my financial aid was revoked. I never called the campus to find out why. Instead, I joined the Navy reserves and got the GI Bill. After becoming a corpsman (like a medic), starting up at Modesto Junior College, being put on active duty for the first Gulf War, then heading back to Modesto Junior College, I finally transferred to UC Santa Cruz! This took a lot of persistence.

My final big challenge was lack of preparation. Although I learned I was not a good writer after I transferred to UC Santa Cruz, I was too proud to really work on my writing. It was not until I started graduate school that I learned how bad my writing was, and also how ill prepared I was for that level of work. I dealt with something called “imposter syndrome.” In this context, this was the belief that I didn’t belong in school and that my admission to the university was a mistake. I had to work through these feelings, which came with a lot of tears and talking, and then I had to
work very hard on my writing every day. I found classmates and professors who agreed to work with me. They also recommended books I could read to help me with my writing. Over time, I learned that I write so that I can work through an idea, and nothing is ready to be shared with a bigger audience until at least draft three. This shift helped me learn that writing is a process and not just a destination.

**How my background has helped me:** In my working-class household and cultural community, people helped each other. I knew whose door to knock on if I got hurt while out playing, if I wanted to borrow a book, if I needed a ride, if I needed a snack, etc. Children were expected to help out too, be it with a younger child's homework (one of my jobs), or pulling weeds for a neighbor. Although I often did things myself in college, I also had an expectation that I could ask for help and someone would give it. For example, my roommates read and commented on all of my papers before I turned them in, because I asked them to. It was also the case that if someone asked for my help, I would freely give it. In college, I learned I was good at math and that I liked it. I would therefore lead tutoring sessions for those who needed help. What I did not realize at the time, but I know now, is that those sessions helped me just as much as they helped those who I was tutoring.

**What I would tell my first-year self:** Start working on your writing sooner rather than later, while you have access to tutors and you don't have to pay someone. Take more classes outside of your major so you can gain a more interdisciplinary foundation, which will make you a better and more creative researcher. Ask questions in class, even if you are afraid you'll sound dumb. Chances are, someone has a similar question.

**The best thing about my college experience was:** I learned that I, too, could co-create knowledge, through research. The university is not just about learning something, but about contributing to make the university and the world a better place. It was an extremely powerful moment when I learned that I could ask a question that no one knew the answer to, and that I could work (usually with others) to figure something out about that question.

**How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now:** My research team and I run an after-school program where we teach fourth and fifth grade students, most of whom will be first generation college students, to conduct action research to create change in their school and community. Something special happens when people realize that they can create knowledge. I want children to have this experience, and not have to wait until they get to college. I want children from working class and working poor communities to know that they and their perspectives matter, that they can change the world, and that there are tools that can help them to do just that. Also, as the provost of Oakes College, I do everything in my power to create programming and affect policies and procedures that will change structures so that first generation college students can be more supported by the university.
First-Gen Staff: Jason Burns, Administrative Special Assistant, Campus Counsel

I was born and raised in San Diego, California. I grew up in South East San Diego, in a socio-economically poor neighborhood. My family was poor and relied on welfare and Section 8 housing for a good portion of my childhood. Life was always a struggle but my mom did her best to shield us from the daily stresses she endured to keep the lights on and put food on the table. It was this upbringing which lead me in my desire to learn and view an education as a way out of my situation.

What motivated me to go to college: In Middle school I became part of the AVID program and being around other kids who were focused on education and college is what helped make me focus on obtaining good grades and really learning the material in classes. I was lucky enough to have some stellar teachers in high school who all supported my educational goals and pushed for me to participate in extracurricular activities so that I was more appealing for the college admission process. I knew that if I went to college I would have so many more opportunities in life than I would without a degree, so I applied to 5 schools and got in to all five, UC Berkeley being the one I chose to attend.

What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it: Unfortunately during my first semester at Berkeley my grandmother passed away and my younger sister was raped. These events put me in a serious depression and I never quite dealt with the issues I was going through in the best manner. I had to withdraw from school, a couple of times through various semesters, and it took me 3 times as long as it normally takes a person to graduate from college. The one thing I always kept in my mind was that I needed to finish what I started. I came to college to get a degree and make my life better, so I kept at it and persevered. I audited the last class I needed in my Anthropology major and took classes at a community college and online courses through Berkeley and finally, after 12 years, I graduated from Berkeley with a B.A. in Anthropology. It was the hardest thing I’ve ever done and it would have been so much easier to have given up and pursued something else, but if I had I wouldn’t be where I am today, working for UCSC and living in such a beautiful city as Santa Cruz.

How my background has helped me: Growing up poor and having to go without has definitely made me more appreciative of all that I have and it has helped me stay determined when things don’t turn out the way I hoped for or planned. The experiences I had throughout my college years and the people I met along the way have given me the ability to relate to people on the most basic and complex levels. These experiences have given me a strong sense of empathy, which has allowed my networking skills to flourish. All of these experiences influence how I view the world and help to make me a stronger person.
What I would tell my first-year self: Never give up. No matter how hard something may seem, or how down you may get, always know that if you keep at it and give it your best, you will come out the other side much better for having gone through the struggle. People like to avoid a difficult situation, but it’s the struggles in life that make us stronger and teach us how to push through adversity.

The best thing about my college experience was: All the people I met through college. I have a fantastic network of friends and colleagues that I met through my undergrad years and beyond. I can count among my best friends Doctors, Lawyers, Engineers, Project Managers, Directors, and Entrepreneurs. I met my fiancé through one of my best friends from college. I can’t stress enough, the people you meet in college will have a transformative effect on your life.

How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now: I’m a huge proponent of higher education (hence why I work where I work) so I always support young people’s decisions in wanting to obtain a university degree and love hearing about the student experience.
First-Gen Staff: Dr. L. Esthela Bañuelos, Academic Senate Analyst

I was born and raised in a working class neighborhood in Southeast Los Angeles, a daughter of immigrants who courageously came to an entirely new country seeking a better life. My route to higher education began at community college.

**What motivated me to go to college:** I remember being excited that I would get to read, learn, and study in an environment where I could set my own course. So learning and independence together felt like an incredible privilege! To get to do what I loved was my primary motivation, but I also knew then that education was my best opportunity for mobility.

**Advice I’d give my frosh self:** Go to as many office hours as you can and get to know your professors. It’s a worthy investment of your time. Also, have fun.

**How my background helped me:** First-gen students often bring exceptional qualities that are not always recognized. For me these included grit, perseverance and insight into structures of inequality that later fueled not only my desire to get an advanced degree, but my passion for sociology. I’m grateful for the mentors and teachers who saw this and encouraged me.

**The best thing about my college experience:** College opened up a whole new set of possibilities for me, and provided a space for me to discover my strengths within a diverse community of support.

**UC Connection:** I earned my Ph.D. in Sociology (Designated Emphasis in Feminist Studies) at UC Santa Cruz, and was a Lecturer in the department of Latin American and Latino Studies here before transitioning to my current position as Analyst with the Academic Senate.
I was born and raised poor in the Bronx, the first son of Dominican immigrants. My mother, raised in a rural community, was not allowed to study past 8th grade because of her gender. We are a Spanglish-speaking family and I consider myself fortunate to have grown up in the most ethnically diverse community in the country.

**What motivated me to go to college:** It is a part of Caribbean culture to value education and sapience on their own terms, but we were also taught that education could be a path to financial stability. As a teen, I was somewhat motivated towards college, but mostly I just treated it as automatic, and I proceeded through scholarship programs without questioning what the end goal was.

**What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it:** When I realized that participating in a capitalist society necessarily means benefiting from the suffering and un-freedom of others, I fell into existential self-doubt and political frustration at the seeming inescapability of our condition. Why get a degree, just to get a job, just to add to it all? An advisor pointed out to me that my experience of depression was not unique to me, but was instead structural and common to first-generation college students, males of color, and others like me. Despite the actions and efforts of many well-intentioned people, the modern university functions in large part to build and reinforce class hierarchy, while assimilating subsections of the general population into positions of management. That I would experience the university as harmful should therefore not take me by surprise; this political awareness then helped me to move through the institution more strategically.

**How my background has helped me:** Connecting to my family members in the Dominican Republic and understanding the limits imposed on them by borders and poverty helped me to appreciate and make more tactical use of the position of power that I was already in. That said, motivation fueled by guilt will often prove inadequate, when not altogether psychologically harmful; neither should we romanticize the resilience, self-sacrifice, and work ethic of our families in ways that encourage that those of us who have fallen by the wayside be forgotten. I have grown and gained the most when I have aimed towards a positive goal grounded in striving for freedom from suffering for all.

**What I would tell my first-year self:** Get over your fear of talking to professors and advisors. It is part of their job to sit there and listen to students.

**The best thing about my college experience was:** Making friends with quality people.
How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now: Growing up poor makes it quite clear that people are often forced to make hard decisions and do ugly things for good reasons. My work as a political theorist focuses on how and why people break the law as they seek resources and struggle to sustain themselves and their communities. From welfare fraud and illegal immigration to the bank robbing revolutionaries of the 1970s, people’s tendencies to do what they need to do—whether they consider the actions “political” or not—make sense on their own terms, while also simultaneously revealing the inhumaneness of modern property law. As a scholar, I work to lend some legitimacy to these everyday practices.
My father was a mechanic in a soda ash plant, a trona mine, and a power plant. My mother was an old school ("one-ringy-dingy") telephone operator whose health eventually forced her into early retirement. My Dad was brilliant, but was unable to complete a degree with the financial demands faced by a working-class person. Our parents both encouraged us to go to college and my Dad worked a lot of overtime to help me pay for the balance left on my undergraduate degree after I applied all my scholarships. My sister and I were the first in our families to complete college.

What motivated me to go to college: I had tremendous support to go to school. My Dad told me I could be the President of the United States, if that’s what I wanted. My parents made sacrifices to send their children to school. I wanted to go to college, so I could leverage the power of a university education to make the world a better place. I feel very fortunate that I get to do that work.

What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it: I worked three jobs during the school year to put myself through school when my savings account drained. I was working three jobs during the summer as well. My best strategies were to connect with others in my situation, plan, and to keep my eyes on the goal. I tried to use my time efficiently and even make use. When my shift ended at the pizza parlor, I would study there, because there were no distractions.

How my background has helped me: Creative resiliency. I had seen people face enormous challenges and pick themselves up, dust off, and carry on. I had to do that in terms of a whole range of challenges, even intellectual ones. Once, the oil filter dropped off of my car while I was driving down the highway, and my engine seized; I couldn’t afford to repair the car for many months. I had to work to stay in school, and I had to have a car to get to work at the Country Club where I waited tables. That meant I had to put together a creative car-pooling program with my friends, so I could still do my job. I didn’t give up when I faced the obstacle.

What I would tell my first-year self: I was working so hard I nearly got all the way through college without recognizing how amazing and fun my classes were. I remind students all the time to shift their paradigm and enjoy college—the learning as well as the people and the social events.

The best thing about my college experience was: Feeling like I had changed my life, so I could do my part to change the world.
How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now: I learned even more ways to have what Carol Dweck (a Stanford researcher on “grit”) calls “Growth Mindset”: the recognition that the things that challenge us the most are also often the very ones that help us genuinely to grow (not a sign that we shouldn’t be doing that work or that we don’t belong there).
As a first-generation undergraduate student, when in high school, I didn’t even know it was possible to get a scholarship to college without playing football. I lived at home, went to college, and continuously worked at least 20 hours per week, first in a store, then in the public library system, and finally as an undergraduate researcher at the university. I was still able to graduate in three years and go on to graduate school.

**Advice I’d give my freshman self:** Feel assured that you really do belong at the university. Don’t be afraid to move outside your comfort zone, and always be open to new ideas and to thinking critically about the subjects you are learning. Be willing to seize those opportunities that present themselves.

**How my background helped me:** I always knew I wanted a more interesting and rewarding career than my parents and grandparents had.

**The best thing about my college experience:** I was able to greatly expand my horizons. I had numerous eye-opening insights about myself and about the subjects I was studying – whether I liked them or not. I was able to get involved in research and discovery, which proved to be a life changing experience for me. And my many interactions with others outside the classroom, both friends and co-workers, had a very positive and lasting impact on my life.

**My UC connections:** Chancellor, UC Santa Cruz as well as Professor of Astronomy and Astrophysics. PhD from UC San Diego. My wife and children all hold professional degrees from
I'm a native to South Central Los Angeles, and the eldest of two daughters born to a Mexican father and Afro Latina mother from Ecuador. My father’s education ended in the fifth grade and my mother migrated to the United States before being able to pursue a college degree in her own country.

What motivated me to go to college: What motivated me to go to college was seeing how hard my parents worked to make sure we had food on the table and a roof over our heads. My fondest memories are of our family waking up at six in the morning to recycle copper because, although it was hard work, it was also our family time. Hearing my parent’s childhood stories, and their desire for us to succeed and no longer recycle cooper, motivated me to go to college.

What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it: The biggest challenge has overcoming the insecurities of feeling like everyone else is better prepared, or smarter than you. It took a long time to realize that I was capable and deserving of being in college, and that my childhood and lived experiences gave me a different type of grounding that was powerful enough to get me through college and eventually pursue a PhD.

How my background has helped me: Because of my background, I’ve found that I am able to make connections others may not be able to make, both inside the classroom and with other people. It’s almost like having an extra pair of glasses to see the world through.

What I would tell my first-year self: If I go back and give my first-year self some advice, it would be to have more fun. I spent too much time worrying whether or not it was OK for me to go out and have fun knowing that my parents were working to help me pay college tuition, that I think I missed some opportunities to learn things outside the classroom and understand that my parents just wanted me to be happy.

The best thing about my college experience was: Being exposed to different cultures... and food!

How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now: Being a first-generation college student has influenced all my work. I’m very interested in the way that youth think of the future and what they imagined their lives could be like in comparison to their parent’s imaginary of the future. My work was heavily influenced by my parent’s stories.
Out of four children, I was the first to be born in America and to graduate from high school. My parents grew up in neighboring villages of rural Mexico with no electricity or public health facilities. Despite yearning for more knowledge, my father, the wisest man I know, left primary school to support his mother and sisters. My mother, a warrior, stopped attending primary school to help her mother manage the household. Both worked hard as seasonal farmworkers to settle our family in the United States. In the cherry orchards of eastern Washington, where my family worked daily for 10-14 hours, I learned values of hard work and collaboration, which I attribute to my success as a first-generation college graduate.

What motivated me to go to college: Even though teachers would tell me that I was destined for college, I struggled to envision a future in higher education because my family had no knowledge on how to encourage or support me in that endeavor. Through middle- and high school, I struggled to explain the concept of higher education to my parents and how it could open opportunities for us. At the age of 16, in my senior year, my family was forced apart by deportation and my daily life changed dramatically. Through support from staff and affiliates from my low-income high school, I found hope in pursuing a college education that would provide me with the tools to challenge the inequities faced in my community.

What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it: I felt an immense amount of guilt for not being able to support my family emotionally, physically, and financially because they still struggled to understand why I chose to leave. I worked multiple jobs to try to be a source of support and kept my feelings of guilt to myself, ultimately leading to setbacks in my health and academics. What helped was finding a family environment in the College Assistance Migrant Program, TRiO and EOP, and participating in mentoring and teaching opportunities to support and connect with other first-generation college students because their strength and resilience was inspiring.

How my background has helped me: I drew upon memories of my family’s demonstrations of strength, perseverance, and resilience to continue to persist through the challenges of adjusting to the college culture. Despite being a working-class family with a language barrier, we have always found ways to overcome obstacles to support the family—whether it was my mother working back-to-back jobs while still ensuring there were meals prepared, or my father pushing
through a lifetime of pain from a disabling work injury. As such, I knew that someday they would understand that this was my way of contributing to our family’s future benefit.

What I would tell my first-year self: Even if your parents don’t express the same excitement for your academic successes, notice the twinkle of pride in their eyes when they mention their daughter is in college—You are a pioneer and it is ok to be proud of yourself, too. While social, cultural, and familial obstacles will be aplenty, remember that you are carving out a glass door that your brother, your cousins, your nieces, and nephews can open and choose to go through if they wish. That being said, remember to take care of your health because you have a long journey ahead of you—you’re gonna earn a Ph.D!

The best thing about my college experience was: I met so many people that inspired and encouraged me throughout my college journey—whether through academic support programs, study abroad, clubs, research, internships, or job opportunities. I found language through which to describe my passion from mentors and a community of first-generation peers that helped me solidify my life goals of advocating for equity in education. For my family, my college experience—full of failures and successes, serves as an example for younger generations as they prepare for the transition to college.

How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now: I am so empowered as a first-generation college graduate! I have cousins whom I have never met, asking for help with financial aid. Instead of saying “I don’t know”, I get to say, “How much time do you have?” and “You’re going to want to write this down”. Career-wise, I am fortunate enough to be in graduate school for the specific purpose of supporting first-generation college students like myself. My goal is to continue to serve first-generation students in a capacity where their stories can be heard and their many strengths celebrated. I still struggle with guilt at times, but my background and the backgrounds of all of the first-generation students whose stories I have had the honor to hear, always keep me motivated to keep going and open more doors to education.
I grew up in the east bay town of Antioch, CA where we moved to when I was six years old. At the time, it was considered an up and coming bedroom community with good public schools. My parents were working class first and second-generation Americans whose highest level of education was finishing high school. My mother spent most of her working career as a baker. She was up and out the door each morning before anyone else was awake and came home well after my younger brother and I had returned from school.

**What motivated me to go to college:** From a very young age, I knew coming from a low-income background caused the majority of stress in my home. I learned that a higher education would make a positive shift in my long-term outcome from growing up in this environment. There was never a question of whether I was going to attend college or not. The question was “how”. I always loved attending school. It was my safe place where I excelled, and felt valued. I was lucky to have amazing teachers throughout K-12 who inspired and guided me academically and personally to find the path to getting to college. Many of these teachers I am still in contact with today. I was also greatly motivated to make sure my brother had a strong support system knowing that I would be leaving home without him. As I was graduating from college, he was graduating from high school. Several weeks after, he had moved in with me, enrolled in college, and is now a firefighter/paramedic and member of the Santa Cruz community.

**What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it:** The biggest challenge I encountered as a first-generation student was balancing work and school. I had a job within a week of arriving at college. Not having a job was not an option as it was the only way I was going to be able to afford to live and stay enrolled. I worked the maximum number hours allowed and was given an increased amount of responsibility over the four years I held the position. I had two part-time jobs while attending high school, but the academic load was significantly higher in college. They key to balancing this challenge was time and resource management and just having a “get it done” attitude because ultimately, there was no other alternative option. I found mentors to guide me academically, personally, and professionally to balance the heavy load I was balancing each day.

**How my background has helped me:** Learning to be independent has always been a key component in my success. I've never had the expectation that “someone will tell me” what I need to know in school, work, or life. I consider myself a “research/policy/information wonk”. I want to know what the guidelines, instructions, general information, etc. are so I can make decisions on how to move around in life. First generations students are usually extremely resilient. I arrived at college feeling that my writing skills were going to put me at a disadvantage.
in many ways. Finding a tutor early on was a high priority to push through having a positive experience in future intensive writing courses.

**What I would tell my first-year self:** I would tell myself not to worry so much and ask for help. Ask for support, ask for mentorship, ask for money...just “do the ask”. If you don’t ask, you don’t know what you might be missing out on. The worse reply you can get is a “no”, which means you haven’t lost anything. It might assist rephrasing your ask to get a “yes”. Also, be loyal to yourself. If something isn’t right in your life, make a change even if you find it risky. You have to be your biggest cheerleader. Taking risks is difficult when things feel safe, but you never know what might be at the end of the “road not taken” if you don’t try.

**The best thing about my college experience was:** There were many wonderful things about the college experience. Meeting new classmates and friends from around the world opened my eyes to new experiences, ideas, and outlooks on life. The freshman Core course at Oakes College influenced my view of society significantly. I learned about the impact of history, culture, and politics on how we’ve moved forward and regressed as a population. I will always treasure my final senior computer science course with Manfred Warmuth. His first lecture on how yeast works in the process of making bread while comparing it to computational theories was brilliant!

**How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now:** Attending college was a transformative experience for me. As a first-generation college student, I did not have the support system that many of my classmates and friends had. I had to be more independent, resilient, and in some ways, had to work a lot harder both personally and academically. Having the honor to work with college students every day reminds me that a student needs to be viewed holistically and that they should be supported, engaged, and educated as humans first...they are more than a name on a roster or a filled chair in a classroom. The most important part of my senior year in high school was scholarship night where I received several community awards. Several years ago, I started a scholarship at my high school on behalf of my graduating class. It is my hope that by awarding several scholarships each year that I can champion well-rounded students who will make a positive impact and contribution to our society and who will also “pay it forward” when the times comes in their lives.
I am a first generation USAmerican—my parents immigrated to Los Angeles from Guatemala. My siblings and I were born here in the US. We grew up in L.A. (Huntington Park) and in the Bay Area. In 1981, my father (who remarried to my stepmother) relocated us back to Guatemala, where I completed 5th through 8th grades, returning to the US as a frosh in high school (midway through the US academic year). After high school, my parents moved to Chico, CA. Unsure about my ability to start college, I worked as a Nurse Assistant at an assisted nursing facility in Chico. Several months after starting work as a Nurse Assistant, I enrolled in classes at Chico State. Competing on the speech and debate team helped to ground my academic focus. I eventually was offered a Performing Arts Scholarship to compete for Colorado State University’s Speech and Debate team. I relocated to Colorado and eventually completed my Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees at CSU in Communication Studies (with a Master’s Certification in Women’s Studies), and my Ph.D. at Boulder (also in Communication Studies).

**What motivated me to go to college:** My stepmother encouraged me to go, but I still was unsure of myself. I just knew that it was “something I should do.” My father worked a lot, so he did not ever really talk to me about college, but he also knew that it was something “good to do.” Honestly, I stumbled into college because my friends who came from more privileged upbringings were going, and I wanted to “fit in.” Once I was in college, I progressively became more motivated because of what I was learning, and not learning. In other words, I realized early on that academic literature was frequently presented from the perspective of privileged dominant groups, consistently missing the voices from underrepresented groups, thus leaving a gap in my learning.

**What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it:** Part of my uncertainty in going to college stemmed from the feeling of not belonging. My formative years were spent in Guatemala during the height of the human rights violations under military control. There was so much that I wanted to question in classes because I saw gaps in representation. However, I did not have the skills, the language, or the confidence to openly question and problematize the narrow perspectives that were presented. It wasn’t until I started classes at Colorado State University where I met my mentors—Dr. Cindy L. Griffin and Karen Wedge—who validated how and why I was questioning what I was learning. They encouraged my learning process, taught me how to frame my questions and connected me to the writings of other women of color who were not quite part of the academic mainstream at the time—bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa were among them.
First Generation Initiative

How my background has helped me: Being raised in Guatemala for part of my life was instrumental to my development and to my upbringing. It was also not easy, and was terrifying at times. Additionally, being raised in two cultural contexts and being raised bilingual taught me how to adapt to ambiguity and how to work effectively with multiple groups of people. I also learned about the importance of family in our Guatemalan culture. My experiences have also highlighted how important it is to understand immigrant experiences, especially immigrants coming from Latin American countries—whether documented or not—and the sacrifices that family members make to keep their families together. Without knowing it at the time, I was also learning how to operate in the world of higher education.

What I would tell my first-year self: The biggest piece of advice I was given, which really is more so a phrase of encouragement and assurance, was: “You do belong here!” As a result, when I experienced frustrations, as well as successes, I would repeat to myself “I do belong here” . . . to this day, I still tell myself this!

The best thing about my college experience was: I was able to make sense of, and develop a language for, the many social, local, national and international inequities that I witnessed. This influenced me to pursue a career in higher education in an effort to continue to support underrepresented students as they experience their own journey through higher education.

How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now: My career path has been in higher education. My role as a Critical Latina/Latin American Transnational Feminist Scholar in Communication Studies was influenced by my first-generation status—both as a first gen student and a first gen US citizen. I developed an academic language of resistance that called out a tradition that marginalized the voices of people from non-dominant groups. Additionally, everything I do as the Campus Diversity Officer for Staff and Students is deeply rooted in and connected to who I am as a first gen student and citizen. In other words, I would not be doing this work had I not had the upbringing and experiences that I did.
Dr. James Doucet-Battle was born and raised in Rochester, New York. His father worked for the Air Force and his mother was employed at Eastman Kodak.

“Recent research shows that only 1 in 11 African American public-school males graduates from high school in Rochester,” he said. “And there were some extremely brilliant people in my neighborhood. Many of them would have made it much farther than I have.”

James’ mother insisted on sending him to a highly regarded private Catholic school. The professor of sociology remains forever grateful to his family for their sacrifices, though he also acknowledges his struggles in a segregated environment where he was made to feel keenly that his true potential was not recognized.

“I think I was seen as more of an athlete than a student,” James said.

His guidance counselor was his track coach, who never brought up the subject of college once, despite James’ avowed love of learning.

James said he is most appreciative of the librarians at the school, who gave him the space to read for hours on end about history, comparative religion, and political science.

James’s journey from Rochester to UC Santa Cruz was driven by a love of his subject material. He is a medical anthropologist and is currently busy working on a book about the recruitment of African Americans in Type II diabetes research.

He doesn’t view his journey toward a full-time faculty position as one of overcoming a series of challenges, but rather as being presented with a series of what he calls “creative opportunities.”

“I viewed it as a series of choices,” he said. “And one of those choices was coming to California.”

After graduating high school, James journeyed to Santa Cruz via New Mexico, pursuing an intense interest in Ayurvedic medicine. That passion carried him to India and Sri Lanka, before he landed an interview with a professor at San Jose State University who specialized in ethnobotany, thus precipitating a quantum leap forward in James’ academic career.

After graduating from San Jose State in just three semesters, and obtaining an MA in History and Anthropology, he was selected as a Ronald McNair Scholar. James then pursued a joint PhD at the University of California, Berkeley and University of California, San Francisco in the Joint Medical Anthropology Program.
After gaining his PhD, James was selected as a UC President’s Postdoctoral Fellow at UC Santa Cruz and then became a professor.

“I didn’t think I was UC material,” he said, joking that he used to believe people who were accepted into Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz were adept at the piano by age 2 and publishing academic papers before the age of 10.

But James said this lack of confidence is the one thing he would tell his students to avoid, particularly those who are the first in their family to attend college.

“Don’t ever say ‘no’ to yourself,” he said. “Let the world say ‘no’ to you.”

James said it is about confidence on the one hand, but also about the courage to recognize your intellectual inclinations and to follow them doggedly.

“I think that a diverse faculty, particularly first-gen faculty, can show students that their passion is not a dead end, but a pipeline through which they too can pass,” he said. “When you get interested in an idea or a topic for which you acquire a passion, you can see real possibilities for creating a positive future that includes you.”

James said the First-Gen Faculty campaign is important in that it allows all students, such as those that hail from low-income backgrounds or underrepresented minorities to envision themselves as full participants in the scholarly community.

“The goal of a diverse faculty is not something hovering over a distant horizon,” he said. “It is within our reach. Our students are the ones who will contribute to achieving that goal.”
Dr. Juan Poblete was born in Santiago, Chile, one of five siblings. His father was a popular singer, whose Frank Sinatra-like crooner style made him popular in the 1950s. Juan’s father also co-led a popular Chilean radio show in the 1960’s.

Neither of Juan’s parents graduated high school, though his father was a voracious reader, something he instilled early on in his son. Juan’s mother had a strong sense of discipline and hard work, which Juan incorporated in his own approach, a particular influence on his studies.

Juan grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Santiago, attending good schools and showing aptitude and ambition early on.

However, Juan’s childhood was beset by the political upheavals in Chile and Argentina throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In 1973, while Juan was still in primary (elementary) school, his family moved to Argentina as Augusto Pinochet effected a military coup and installed himself as dictator of Chile, a political circumstance that would last to 1990 and impede the educational efforts of many of Juan’s compatriots.

With his family migrating to Mendoza, Argentina, Juan was encouraged to apply himself academically and he benefited from the examples of his older siblings, all of whom attended college. When a military coup took place in Argentina in 1976 Juan’s family again moved, this time back to Chile, once again disquieting the continuity of his education.

Juan continued to persevere, however, graduating from high school, studying literature at the University of Chile, and doing the coursework for a graduate degree in Communications before coming to the United States to pursue a PhD in literature.

“Since I loved it, I did really well,” said Poblete of his experiences in college. “It’s not like I found it easy, but I had discipline and I put the work in.”

He earned his degree at Duke in 1997 and soon after accepted a tenure-track position in the Literature Department at UC Santa Cruz, where he has been ever since.

Juan is proud to be part of a public institution now recognized as an Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) with over 25% of the undergraduate student body identified as Latino/a. He served as co-chair for the task force that successfully applied for two Hispanic Serving Institution grants through the U.S. Department of Education totaling more than $8 million. These funds are being used to support student retention and success in math, science, and critical reading for incoming Hispanic students as well as to develop a sense of belonging and for implementation of culturally-relevant academic advising.
Because Juan teaches literature classes in both English and Spanish, he has a direct connection to many first-generation students making their way through college.

“What I would say to a first-generation student is that you are welcome here at UCSC, we want you to be successful, we understand your challenges. We are in the process of re-designing all the steps, rethinking our approach to preparatory education in college, creating a level playing field for all of our students. We are committed to supporting you in excelling and look forward to you graduating from this campus,” Poblete said.

The institution, Juan notes, must continue to progress if it plans to serve the current and the next generations of Californians. Demographic forces mean the institution must rise to the challenges of providing high-level and effective education to a culturally diverse student body. He sees the First-Gen Faculty (FGF) campaign as one step in that direction.

“It is not just Latinos,” he said. “We have many students from underserved populations who are Vietnamese, Chinese, Filipino, African Americans, and Native Americans. They are often the first to go to college in their family too.”

Juan notes that all of these demographics combined accounted for roughly two-thirds of the students at UC Santa Cruz for fall of 2016.

“We are a majority minority campus now,” he said.

With the FGF campaign underway, the HSI initiatives being implemented, and so many student success services provided on campus, Juan sees UC Santa Cruz now on the path toward fulfilling the mission of a public university, serving the needs of students in a culturally and ethnically diverse state and nation.

“We need to be able to say to these students — ‘We have created the perfect social and educational environment for you to thrive here. All we need now is your full effort and talents’” Juan said.
First-Gen Faculty: Dr. Veronica Terriquez, Associate Professor, Sociology Department

Dr. Veronica Terriquez was born in the San Gabriel Valley in eastern Los Angeles County. The daughter of working-class immigrants, Veronica discovered early on her acumen and affinity for academic pursuits.

She excelled in K-12, earning good grades and her parents actively encouraged her to pursue her dreams of going to college.

Everyone, including Veronica’s counselor’s, assumed she would go to college, but in terms of the specifics, she was fuzzy.

She was fortunate to come in contact with peers who applied to the University of California, Berkeley, and even Ivy League schools. Based upon her sterling performance throughout high school, Veronica was encouraged to think along similar lines.

“I was very fortunate to have people in my life who suggested I apply to top universities,” Veronica said. “My parents were very supportive, but they didn’t provide me with guidance on my options and application process.”

She applied to Stanford, Berkeley, Pomona, UCLA, and Harvard, garnering acceptance letters at all five and eventually settling upon Harvard.

Once in Cambridge, she quickly realized the education she received at a Catholic High School meant that she was competing with students who were more prepared for the rigors of an Ivy League education.

“Math and science were my favorite subjects, but once I got into college I immediately became aware that my peers had much stronger preparation in those subject areas than I did,” she said. “I initially didn’t even know how to compete with them.”

However, her parents work ethic, demonstrated from an early age, meant Veronica was willing and able to put in the extra work necessary to level the playing field.

“I knew I had to work twice as hard, so that’s what I did,” she said.

Furthermore, Veronica began taking classes in sociology and found the study of social forces helped her understand and contextualize the difference between herself and her working-class background and many of the other students who came from more privileged backgrounds.
Armed with values of diligence and curiosity, Veronica eventually learned to thrive at Harvard and began to turn her attention to some of the inequalities she noticed at the school. Specifically, Veronica saw that there was not a single Latina professor at Harvard.

“One of the things I did with some of my peers was to work on an awareness campaign about the lack of diversity among the faculty,” Veronica said.

The students put up posters, held rallies.

“I felt I was not represented and there weren’t people like me working in higher education,” Veronica said.

But far from holding her back, Veronica used it as a motivating force, impelling her to achieve academically so she could change the statistics. She went on to earn a master's degree at UC Berkeley and then a PhD at UCLA.

Veronica is eager to participate in the First-Gen Faculty Initiative because she knows first-hand the difficulties that students who are the first in their family to go to college face.

“I don’t assume students have parents who went to college,” she said. “It’s why I aim to explain the expectations and processes at the beginning of each quarter.”

Veronica said she is also cognizant of the costs of course materials and attempts to orient her classrooms to factor in students who may be facing economic hardships.

The UC Santa Cruz First-Gen campaign should also help students realize they should take advantage of resources available to them while on campus. Meet with professors, utilize office hours, seek internships and engage with the college experience at a level that exceeds simply going to class and taking tests.

“This campaign matters because our students need to feel that they are supported,” she said. “The faculty is here to help them navigate higher education. I’m here to help.”
“¿Estás durmiendo bien?” “Are you eating enough?” “Your new shoes look funny.” These are bits of conversations that can be heard when Dr. Rebecca Covarrubias, an Assistant Professor of Psychology, visits home during the break. “My family shows love in many ways — making sure I'm doing okay and also teasing me. They are good at it, too.”

One of four children, Rebecca grew up in a predominately low-income, Mexican neighborhood in Phoenix, Arizona. Born to two hard-working parents — her father, Jose Luis, an elementary school bus driver and janitor and her mother, Rosario, the backbone of the family — she learned the values of collaboration, hard work, and humility.

Growing up, she observed her father work long days in the Arizona heat to support the family, and her mother always on her feet to keep the family together. “It’s not just that they do everything for the family with limited means, but that they are also compassionate, tough, and funny. I admire who they are as people.”

Until Rebecca tested into an International Baccalaureate program outside of her high school district, she did not realize the stark contrast in resources available to her community and those available to other students in the honors program. Noticing these inequities propelled her to work harder and ultimately earn a full-ride to the University of Arizona (U of A) where she could learn how to make a change in her community.

“It was a hard transition leaving my family,” she said, as the first in her entire family to go to college.

For Rebecca, the strength of family bonds is typical of first-generation students, who are in many instances depended upon to contribute to the family, physically, emotionally, and financially. Since high school, Rebecca worked part-time jobs to give back to her family.

While enrolled at U of A, Rebecca was selected into the Ronald E. McNair Achievement Program that focused on introducing diversity into the research field. “I met other low-income, first-generation scholars of color like me and connected with mentors who believed I could do anything. For the first time, I could envision myself as a researcher,” she said.

The PhD program in Social Psychology at U of A did not come without challenges, however. Rebecca struggled to feel like she fit in with the graduate school culture and felt further disconnected from her family. “When moments of doubt hit, I thought about how hard my parents work or those who invested in me, or I found a way to connect with them,” she shared. “That helped keep me going.”
Rebecca found she had a knack for working with students, many just like her. “Being in the classroom or meeting with students was the only thing that consistently felt rewarding. Students gave meaning to the work.”

Having done postgraduate work in Delaware and abroad in Italy, Rebecca was excited to accept a position at UC Santa Cruz. “Even though my parents may not fully understand what it means to be faculty, they were excited for me,” she says, pointing out an example of how being first generation can follow you throughout your career. “We were all especially excited that I was finally closer to home.”

Rebecca directs the **Culture and Achievement Collaborative** on campus, where her undergraduate and graduate research team develops culturally-relevant approaches and strategies that can be used to better serve diverse students.

She wants students to know that, “My door is always open to you.”

Watch Rebecca's first-gen faculty profile video with tips and suggestions for navigating the first-gen experience.
First-Gen Faculty: Dr. Catherine “Cat” Ramírez, Associate Professor, Latin American & Latino Studies, And Director, Chicano Latino Research Center

Dr. Catherine “Cat” Ramírez's father graduated from high school in East Los Angeles and, after serving in the U.S. military during World War II, got a job working for Caltrans. Her mother, an immigrant from Mexico, was a homemaker who had to leave school as a girl to support her siblings after their mother died. When Cat was a teenager, her mother went back to school. Ultimately, she passed the General Educational Development (GED) test and graduated from high school the same year as Cat. Cat admired her mother’s resilience and dedication and saw how important education was to her.

The Catholic schools in Southern California’s San Gabriel Valley that Cat attended were mostly working-class and Hispanic. Many of her classmates did not attend university. However, her older sister, Nancy, transferred from community college to the University of California at Berkeley while Cat was still in high school. Since Cat’s high school had relatively few resources for preparing students for college, Nancy became her younger sister’s unofficial academic advisor and told her what classes she needed to take to qualify for admission to the University of California. After visiting Nancy in Berkeley, Cat resolved to follow in her older sister’s footsteps and to attend Cal, too. She was especially impressed by the campus’ vibrancy and the diversity of its student body, and the high expectations the students had of themselves and each other.

Cat enrolled at Berkeley as a freshman. However, the quality of education she had received in high school meant she had a steep learning curve. “I needed to learn how to identify and gather evidence, craft a thesis, and defend my claim,” she said. “I hadn’t learned how to argue or to think critically in high school.”

She struggled in her first writing class, English 1A, until her instructor directed her to a tutoring center, where a fellow student worked with her on improving her writing. Eventually, Cat majored in English and was hired as a writing tutor at the same center. Her job allowed her to continue to hone her writing and communication skills and introduced her to the rewards of teaching.

Cat realized as an undergraduate that she wanted to continue to work in a university setting as a professor. She reached out to her faculty, often simply by attending their office hours, and asked them what she needed to do to become a professor, too. In addition to giving her basic advice—for example, stressing the importance of maintaining high grades and collecting strong letters of recommendation—they encouraged her to study languages. So she studied Spanish, French, and, for a short time, Japanese. Their guidance encouraged her to be open to new
ideas and approaches. It also prompted her to see that college is not a terminus, but one step in the long journey of living and learning.

After graduating from Berkeley with a Bachelor’s degree in English, and then going back for her Ph.D. in ethnic studies, Cat joined the faculty of the University of California, Santa Cruz, in 2002. In addition to teaching classes on migration, citizenship, Latinx literature, and cultural studies, she directs UC Santa Cruz’s Chicano Latino Research Center.

Further, Cat stresses, students should place value on moving outside of their comfort zone. "I fear that too many students are being done and are doing themselves a disservice by trying to avoid studying or discussing unpleasant subjects, like genocide and misogyny. We must learn about the violence and injustices of the past and present in order to stop and prevent violence and injustices in the present and future," she suggests.

"Let's keep talking about this and supporting each other," suggests Ramírez.
Dr. Jaye Padgett grew up in Takoma Park, Maryland, one of three siblings.

His father never graduated high school and procured work as a printer and later a chauffeur. His mother earned her diploma, but instead of continuing on to college got work as an administrative assistant.

“Really, I was the only person in my family to have a college experience,” Jaye said.

When he did arrive for his freshman year at the University of Maryland he felt keenly that he was out of place. He didn’t know how to pronounce sophisticated words that many of his peers used with a casual fluency. He didn’t know very much about composers, writers, painters, and other aspects of what is called “cultural capital”.

“My background was low-income and I think in that sense I felt like I didn’t fit in,” Jaye said.

Nevertheless, his status as a first-generation college student didn’t occur to him until recently, since he attended a large university in the 1980s, when there wasn’t even a concept of first-generation college students let alone support services.

Jaye struggled at first as a result.

“Academically, I felt a little bit lost in those first years of college,” Jaye said. “But I discovered linguistics and the Russian language and literature and in the last couple of years while in college I got straight A’s.”

Jaye said his parents never fully understood his academic pursuits, but always remained supportive and proud.

“I think having parents who didn’t go to college is presented as a disadvantage, but there is a flipside to that too,” he said. “Everything I did academically was because I wanted to do it, not because my dad wanted me to be an engineer.”

While Jaye was fortunate enough to find his calling, he understands the many pressures that first generation students can feel. “It isn’t just about academic preparation”, he notes. “First generation students may lack a secure sense of belonging at the university, may face stereotype threat, and are less likely to know who to turn to for support.”

It’s why he relishes the opportunity to serve as Interim Vice Provost for Student Success.
“There are huge economic disparities, quality of life disparities related to access to higher education, which is itself correlated with income and ethnicity,” he said. “We have a moral imperative to do better.”
In fall of 2016, UC Santa Cruz welcomed 16,962 students. Forty-two percent (7,124) of those students were first-generation students, those whose parents have not graduated from a four-year American institution.

Following the pioneering leadership of the University of California, Irvine and with support from the UC Office of the President, in spring 2017 UC Santa Cruz joined a UC system wide launch of the "#First-Gen College Grad" initiative.

This effort is focused on responding to and supporting the fast-growing first-generation college student population on the UC Santa Cruz campus. Our goal is to create a welcoming and supportive campus environment for all of our students.

“We don’t always know who the first-generation students are in our classrooms,” notes First-Generation Initiative faculty director, Dr. Rebecca Covarrubias, an assistant professor in the psychology department. "In drawing attention to the shared identities among students, staff, and faculty we send a clear message that we want you here, you belong here, and you will succeed.”

The goals of this initiative are to:

- Raise the visibility of first-generation students at UCSC, and recognize the challenges and strengths they have as well as the unique gifts they bring to the university.
- Foster a positive campus climate that welcomes first-generation students and begins to build long-term relationships of support, understanding, and learning between students, faculty, and staff.
- Provide information and encouragement to first-generation students helping them identify and make strategic use of campus support services.
- Create spaces for discussion about how department-, college-, and division-specific policies and practices can best facilitate and support first-generation students’ academic success, belonging, and wellbeing.
- Build a network of allies with shared interests and a common goal in support of first-generation students.

Phase one, the "First-Gen Faculty Campaign", was launched during Student Achievement week, the last week of classes in spring, 2017. This initiative served to raise visibility of first-gen faculty and those faculty who signed up as first-gen supporters.

In fall, 2017 the campaign expands to include all faculty, staff and graduate students.

For current faculty, staff, or graduate students please sign up to join the campaign!

For more information, please contact firstgen@ucsc.edu.
My two older brothers and I were born and raised in San Francisco to parents who immigrated from Hong Kong. My parents are high school graduates who learned of the American grading system when we entered public school. My parents knew they were limited in how much they could help us in our studies, so they were more concerned with us passing with “C”s than excelling with “A”s. Instead, they stressed hard work and best personal efforts, over the more commonly measured success of comparison to others, be it with regards to grades or anything else.

What motivated me to go to college: While I vaguely remember an uncle graduating college when I was very young, the idea of higher education remained foreign to me until I saw my older brother go to UC Santa Cruz, moving first into Crown College before transferring to Oakes the following year and graduating from there a few years after. My most vivid memory from my brother’s time in college is his moving into Crown’s Maxwell House, and seeing his name on his dorm door on a construction paper cut-out of a coffee cup. That moment solidified for me what college was --- moving away from home, and fully immersing yourself in school as you really started traveling the path of what you wanted to be when you grew up. For the first time, chasing a dream career wasn’t a theoretical ice breaker game of filling in the blank, “When I grow up, I want to be…”. No, for the first time, I was watching the pursuit of a dream career happen. There was a tangible path and I wanted it for myself.

What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it: I rarely visited my brother in his time at UC Santa Cruz, and he spoke more to my eldest brother than to his bratty younger sister. So, I had no idea what to expect from college, no benchmark of what was normal with regards to school, classes, dorms, food, people, or anything else. I lumped any doubts I had with knowing that there’s always an awkwardness in acclimating to a new environment. Still, my awkwardness seemed very pronounced in my first year at UCSC, 1995-96, when I was getting used to the lower ethnic diversity of a small town in comparison to the San Francisco Bay Area. Although playfully said, my floor mates dubbed me “City Girl”, and often asked, “Are you API [happy] today?” in referencing the Asian Pacific Islander acronym. Always inclusive and nurturing, I knew my floor mates meant only fun. But it made me wonder what strangers were thinking of me if my friends were already teasing me. How much was I sticking out, and how much more would I be sticking out once people noticed I didn’t know how to navigate through office hours, sections, or being a single face in a sea of hundreds in a Classroom Unit 2 lecture?

I’m not sure how much of that awkwardness is attributed to being a City Mouse versus Country Mouse, a first-generation college goer versus the latest in a long line of the same. I think ultimately college is a culture shock for everyone as you take your own experiences and mix them with others. That said, I felt a tremendous amount of pressure knowing I was the first
female in my family to go away to school, even with Mom and Dad’s mantra of “just work hard and try your best” ringing in my ears. The biggest challenge as a first-generation student, then, is KNOWING you’re a first-generation student and wanting to do right by that opportunity. And one of the reasons I wanted to participate in #FirstGen is because I never really overcame that. Being a first-generation student is a weight when you are going through school, and a medal when you graduate, knowing the whole time that you’re doing something your parents never did. It’s a journey that changes you, and I can only hope that the #FirstGen campaign will help current students find a solace I missed.

**How my background has helped me:** My dad worked two and a half jobs when he first immigrated to the U.S. from Hong Kong. As a new immigrant, my mom learned how to be a mother, cooked for an entourage of extended family, and took night classes to improve her English, before going to work herself. I learned firsthand that hard work can pay off, and that refraining from playing the martyr during the journey leaves more time to focus on the goal. Having the chance to talk now about my first-generation experience, then, is refreshing, cathartic, and something that I didn’t know that I needed until I started to write this.

**What I would tell my first-year self:** I would tell my first-year self that a 10-minute call to mom can do wonders for the soul. Even for first-generation students, while your parents may not understand the circumstances first hand, they will understand the emotions so long as you start with, “Everything is just fine. I just need to vent.”

**The best thing about my college experience was:** The best thing about my college experience was changing from majoring in Biology to double majoring in Psychology and Sociology two years in. It is horrible to feel like you’ve wasted half your undergraduate college career, but freeing to accept what you do not enjoy, and to learn what you do. The best thing about my college experience, then, was learning to listen to my heart and discovering that its often not too far from what my gut is telling me.

**How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now:** I am asked often by work superiors why I’ve chosen to be an office manager and executive assistant when my two degrees suggest that I could be challenging myself more. Beyond questioning folks on how easy they think herding cats in a start-up actually is, it is a reminder to me of my mom comforting me over the phone as I cried about failing organic chemistry and wanting to change majors two years into the game. Mom said, “I don’t care what you study. I just wanted you to go to college so that you could learn how to really think and analyze things for yourself.” Having been a first-generation student allows me the daily reminder that college was not about a degree, but rather an opportunity to open my mind to deeper thought; an opportunity to choose what to do and what not to do to earn my living; an opportunity to HAVE opportunities.
I was born in Hawaiian Gardens, CA (near Long Beach), and grew up in Modesto, CA. Three of my four grandparents did not complete high school due to family obligations (e.g., helping to raise siblings). My parents are both high school graduates. My dad is a mechanic and worked 10 hour days, standing in an open garage, for most of my life. He rarely called in sick and never took vacation time. My mom (now deceased) was a secretary. I have a younger brother who is also a mechanic and works with my dad now. I was raised in a working-class neighborhood and was told from a very early age, especially by my mom and aunts, that I would go to college. I learned about hard work and to aspire for a college degree from my family.

**What motivated me to go to college:** I grew up in a neighborhood with a lot of violence, including domestic violence. I knew from an early age that this was not the life that I wanted for myself. Between this, and the encouragement of my mom, aunts, and teachers, I knew that, one way or another, I would go to college. Of course, no one in my family knew what this meant, but it was still my and my community’s dream for me.

**What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it:** I faced three big challenges: expectations, finances, and lack of preparation. Considering expectations, I had a high school guidance counselor who did not believe in me. When I told her I wanted to go to Stanford and become a lawyer, she told me that kids like me do not go to places like Stanford and become lawyers. Instead, I should go to Stanislaus State University and become a paralegal. I never applied to Stanford. Instead, I applied to four UCs. I got into UCSC and wanted to come here, as it was the only college campus I had ever visited (thanks to a friend’s mom). I was supposed to get financial aid to cover about half of my expenses, but my financial aid was revoked. I never called the campus to find out why. Instead, I joined the Navy reserves and got the GI Bill. After becoming a corpsman (like a medic), starting up at Modesto Junior College, being put on active duty for the first Gulf War, then heading back to Modesto Junior College, I finally transferred to UC Santa Cruz! This took a lot of persistence.

My final big challenge was lack of preparation. Although I learned I was not a good writer after I transferred to UC Santa Cruz, I was too proud to really work on my writing. It was not until I started graduate school that I learned how bad my writing was, and also how ill prepared I was for that level of work. I dealt with something called “imposter syndrome.” In this context, this was the belief that I didn’t belong in school and that my admission to the university was a mistake. I had to work through these feelings, which came with a lot of tears and talking, and then I had to
work very hard on my writing every day. I found classmates and professors who agreed to work with me. They also recommended books I could read to help me with my writing. Over time, I learned that I write so that I can work through an idea, and nothing is ready to be shared with a bigger audience until at least draft three. This shift helped me learn that writing is a process and not just a destination.

**How my background has helped me:** In my working-class household and cultural community, people helped each other. I knew whose door to knock on if I got hurt while out playing, if I wanted to borrow a book, if I needed a ride, if I needed a snack, etc. Children were expected to help out too, be it with a younger child’s homework (one of my jobs), or pulling weeds for a neighbor. Although I often did things myself in college, I also had an expectation that I could ask for help and someone would give it. For example, my roommates read and commented on all of my papers before I turned them in, because I asked them to. It was also the case that if someone asked for my help, I would freely give it. In college, I learned I was good at math and that I liked it. I would therefore lead tutoring sessions for those who needed help. What I did not realize at the time, but I know now, is that those sessions helped me just as much as they helped those who I was tutoring.

**What I would tell my first-year self:** Start working on your writing sooner rather than later, while you have access to tutors and you don’t have to pay someone. Take more classes outside of your major so you can gain a more interdisciplinary foundation, which will make you a better and more creative researcher. Ask questions in class, even if you are afraid you’ll sound dumb. Chances are, someone has a similar question.

**The best thing about my college experience was:** I learned that I, too, could co-create knowledge, through research. The university is not just about learning something, but about contributing to make the university and the world a better place. It was an extremely powerful moment when I learned that I could ask a question that no one knew the answer to, and that I could work (usually with others) to figure something out about that question.

**How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now:** My research team and I run an after-school program where we teach fourth and fifth grade students, most of whom will be first generation college students, to conduct action research to create change in their school and community. Something special happens when people realize that they can create knowledge. I want children to have this experience, and not have to wait until they get to college. I want children from working class and working poor communities to know that they and their perspectives matter, that they can change the world, and that there are tools that can help them to do just that. Also, as the provost of Oakes College, I do everything in my power to create programming and affect policies and procedures that will change structures so that first generation college students can be more supported by the university.
I was born and raised in San Diego, California. I grew up in South East San Diego, in a socio-economically poor neighborhood. My family was poor and relied on welfare and Section 8 housing for a good portion of my childhood. Life was always a struggle but my mom did her best to shield us from the daily stresses she endured to keep the lights on and put food on the table. It was this upbringing which lead me in my desire to learn and view an education as a way out of my situation.

**What motivated me to go to college:** In Middle school I became part of the AVID program and being around other kids who were focused on education and college is what helped make me focus on obtaining good grades and really learning the material in classes. I was lucky enough to have some stellar teachers in high school who all supported my educational goals and pushed for me to participate in extracurricular activities so that I was more appealing for the college admission process. I knew that if I went to college I would have so many more opportunities in life than I would without a degree, so I applied to 5 schools and got in to all five, UC Berkeley being the one I chose to attend.

**What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it:** Unfortunately during my first semester at Berkeley my grandmother passed away and my younger sister was raped. These events put me in a serious depression and I never quite dealt with the issues I was going through in the best manner. I had to withdraw from school, a couple of times through various semesters, and it took me 3 times as long as it normally takes a person to graduate from college. The one thing I always kept in my mind was that I needed to finish what I started. I came to college to get a degree and make my life better, so I kept at it and persevered. I audited the last class I needed in my Anthropology major and took classes at a community college and online courses through Berkeley and finally, after 12 years, I graduated from Berkeley with a B.A. in Anthropology. It was the hardest thing I’ve ever done and it would have been so much easier to have given up and pursued something else, but if I had I wouldn’t be where I am today, working for UCSC and living in such a beautiful city as Santa Cruz.

**How my background has helped me:** Growing up poor and having to go without has definitely made me more appreciative of all that I have and it has helped me stay determined when things don’t turn out the way I hoped for or planned. The experiences I had throughout my college years and the people I met along the way have given me the ability to relate to people on the most basic and complex levels. These experiences have given me a strong sense of empathy, which has allowed my networking skills to flourish. All of these experiences influence how I view the world and help to make me a stronger person.
What I would tell my first-year self: Never give up. No matter how hard something may seem, or how down you may get, always know that if you keep at it and give it your best, you will come out the other side much better for having gone through the struggle. People like to avoid a difficult situation, but it’s the struggles in life that make us stronger and teach us how to push through adversity.

The best thing about my college experience was: All the people I met through college. I have a fantastic network of friends and colleagues that I met through my undergrad years and beyond. I can count among my best friends Doctors, Lawyers, Engineers, Project Managers, Directors, and Entrepreneurs. I met my fiancé through one of my best friends from college. I can’t stress enough, the people you meet in college will have a transformative effect on your life.

How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now: I’m a huge proponent of higher education (hence why I work where I work) so I always support young people’s decisions in wanting to obtain a university degree and love hearing about the student experience.
First-Gen Staff: Dr. L. Esthela Bañuelos, Academic Senate Analyst

I was born and raised in a working class neighborhood in Southeast Los Angeles, a daughter of immigrants who courageously came to an entirely new country seeking a better life. My route to higher education began at community college.

What motivated me to go to college: I remember being excited that I would get to read, learn, and study in an environment where I could set my own course. So learning and independence together felt like an incredible privilege! To get to do what I loved was my primary motivation, but I also knew then that education was my best opportunity for mobility.

Advice I’d give my frosh self: Go to as many office hours as you can and get to know your professors. It’s a worthy investment of your time. Also, have fun.

How my background helped me: First-gen students often bring exceptional qualities that are not always recognized. For me these included grit, perseverance and insight into structures of inequality that later fueled not only my desire to get an advanced degree, but my passion for sociology. I’m grateful for the mentors and teachers who saw this and encouraged me.

The best thing about my college experience: College opened up a whole new set of possibilities for me, and provided a space for me to discover my strengths within a diverse community of support.

UC Connection: I earned my Ph.D. in Sociology (Designated Emphasis in Feminist Studies) at UC Santa Cruz, and was a Lecturer in the department of Latin American and Latino Studies here before transitioning to my current position as Analyst with the Academic Senate.
First-Gen Graduate Student: Delio Vasquez, History of Consciousness

I was born and raised poor in the Bronx, the first son of Dominican immigrants. My mother, raised in a rural community, was not allowed to study past 8th grade because of her gender. We are a Spanglish-speaking family and I consider myself fortunate to have grown up in the most ethnically diverse community in the country.

What motivated me to go to college: It is a part of Caribbean culture to value education and sapience on their own terms, but we were also taught that education could be a path to financial stability. As a teen, I was somewhat motivated towards college, but mostly I just treated it as automatic, and I proceeded through scholarship programs without questioning what the end goal was.

What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it: When I realized that participating in a capitalist society necessarily means benefiting from the suffering and un-freedom of others, I fell into existential self-doubt and political frustration at the seeming inescapability of our condition. Why get a degree, just to get a job, just to add to it all? An advisor pointed out to me that my experience of depression was not unique to me, but was instead structural and common to first-generation college students, males of color, and others like me. Despite the actions and efforts of many well-intentioned people, the modern university functions in large part to build and reinforce class hierarchy, while assimilating subsections of the general population into positions of management. That I would experience the university as harmful should therefore not take me by surprise; this political awareness then helped me to move through the institution more strategically.

How my background has helped me: Connecting to my family members in the Dominican Republic and understanding the limits imposed on them by borders and poverty helped me to appreciate and make more tactical use of the position of power that I was already in. That said, motivation fueled by guilt will often prove inadequate, when not altogether psychologically harmful; neither should we romanticize the resilience, self-sacrifice, and work ethic of our families in ways that encourage that those of us who have fallen by the wayside be forgotten. I have grown and gained the most when I have aimed towards a positive goal grounded in striving for freedom from suffering for all.

What I would tell my first-year self: Get over your fear of talking to professors and advisors. It is part of their job to sit there and listen to students.

The best thing about my college experience was: Making friends with quality people.
How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now: Growing up poor makes it quite clear that people are often forced to make hard decisions and do ugly things for good reasons. My work as a political theorist focuses on how and why people break the law as they seek resources and struggle to sustain themselves and their communities. From welfare fraud and illegal immigration to the bank robbing revolutionaries of the 1970s, people’s tendencies to do what they need to do—whether they consider the actions "political" or not—make sense on their own terms, while also simultaneously revealing the inhumaneness of modern property law. As a scholar, I work to lend some legitimacy to these everyday practices.
My father was a mechanic in a soda ash plant, a trona mine, and a power plant. My mother was an old school ("one-ringy-dingy") telephone operator whose health eventually forced her into early retirement. My Dad was brilliant, but was unable to complete a degree with the financial demands faced by a working-class person. Our parents both encouraged us to go to college and my Dad worked a lot of overtime to help me pay for the balance left on my undergraduate degree after I applied all my scholarships. My sister and I were the first in our families to complete college.

**What motivated me to go to college:** I had tremendous support to go to school. My Dad told me I could be the President of the United States, if that’s what I wanted. My parents made sacrifices to send their children to school. I wanted to go to college, so I could leverage the power of a university education to make the world a better place. I feel very fortunate that I get to do that work.

**What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it:** I worked three jobs during the school year to put myself through school when my savings account drained. I was working three jobs during the summer as well. My best strategies were to connect with others in my situation, plan, and to keep my eyes on the goal. I tried to use my time efficiently and even make use. When my shift ended at the pizza parlor, I would study there, because there were no distractions.

**How my background has helped me:** Creative resiliency. I had seen people face enormous challenges and pick themselves up, dust off, and carry on. I had to do that in terms of a whole range of challenges, even intellectual ones. Once, the oil filter dropped off of my car while I was driving down the highway, and my engine seized; I couldn’t afford to repair the car for many months. I had to work to stay in school, and I had to have a car to get to work at the Country Club where I waited tables. That meant I had to put together a creative car-pooling program with my friends, so I could still do my job. I didn’t give up when I faced the obstacle.

**What I would tell my first-year self:** I was working so hard I nearly got all the way through college without recognizing how amazing and fun my classes were. I remind students all the time to shift their paradigm and enjoy college—the learning as well as the people and the social events.

**The best thing about my college experience was:** Feeling like I had changed my life, so I could do my part to change the world.
How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now: I learned even more ways to have what Carol Dweck (a Stanford researcher on “grit”) calls “Growth Mindset”: the recognition that the things that challenge us the most are also often the very ones that help us genuinely to grow (not a sign that we shouldn’t be doing that work or that we don’t belong there).
First-Gen: Chancellor George Blumenthal

As a first-generation undergraduate student, when in high school, I didn’t even know it was possible to get a scholarship to college without playing football. I lived at home, went to college, and continuously worked at least 20 hours per week, first in a store, then in the public library system, and finally as an undergraduate researcher at the university. I was still able to graduate in three years and go on to graduate school.

**Advice I’d give my freshman self:** Feel assured that you really do belong at the university. Don’t be afraid to move outside your comfort zone, and always be open to new ideas and to thinking critically about the subjects you are learning. Be willing to seize those opportunities that present themselves.

**How my background helped me:** I always knew I wanted a more interesting and rewarding career than my parents and grandparents had.

**The best thing about my college experience:** I was able to greatly expand my horizons. I had numerous eye-opening insights about myself and about the subjects I was studying – whether I liked them or not. I was able to get involved in research and discovery, which proved to be a life changing experience for me. And my many interactions with others outside the classroom, both friends and co-workers, had a very positive and lasting impact on my life.

**My UC connections:** Chancellor, UC Santa Cruz as well as Professor of Astronomy and Astrophysics. PhD from UC San Diego. My wife and children all hold professional degrees from
I’m a native to South Central Los Angeles, and the eldest of two daughters born to a Mexican father and Afro Latina mother from Ecuador. My father’s education ended in the fifth grade and my mother migrated to the United States before being able to pursue a college degree in her own country.

**What motivated me to go to college:** What motivated me to go to college was seeing how hard my parents worked to make sure we had food on the table and a roof over our heads. My fondest memories are of our family waking up at six in the morning to recycle copper because, although it was hard work, it was also our family time. Hearing my parent’s childhood stories, and their desire for us to succeed and no longer recycle cooper, motivated me to go to college.

**What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it:** The biggest challenge has overcoming the insecurities of feeling like everyone else is better prepared, or smarter than you. It took a long time to realize that I was capable and deserving of being in college, and that my childhood and lived experiences gave me a different type of grounding that was powerful enough to get me through college and eventually pursue a PhD.

**How my background has helped me:** Because of my background, I’ve found that I am able to make connections others may not be able to make, both inside the classroom and with other people. It’s almost like having an extra pair of glasses to see the world through.

**What I would tell my first-year self:** If I go back and give my first-year self some advice, it would be to have more fun. I spent too much time worrying whether or not it was OK for me to go out and have fun knowing that my parents were working to help me pay college tuition, that I think I missed some opportunities to learn things outside the classroom and understand that my parents just wanted me to be happy.

**The best thing about my college experience was:** Being exposed to different cultures… and food!

**How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now:** Being a first-generation college student has influenced all my work. I’m very interested in the way that youth think of the future and what they imagined their lives could be like in comparison to their parent’s imaginary of the future. My work was heavily influenced by my parent’s stories.
First-Gen Graduate Student: Ibette Valle, Social Psychology

Out of four children, I was the first to be born in America and to graduate from high school. My parents grew up in neighboring villages of rural Mexico with no electricity or public health facilities. Despite yearning for more knowledge, my father, the wisest man I know, left primary school to support his mother and sisters. My mother, a warrior, stopped attending primary school to help her mother manage the household. Both worked hard as seasonal farmworkers to settle our family in the United States. In the cherry orchards of eastern Washington, where my family worked daily for 10-14 hours, I learned values of hard work and collaboration, which I attribute to my success as a first-generation college graduate.

What motivated me to go to college: Even though teachers would tell me that I was destined for college, I struggled to envision a future in higher education because my family had no knowledge on how to encourage or support me in that endeavor. Through middle- and high school, I struggled to explain the concept of higher education to my parents and how it could open opportunities for us. At the age of 16, in my senior year, my family was forced apart by deportation and my daily life changed dramatically. Through support from staff and affiliates from my low-income high school, I found hope in pursuing a college education that would provide me with the tools to challenge the inequities faced in my community.

What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it: I felt an immense amount of guilt for not being able to support my family emotionally, physically, and financially because they still struggled to understand why I chose to leave. I worked multiple jobs to try to be a source of support and kept my feelings of guilt to myself, ultimately leading to setbacks in my health and academics. What helped was finding a family environment in the College Assistance Migrant Program, TRiO and EOP, and participating in mentoring and teaching opportunities to support and connect with other first-generation college students because their strength and resilience was inspiring.

How my background has helped me: I drew upon memories of my family’s demonstrations of strength, perseverance, and resilience to continue to persist through the challenges of adjusting to the college culture. Despite being a working-class family with a language barrier, we have always found ways to overcome obstacles to support the family—whether it was my mother working back-to-back jobs while still ensuring there were meals prepared, or my father...
First Generation Initiative

through a lifetime of pain from a disabling work injury. As such, I knew that someday they would understand that this was my way of contributing to our family’s future benefit.

What I would tell my first-year self: Even if your parents don’t express the same excitement for your academic successes, notice the twinkle of pride in their eyes when they mention their daughter is in college—You are a pioneer and it is ok to be proud of yourself, too. While social, cultural, and familial obstacles will be aplenty, remember that you are carving out a glass door that your brother, your cousins, your nieces, and nephews can open and choose to go through if they wish. That being said, remember to take care of your health because you have a long journey ahead of you—you’re gonna earn a Ph.D!

The best thing about my college experience was: I met so many people that inspired and encouraged me throughout my college journey—whether through academic support programs, study abroad, clubs, research, internships, or job opportunities. I found language through which to describe my passion from mentors and a community of first-generation peers that helped me solidify my life goals of advocating for equity in education. For my family, my college experience—full of failures and successes, serves as an example for younger generations as they prepare for the transition to college.

How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now: I am so empowered as a first-generation college graduate! I have cousins whom I have never met, asking for help with financial aid. Instead of saying “I don’t know”, I get to say, “How much time do you have?” and “You’re going to want to write this down”. Career-wise, I am fortunate enough to be in graduate school for the specific purpose of supporting first-generation college students like myself. My goal is to continue to serve first-generation students in a capacity where their stories can be heard and their many strengths celebrated. I still struggle with guilt at times, but my background and the backgrounds of all of the first-generation students whose stories I have had the honor to hear, always keep me motivated to keep going and open more doors to education.
First Generation Initiative

First-Gen Staff: Angela Rossi-Steele, ITS (Former Chair, Staff Advisory Board)

I grew up in the east bay town of Antioch, CA where we moved to when I was six years old. At the time, it was considered an up and coming bedroom community with good public schools. My parents were working class first and second-generation Americans whose highest level of education was finishing high school. My mother spent most of her working career as a baker. She was up and out the door each morning before anyone else was awake and came home well after my younger brother and I had returned from school.

What motivated me to go to college: From a very young age, I knew coming from a low-income background caused the majority of stress in my home. I learned that a higher education would make a positive shift in my long-term outcome from growing up in this environment. There was never a question of whether I was going to attend college or not. The question was “how”. I always loved attending school. It was my safe place where I excelled, and felt valued. I was lucky to have amazing teachers throughout K-12 who inspired and guided me academically and personally to find the path to getting to college. Many of these teachers I am still in contact with today. I was also greatly motivated to make sure my brother had a strong support system knowing that I would be leaving home without him. As I was graduating from college, he was graduating from high school. Several weeks after, he had moved in with me, enrolled in college, and is now a firefighter/paramedic and member of the Santa Cruz community.

What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it: The biggest challenge I encountered as a first-generation student was balancing work and school. I had a job within a week of arriving at college. Not having a job was not an option as it was the only way I was going to be able to afford to live and stay enrolled. I worked the maximum number hours allowed and was given an increased amount of responsibility over the four years I held the position. I had two part-time jobs while attending high school, but the academic load was significantly higher in college. They key to balancing this challenge was time and resource management and just having a “get it done” attitude because ultimately, there was no other alternative option. I found mentors to guide me academically, personally, and professionally to balance the heavy load I was balancing each day.

How my background has helped me: Learning to be independent has always been a key component in my success. I’ve never had the expectation that “someone will tell me” what I need to know in school, work, or life. I consider myself a “research/policy/information wonk”. I want to know what the guidelines, instructions, general information, etc. are so I can make decisions on how to move around in life. First generations students are usually extremely resilient. I arrived at college feeling that my writing skills were going to put me at a disadvantage
in many ways. Finding a tutor early on was a high priority to push through having a positive experience in future intensive writing courses.

**What I would tell my first-year self:** I would tell myself not to worry so much and ask for help. Ask for support, ask for mentorship, ask for money...just “do the ask”. If you don’t ask, you don’t know what you might be missing out on. The worse reply you can get is a “no”, which means you haven’t lost anything. It might assist rephrasing your ask to get a “yes”. Also, be loyal to yourself. If something isn’t right in your life, make a change even if you find it risky. You have to be your biggest cheerleader. Taking risks is difficult when things feel safe, but you never know what might be at the end of the “road not taken” if you don’t try.

**The best thing about my college experience was:** There were many wonderful things about the college experience. Meeting new classmates and friends from around the world opened my eyes to new experiences, ideas, and outlooks on life. The freshman Core course at Oakes College influenced my view of society significantly. I learned about the impact of history, culture, and politics on how we’ve moved forward and regressed as a population. I will always treasure my final senior computer science course with Manfred Warmuth. His first lecture on how yeast works in the process of making bread while comparing it to computational theories was brilliant!

**How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now:** Attending college was a transformative experience for me. As a first-generation college student, I did not have the support system that many of my classmates and friends had. I had to be more independent, resilient, and in some ways, had to work a lot harder both personally and academically. Having the honor to work with college students every day reminds me that a student needs to be viewed holistically and that they should be supported, engaged, and educated as humans first...they are more than a name on a roster or a filled chair in a classroom. The most important part of my senior year in high school was scholarship night where I received several community awards. Several years ago, I started a scholarship at my high school on behalf of my graduating class. It is my hope that by awarding several scholarships each year that I can champion well-rounded students who will make a positive impact and contribution to our society and who will also “pay it forward” when the times comes in their lives.
I am a first generation USAmerican—my parents immigrated to Los Angeles from Guatemala. My siblings and I were born here in the US. We grew up in L.A. (Huntington Park) and in the Bay Area. In 1981, my father (who remarried to my stepmother) relocated us back to Guatemala, where I completed 5th through 8th grades, returning to the US as a frosh in high school (midway through the US academic year). After high school, my parents moved to Chico, CA. Unsure about my ability to start college, I worked as a Nurse Assistant at an assisted nursing facility in Chico. Several months after starting work as a Nurse Assistant, I enrolled in classes at Chico State. Competing on the speech and debate team helped to ground my academic focus. I eventually was offered a Performing Arts Scholarship to compete for Colorado State University’s Speech and Debate team. I relocated to Colorado and eventually completed my Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees at CSU in Communication Studies (with a Master’s Certification in Women’s Studies), and my Ph.D. at Boulder (also in Communication Studies).

**What motivated me to go to college:** My stepmother encouraged me to go, but I still was unsure of myself. I just knew that it was “something I should do.” My father worked a lot, so he did not ever really talk to me about college, but he also knew that it was something “good to do.” Honestly, I stumbled into college because my friends who came from more privileged upbringings were going, and I wanted to “fit in.” Once I was in college, I progressively became more motivated because of what I was learning, and not learning. In other words, I realized early on that academic literature was frequently presented from the perspective of privileged dominant groups, consistently missing the voices from underrepresented groups, thus leaving a gap in my learning.

**What the biggest challenge I encountered was as a first-generation student and how I overcame it:** Part of my uncertainty in going to college stemmed from the feeling of not belonging. My formative years were spent in Guatemala during the height of the human rights violations under military control. There was so much that I wanted to question in classes because I saw gaps in representation. However, I did not have the skills, the language, or the confidence to openly question and problematize the narrow perspectives that were presented. It wasn’t until I started classes at Colorado State University where I met my mentors—Dr. Cindy L. Griffin and Karen Wedge—who validated how and why I was questioning what I was learning. They encouraged my learning process, taught me how to frame my questions and connected me to the writings of other women of color who were not quite part of the academic mainstream at the time—bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa were among them.
**First Generation Initiative**

**How my background has helped me:** Being raised in Guatemala for part of my life was instrumental to my development and to my upbringing. It was also not easy, and was terrifying at times. Additionally, being raised in two cultural contexts and being raised bilingual taught me how to adapt to ambiguity and how to work effectively with multiple groups of people. I also learned about the importance of family in our Guatemalan culture. My experiences have also highlighted how important it is to understand immigrant experiences, especially immigrants coming from Latin American countries—whether documented or not—and the sacrifices that family members make to keep their families together. Without knowing it at the time, I was also learning how to operate in the world of higher education.

**What I would tell my first-year self:** The biggest piece of advice I was given, which really is more so a phrase of encouragement and assurance, was: “You do belong here!” As a result, when I experienced frustrations, as well as successes, I would repeat to myself “I do belong here” . . . to this day, I still tell myself this!

**The best thing about my college experience was:** I was able to make sense of, and develop a language for, the many social, local, national and international inequities that I witnessed. This influenced me to pursue a career in higher education in an effort to continue to support underrepresented students as they experience their own journey through higher education.

**How being a first-generation student influences me (and/or my work) now:** My career path has been in higher education. My role as a Critical Latina/Latin American Transnational Feminist Scholar in Communication Studies was influenced by my first-generation status—both as a first gen student and a first gen US citizen. I developed an academic language of resistance that called out a tradition that marginalized the voices of people from non-dominant groups. Additionally, everything I do as the Campus Diversity Officer for Staff and Students is deeply rooted in and connected to who I am as a first gen student and citizen. In other words, I would not be doing this work had I not had the upbringing and experiences that I did.
First-Gen Faculty: Dr. James Doucet-Battle, Assistant Professor, Sociology Department

Dr. James Doucet-Battle was born and raised in Rochester, New York. His father worked for the Air Force and his mother was employed at Eastman Kodak.

“Recent research shows that only 1 in 11 African American public-school males graduates from high school in Rochester,” he said. “And there were some extremely brilliant people in my neighborhood. Many of them would have made it much farther than I have.”

James' mother insisted on sending him to a highly regarded private Catholic school. The professor of sociology remains forever grateful to his family for their sacrifices, though he also acknowledges his struggles in a segregated environment where he was made to feel keenly that his true potential was not recognized.

“I think I was seen as more of an athlete than a student,” James said.

His guidance counselor was his track coach, who never brought up the subject of college once, despite James’ avowed love of learning.

James said he is most appreciative of the librarians at the school, who gave him the space to read for hours on end about history, comparative religion, and political science.

James’s journey from Rochester to UC Santa Cruz was driven by a love of his subject material. He is a medical anthropologist and is currently busy working on a book about the recruitment of African Americans in Type II diabetes research.

He doesn’t view his journey toward a full-time faculty position as one of overcoming a series of challenges, but rather as being presented with a series of what he calls “creative opportunities.”

“I viewed it as a series of choices,” he said. “And one of those choices was coming to California.”

After graduating high school, James journeyed to Santa Cruz via New Mexico, pursuing an intense interest in Ayurvedic medicine. That passion carried him to India and Sri Lanka, before he landed an interview with a professor at San Jose State University who specialized in ethnobotany, thus precipitating a quantum leap forward in James’ academic career.

After graduating from San Jose State in just three semesters, and obtaining an MA in History and Anthropology, he was selected as a Ronald McNair Scholar. James then pursued a joint PhD at the University of California, Berkeley and University of California, San Francisco in the Joint Medical Anthropology Program.
After gaining his PhD, James was selected as a UC President’s Postdoctoral Fellow at UC Santa Cruz and then became a professor.

“I didn’t think I was UC material,” he said, joking that he used to believe people who were accepted into Berkeley and UC Santa Cruz were adept at the piano by age 2 and publishing academic papers before the age of 10.

But James said this lack of confidence is the one thing he would tell his students to avoid, particularly those who are the first in their family to attend college.

“Don’t ever say ‘no’ to yourself,” he said. “Let the world say ‘no’ to you.”

James said it is about confidence on the one hand, but also about the courage to recognize your intellectual inclinations and to follow them doggedly.

“I think that a diverse faculty, particularly first-gen faculty, can show students that their passion is not a dead end, but a pipeline through which they too can pass,” he said. “When you get interested in an idea or a topic for which you acquire a passion, you can see real possibilities for creating a positive future that includes you.”

James said the First-Gen Faculty campaign is important in that it allows all students, such as those that hail from low-income backgrounds or underrepresented minorities to envision themselves as full participants in the scholarly community.

“The goal of a diverse faculty is not something hovering over a distant horizon,” he said. “It is within our reach. Our students are the ones who will contribute to achieving that goal.”
First-Gene Faculty: Dr. Juan Poblete, Literature Professor

Dr. Juan Poblete was born in Santiago, Chile, one of five siblings. His father was a popular singer, whose Frank Sinatra-like crooner style made him popular in the 1950s. Juan’s father also co-led a popular Chilean radio show in the 1960’s.

Neither of Juan’s parents graduated high school, though his father was a voracious reader, something he instilled early on in his son. Juan’s mother had a strong sense of discipline and hard work, which Juan incorporated in his own approach, a particular influence on his studies.

Juan grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Santiago, attending good schools and showing aptitude and ambition early on.

However, Juan’s childhood was beset by the political upheavals in Chile and Argentina throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In 1973, while Juan was still in primary (elementary) school, his family moved to Argentina as Augusto Pinochet effected a military coup and installed himself as dictator of Chile, a political circumstance that would last to 1990 and impede the educational efforts of many of Juan’s compatriots.

With his family migrating to Mendoza, Argentina, Juan was encouraged to apply himself academically and he benefited from the examples of his older siblings, all of whom attended college. When a military coup took place in Argentina in 1976 Juan’s family again moved, this time back to Chile, once again disquieting the continuity of his education.

Juan continued to persevere, however, graduating from high school, studying literature at the University of Chile, and doing the coursework for a graduate degree in Communications before coming to the United States to pursue a PhD in literature.

“Since I loved it, I did really well,” said Poblete of his experiences in college. “It’s not like I found it easy, but I had discipline and I put the work in.”

He earned his degree at Duke in 1997 and soon after accepted a tenure-track position in the Literature Department at UC Santa Cruz, where he has been ever since.

Juan is proud to be part of a public institution now recognized as an Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) with over 25% of the undergraduate student body identified as Latino/a. He served as co-chair for the task force that successfully applied for two Hispanic Serving Institution grants through the U.S. Department of Education totaling more than $8 million. These funds are being used to support student retention and success in math, science, and critical reading for incoming Hispanic students as well as to develop a sense of belonging and for implementation of culturally-relevant academic advising.
Because Juan teaches literature classes in both English and Spanish, he has a direct connection to many first-generation students making their way through college.

“What I would say to a first-generation student is that you are welcome here at UCSC, we want you to be successful, we understand your challenges. We are in the process of re-designing all the steps, rethinking our approach to preparatory education in college, creating a level playing field for all of our students. We are committed to supporting you in excelling and look forward to you graduating from this campus,” Poblete said.

The institution, Juan notes, must continue to progress if it plans to serve the current and the next generations of Californians. Demographic forces mean the institution must rise to the challenges of providing high-level and effective education to a culturally diverse student body. He sees the First-Gen Faculty (FGF) campaign as one step in that direction.

“It is not just Latinos,” he said. “We have many students from underserved populations who are Vietnamese, Chinese, Filipino, African Americans, and Native Americans. They are often the first to go to college in their family too.”

Juan notes that all of these demographics combined accounted for roughly two-thirds of the students at UC Santa Cruz for fall of 2016.

“We are a majority minority campus now,” he said.

With the FGF campaign underway, the HSI initiatives being implemented, and so many student success services provided on campus, Juan sees UC Santa Cruz now on the path toward fulfilling the mission of a public university, serving the needs of students in a culturally and ethnically diverse state and nation.

“We need to be able to say to these students — ‘We have created the perfect social and educational environment for you to thrive here. All we need now is your full effort and talents’” Juan said.
First-Gen Faculty: Dr. Veronica Terriquez, Associate Professor, Sociology Department

Dr. Veronica Terriquez was born in the San Gabriel Valley in eastern Los Angeles County. The daughter of working-class immigrants, Veronica discovered early on her acumen and affinity for academic pursuits.

She excelled in K-12, earning good grades and her parents actively encouraged her to pursue her dreams of going to college.

Everyone, including Veronica’s counselor’s, assumed she would go to college, but in terms of the specifics, she was fuzzy.

She was fortunate to come in contact with peers who applied to the University of California, Berkeley, and even Ivy League schools. Based upon her sterling performance throughout high school, Veronica was encouraged to think along similar lines.

“I was very fortunate to have people in my life who suggested I apply to top universities,” Veronica said. “My parents were very supportive, but they didn’t provide me with guidance on my options and application process.”

She applied to Stanford, Berkeley, Pomona, UCLA, and Harvard, garnering acceptance letters at all five and eventually settling upon Harvard.

Once in Cambridge, she quickly realized the education she received at a Catholic High School meant that she was competing with students who were more prepared for the rigors of an Ivy League education.

“Math and science were my favorite subjects, but once I got into college I immediately became aware that my peers had much stronger preparation in those subject areas than I did,” she said. “I initially didn’t even know how to compete with them.”

However, her parents work ethic, demonstrated from an early age, meant Veronica was willing and able to put in the extra work necessary to level the playing field.

“I knew I had to work twice as hard, so that’s what I did,” she said.

Furthermore, Veronica began taking classes in sociology and found the study of social forces helped her understand and contextualize the difference between herself and her working-class background and many of the other students who came from more privileged backgrounds.
Armed with values of diligence and curiosity, Veronica eventually learned to thrive at Harvard and began to turn her attention to some of the inequalities she noticed at the school. Specifically, Veronica saw that there was not a single Latina professor at Harvard.

“One of the things I did with some of my peers was to work on an awareness campaign about the lack of diversity among the faculty,” Veronica said.

The students put up posters, held rallies.

“I felt I was not represented and there weren’t people like me working in higher education,” Veronica said.

But far from holding her back, Veronica used it as a motivating force, impelling her to achieve academically so she could change the statistics. She went on to earn a master’s degree at UC Berkeley and then a PhD at UCLA.

Veronica is eager to participate in the First-Gen Faculty Initiative because she knows first-hand the difficulties that students who are the first in their family to go to college face.

“I don’t assume students have parents who went to college,” she said. “It’s why I aim to explain the expectations and processes at the beginning of each quarter.”

Veronica said she is also cognizant of the costs of course materials and attempts to orient her classrooms to factor in students who may be facing economic hardships.

The UC Santa Cruz First-Gen campaign should also help students realize they should take advantage of resources available to them while on campus. Meet with professors, utilize office hours, seek internships and engage with the college experience at a level that exceeds simply going to class and taking tests.

“This campaign matters because our students need to feel that they are supported,” she said. “The faculty is here to help them navigate higher education. I’m here to help.”
“¿Estás durmiendo bien?” “Are you eating enough?” “Your new shoes look funny.” These are bits of conversations that can be heard when Dr. Rebecca Covarrubias, an Assistant Professor of Psychology, visits home during the break. “My family shows love in many ways — making sure I’m doing okay and also teasing me. They are good at it, too.”

One of four children, Rebecca grew up in a predominately low-income, Mexican neighborhood in Phoenix, Arizona. Born to two hard-working parents — her father, Jose Luis, an elementary school bus driver and janitor and her mother, Rosario, the backbone of the family — she learned the values of collaboration, hard work, and humility.

Growing up, she observed her father work long days in the Arizona heat to support the family, and her mother always on her feet to keep the family together. “It’s not just that they do everything for the family with limited means, but that they are also compassionate, tough, and funny. I admire who they are as people.”

Until Rebecca tested into an International Baccalaureate program outside of her high school district, she did not realize the stark contrast in resources available to her community and those available to other students in the honors program. Noticing these inequities propelled her to work harder and ultimately earn a full-ride to the University of Arizona (U of A) where she could learn how to make a change in her community.

“It was a hard transition leaving my family,” she said, as the first in her entire family to go to college.

For Rebecca, the strength of family bonds is typical of first-generation students, who are in many instances depended upon to contribute to the family, physically, emotionally, and financially. Since high school, Rebecca worked part-time jobs to give back to her family.

While enrolled at U of A, Rebecca was selected into the Ronald E. McNair Achievement Program that focused on introducing diversity into the research field. “I met other low-income, first-generation scholars of color like me and connected with mentors who believed I could do anything. For the first time, I could envision myself as a researcher,” she said.

The PhD program in Social Psychology at U of A did not come without challenges, however. Rebecca struggled to feel like she fit in with the graduate school culture and felt further disconnected from her family. “When moments of doubt hit, I thought about how hard my parents work or those who invested in me, or I found a way to connect with them,” she shared. “That helped keep me going.”
Rebecca found she had a knack for working with students, many just like her. “Being in the classroom or meeting with students was the only thing that consistently felt rewarding. Students gave meaning to the work.”

Having done postgraduate work in Delaware and abroad in Italy, Rebecca was excited to accept a position at UC Santa Cruz. “Even though my parents may not fully understand what it means to be faculty, they were excited for me,” she says, pointing out an example of how being first generation can follow you throughout your career. “We were all especially excited that I was finally closer to home.”

Rebecca directs the Culture and Achievement Collaborative on campus, where her undergraduate and graduate research team develops culturally-relevant approaches and strategies that can be used to better serve diverse students.

She wants students to know that, “My door is always open to you.”

Watch Rebecca's first-gen faculty profile video with tips and suggestions for navigating the first-gen experience.
First-Gen Faculty: Dr. Catherine “Cat” Ramírez, Associate Professor, Latin American & Latino Studies, And Director, Chicano Latino Research Center

Dr. Catherine "Cat" Ramírez's father graduated from high school in East Los Angeles and, after serving in the U.S. military during World War II, got a job working for Caltrans. Her mother, an immigrant from Mexico, was a homemaker who had to leave school as a girl to support her siblings after their mother died. When Cat was a teenager, her mother went back to school. Ultimately, she passed the General Educational Development (GED) test and graduated from high school the same year as Cat. Cat admired her mother’s resilience and dedication and saw how important education was to her.

The Catholic schools in Southern California’s San Gabriel Valley that Cat attended were mostly working-class and Hispanic. Many of her classmates did not attend university. However, her older sister, Nancy, transferred from community college to the University of California at Berkeley while Cat was still in high school. Since Cat’s high school had relatively few resources for preparing students for college, Nancy became her younger sister’s unofficial academic advisor and told her what classes she needed to take to qualify for admission to the University of California. After visiting Nancy in Berkeley, Cat resolved to follow in her older sister’s footsteps and to attend Cal, too. She was especially impressed by the campus’ vibrancy and the diversity of its student body, and the high expectations the students had of themselves and each other.

Cat enrolled at Berkeley as a freshman. However, the quality of education she had received in high school meant she had a steep learning curve. “I needed to learn how to identify and gather evidence, craft a thesis, and defend my claim,” she said. “I hadn’t learned how to argue or to think critically in high school.”

She struggled in her first writing class, English 1A, until her instructor directed her to a tutoring center, where a fellow student worked with her on improving her writing. Eventually, Cat majored in English and was hired as a writing tutor at the same center. Her job allowed her to continue to hone her writing and communication skills and introduced her to the rewards of teaching.

Cat realized as an undergraduate that she wanted to continue to work in a university setting as a professor. She reached out to her faculty, often simply by attending their office hours, and asked them what she needed to do to become a professor, too. In addition to giving her basic advice--for example, stressing the importance of maintaining high grades and collecting strong letters of recommendation--they encouraged her to study languages. So she studied Spanish, French, and, for a short time, Japanese. Their guidance encouraged her to be open to new
ideas and approaches. It also prompted her to see that college is not a terminus, but one step in the long journey of living and learning.

After graduating from Berkeley with a Bachelor’s degree in English, and then going back for her Ph.D. in ethnic studies, Cat joined the faculty of the University of California, Santa Cruz, in 2002. In addition to teaching classes on migration, citizenship, Latinx literature, and cultural studies, she directs UC Santa Cruz’s Chicano Latino Research Center.

Further, Cat stresses, students should place value on moving outside of their comfort zone. "I fear that too many students are being done and are doing themselves a disservice by trying to avoid studying or discussing unpleasant subjects, like genocide and misogyny. We must learn about the violence and injustices of the past and present in order to stop and prevent violence and injustices in the present and future," she suggests.

"Let's keep talking about this and supporting each other," suggests Ramírez.
First-Gen Faculty: Dr. Jaye Padgett, Professor, Linguistics Department, And Interim Vice Provost for Student Success

Dr. Jaye Padgett grew up in Takoma Park, Maryland, one of three siblings.

His father never graduated high school and procured work as a printer and later a chauffeur. His mother earned her diploma, but instead of continuing on to college got work as an administrative assistant.

“Really, I was the only person in my family to have a college experience,” Jaye said.

When he did arrive for his freshman year at the University of Maryland he felt keenly that he was out of place. He didn’t know how to pronounce sophisticated words that many of his peers used with a casual fluency. He didn’t know very much about composers, writers, painters, and other aspects of what is called “cultural capital”.

“My background was low-income and I think in that sense I felt like I didn’t fit in,” Jaye said.

Nevertheless, his status as a first-generation college student didn’t occur to him until recently, since he attended a large university in the 1980s, when there wasn’t even a concept of first-generation college students let alone support services.

Jaye struggled at first as a result.

“Academically, I felt a little bit lost in those first years of college,” Jaye said. “But I discovered linguistics and the Russian language and literature and in the last couple of years while in college I got straight A’s.”

Jaye said his parents never fully understood his academic pursuits, but always remained supportive and proud.

“I think having parents who didn’t go to college is presented as a disadvantage, but there is a flipside to that too,” he said. “Everything I did academically was because I wanted to do it, not because my dad wanted me to be an engineer.”

While Jaye was fortunate enough to find his calling, he understands the many pressures that first generation students can feel. “It isn’t just about academic preparation”, he notes. “First generation students may lack a secure sense of belonging at the university, may face stereotype threat, and are less likely to know who to turn to for support.”

It’s why he relishes the opportunity to serve as Interim Vice Provost for Student Success.
“There are huge economic disparities, quality of life disparities related to access to higher education, which is itself correlated with income and ethnicity,” he said. “We have a moral imperative to do better.”