

First Generation College Student Narrative:
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Until I had read the articles concerning First Generation College Students I had never considered my college education to be a major accomplishment. While being the first in my family to obtain a degree, I was among a group of my friends in my neighborhood to obtain their degrees at the same time so I did not recognize the magnitude of the accomplishment.

I grew up in a working class neighborhood in the city of St. Louis nicknamed “The Hill”. This area of the city was where all the Italian immigrants in St. Louis settled. The Hill is famous for being the birthplace of Yogi Berra and for its restaurants. Both of my parents were first generation Italian-Americans being born in the St. Louis area a year or two after my grandparents emigrated over from Italy. My mom was a cafeteria worker for the St. Louis Public School District and my dad was a factory worker. Both parents had an elementary school education. While a majority of my friends did not go to college, I did not feel that this was a major accomplishment on my part.

I remember at a young age being identified as being gifted intellectually. I often tell the story about early report cards stating “Finishes his work early and then bothers others”! From here I was continually challenged from mentors at the all boys’ high school I attended, St. Mary’s, to reach my full potential. At the time, I

did not realize exactly what that comment meant. I now understand why my dad always embarrassed me in front of friends and relatives by bragging about me being a member of the National Honor Society at my high school and excelling in college. It wasn't until my wife and I had recently adopted our son that I began to look at the "bigger picture" and came to the realization that my parents believed that not only would a college degree help me to build a better life for myself and my family but that it would indirectly help the community as a whole.

Being a first time college student in your family, it is perfectly normal to feel "out of place" or nervous about not knowing what comes next. Have faith that this wave you're riding will take you to new heights that up until this point only existed within your imagination. As you can see from the stories on this web page, many OU faculty and staff members have found this to be true.