

**First Generation College Student Narrative:**  
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Hi, my name is Connie and I am a first generation college student. Sorry for the sarcasm, that is just how I feel when I was asked to discuss my experience as the first one in my family to venture off to college. What caused that reaction? Well, I guess I was naïve to think that that was anything special. I had always obtained decent grades in school (I graduated with a 3.25). All of my friends were going to college; why would I be any different? Unfortunately, even though I was in the college-prep courses in high school, when it came to standardized testing, my scores always fell short of my friends. I remember the day that we received our ACT scores. All of my friends were comparing scores, not necessarily to reveal how smart we were but more to see where we ranked amongst each other. My score was 3-5 points lower than any of my friends. That was embarrassing! Well, it was just a test! I knew I had the potential to be successful and I was not going to let a test score dampen my spirits! To prove it, I applied to and was accepted at three universities.

I am a middle child with one older and one younger brother. My mother and father both graduated from high school and my father had some college training but never received his bachelor's degree. He jokes that he received his PhD at CSU...Common Sense University. He always stressed that while it was important to get a formal education, it was equally as important to have a 'good head on your shoulders'. Both of my parents supported my efforts to go to college. They knew I did not have the money to pay tuition. They knew I did not

have the money to pay room and board, books, fees, etc. They paid for all of my various college expenses. That is what support means, right?

I did not realize that my experience would be any different from anyone else until my freshman year in college. I was taking a Chemistry class and was having real difficulties understanding the material. I had never had a Chemistry class in high school. A friend of mine and I were studying together and she called her mom for help. Wait, her mom knew Chemistry? My mom is a very smart, warm and caring woman but her mom knew Chemistry. Is that normal? That quarter I obtained a dismal 2.07 GPA and was 0.07 points away from being put on academic probation. Academic probation! That was when I noticed that something was different. Why didn't I know how fast things moved in college? Why wasn't I prepared to know that I actually had to read the chapters and not just show up for class? Why didn't anyone tell me that college was going to be so different from high school?

As I continued my college career, I was fortunate enough to find my passion in Psychology. I was lucky to have an advisor who listened to me and helped me figure out what I wanted to do with my life. He was exactly what I needed. While my parents were, and continue to be, wonderful and learned that support also included listening to me talk about my classes, complain about my friends, cry about my test scores and a variety of other college experiences, my advisor was able to talk to me in a way that helped me better understand myself as a college student who had a lot of potential. He was the one who, despite my low GRE scores (again, lower than any of my friends), encouraged me to continue my education beyond the bachelor's degree.

Fast forward five years and I was at my doctoral commencement ceremony. My family, fiancé, and friends were rooting me on as I walked across the stage to be hooded. Wow, look at me go! Who would have thought this would be happening to me? Well, I did! My parents did! None of us knew what college would entail but I learned that even though my experience was different from others, I belonged in college just as much as anyone else. If I could give advice to another 'first-generation' student, I would say the following, "Identify your passion and seek it out. Don't let low test scores scare you from new challenges. Find a mentor to help you navigate the uncharted territory of being in college. You deserve to be here!" Through the support of my husband (who happens to be that early advisor) and my family, I have my PhD and a 'good head on my shoulders'.