



The University Service
Center's

First Gen Connect Newsletter

February 2016

Mahilet Assefa (SAR '16), a member of our First Gen Volunteer Corps, sat down with two classmates—Tsion (SAR '18), who enrolled at BU after high school in San Francisco, and Ribeka (SAR '16), who attended high school abroad and then transferred to BU after studying at Bunker Hill Community College—to hear their opinions on support systems benefitting first generation students. Salome Kuchukhidze (SPH '16), First Gen Connect's graduate intern, provided her thoughts on their conversation.

Mahi: What can we learn from first generation students?

Ribeka: Being a first gen student is a struggle and rewarding at the same time. One valuable lesson one can learn from being first gen is how to manage two different identities simultaneously - one with their family and the other at school. You learn how to integrate these two sides of your identity to succeed. Usually, first gen students' families lack awareness about the struggles they face in college; however, at the end of the day, their achievements are still a big source of pride to their family.

Tsion: As a first generation student, I am personally held up to high expectations in the household where my performance in high school, and now in college, are expected to display the best of my abilities. Sometimes, first generation students may have lower academic expectations than their peers. It's one of those facts you don't hide about yourself but always fear that it'd place you at a disadvantage somehow. However, these students are capable of not just acquiring a degree, but also succeeding in the long run.

Salome: Good point. As a first generation student, I have always felt the internal pressure to do my very best in every endeavor I take on. Since I was unfamiliar with the American education system when I moved here to the USA for my undergraduate degree, I felt that people tended to cut me more slack. This motivated me even more to push myself and prove that I was just as qualified as any other student whose parents had gone to college in the USA.

Mahi: What can high schools do to prepare first generation students for their college experience?

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Tsion: I feel like, unfortunately, first generation students are not given enough exposure to the importance of enrolling in advanced courses to prep them for the rigorous college life. I also think that they are also not educated about various scholarship/financial aid opportunities, and the advantages of enrolling in a community college vs. a 4-year-institution and vice versa. Programs such as [AVID](#) (Advancement Via Individual Determination) allow first gen students to not only grasp the importance of higher education but also hold them accountable for their achievements while in school.

Salome: I'm glad Tsion brought up AVID. Our readers might be interested to learn that AVID is a wonderful program dedicated to closing the achievement gap by preparing all students for college and other postsecondary opportunities. The AVID System annually provides more than 30,000 educators with training in methodologies to develop students' critical thinking, literacy, and math skills.

Mahi: What can colleges do to support first generation students?

Tsion: I think first gen students need strong [EOP](#) (Educational Opportunity Programs) implemented not just for first-years, but for everyone. College counselors who have extensive knowledge and dedication to working with first generation students need to be made readily available for students. A stable resource center where students can go if they need help would also be effective, in my opinion.

Salome: For those of you who may not have heard of it previously, EOP is a college preparation and support program in California. Its purpose is to encourage college enrollment, and provide access to education for students disadvantaged by various factors, such as language, social, economic and educational barriers.

Ribeka: I feel like advisors or counselors in school should focus on providing the platform for networking among first generation students. For instance, I spent my summer babysitting rather than working on internships to build my experience in the field of study I'm involved in. It's hard to find resources without being in touch with other first gen students.

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Salome: I agree completely. Colleges should provide stable, uninterrupted support and follow-up for students at all levels of their studies. In fact, I'd really encourage first gen students and their families to visit or call BU's University Service Center (USC) if they have a question or problem and aren't sure where to go. The staff are great to talk to and can get them pointed in the right direction. If there are many factors or offices involved, they're also great at helping figure out the best way to address the issue. The office is small and works with students closely on a one-on-one basis for as long as they need. First Gen Connect, housed in the USC, facilitates networking between upperclassmen and incoming first gen students as part of its mission.

***** Want to continue these conversations? Join us on April 9 at the [1st Gen College Student Summit](#). Students attend and stay for free. [Email us](#) for more details.**

**February 10 (3:00 pm) &
February 11 (5:30 pm)**

First Gen Connect Presents - Financial Planning for your College Bill & Applying for Financial Aid - [RSVP by February 9](#)
100 Bay State Road, Room 101

February 15

Presidents Day Holiday, Classes Suspended

February 23

Last Day to Drop Standard Courses (without a "W" grade)



Spotlight

Check out our [February Spotlight](#) - Nate Bellerose (Questrom '18)

Visit our [website](#) for events and workshops happening this academic year!