

First Generation College Student Narrative:
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I'm the oldest child in the family. My parents never attended college, but at that time, college wasn't necessary to earn a living. Although I belonged to the right clique in high school, I wasn't in the same league in terms of being prepared for college. The group of people I hung around with seemed to have it all together when it came to plans after high school. They had parents and/or older siblings that attended college, so they knew what to do and how to plan. I didn't have that knowledge base to tap into. However, I never wanted my friends to know I didn't know what I was doing, so I acted like I was in control of my future. I wasn't.

I was never a leader, always a follower. I wanted to fit in. I signed up for the ACT and SAT for the same sessions as the rest of the group so we could all ride together. I didn't know I should study for these tests. It was then I realized standardized testing was not something I could manage. I didn't know that I should visit college campuses. I didn't know what questions I should ask. I never knew what I was supposed to do to prepare for college. I thought it would be neat to go out of state for college, but my father said I would go to Ohio State or not at all. Somehow I was accepted (it wasn't on my SAT score).

I moved to Main Campus in Columbus into a room with 2 other girls. One knew what she wanted to do; the other wanted nothing to do with college. I was somewhere in the middle. I had a pre-conceived notion that college would be just like high school. I would get above average grades without ever opening a

book, and the instructors would pass me. I learned early on that I would have to study if I wanted to graduate, but I had no idea how. I never had to study much in high school. Although I spent a lot of my time at the Main Library at OSU, I struggled with the idea of how to study. I more or less spent the time spinning my wheels and feeling overwhelmed.

The first two years of college were a struggle for me. The more I tried to keep up, the more I fell behind. I was “academically dismissed” before the end of my 2nd year (no, I wasn’t a sophomore by then). My mother received that letter as it was addressed to my parents; she came and moved me home. I was mortified. I begged OSU to reinstate me after a year, and they agreed. I returned a part-time student, and lived off campus. Taking two classes instead of three really helped me focus and do well. Living off campus took me out of the socializing aspect of college and allowed me to concentrate on my studies. By my 4th year, I moved back to the dorm (dad wouldn’t allow me to have an apartment, which was probably a good idea), worked my tail off, and finally graduated on the 5 year plan. My GPA was never anything to brag about, but at least I received a diploma.

Fast forward about 15 years. I felt I was mature enough to try graduate school. I had taken the GRE years prior and still struggled with the testing process. I found a graduate program that didn’t require those results, and I was accepted “conditionally”. I had to obtain nothing less than a “B” for the first three classes. It was an effort as I had to hone my study skills. I spent time in the library actually working on papers, research, and homework, and somehow I figured it out. Since then, I have earned a second masters degree. After my disastrous beginnings as a struggling undergraduate, I felt I had to prove to myself that I could succeed in college.

The biggest problem with my undergraduate years was that I didn’t know what to expect. My parents didn’t know what to expect. I wasn’t comfortable asking for advice from anyone. I never developed a rapport with any of my instructors or undergraduate advisors. I didn’t understand the importance of that. I remember after being reinstated, I was required to meet with my advisor regularly. At one of those meetings, he told me that had I met with my UVC advisors when I was having difficulty adjusting to college, they would have been able to help get me going in the right direction. I didn’t have any clue that I was suppose to meet with advisors on a regular basis. I thought they were there if I needed them, and I didn’t realize I needed them. I figured they would seek me out when they saw I was having problems. I didn’t know I was to make the first move. I also didn’t know that instructors were approachable. That’s my advice to you: know your advisors and instructors. If there’s a favorite instructor in your academic field, don’t be afraid to approach and build a professional relationship with them. They are there to help, and chances are, they can relate to your experiences.