

ELEVATE

VOLUME 1
ISSUE 1

cover photo by
dolly yin





Newbury Center

ELEVATE

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A NOTE FROM THE CO-EDITORS

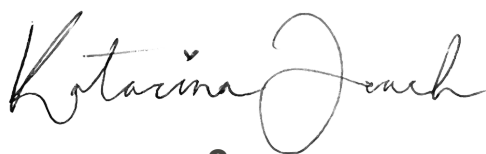
When the magazine project was pitched, I knew that I had to step up to the challenge. To have a platform for all Boston University students to submit pieces about their experiences about being first-generation college students was priceless, and something I felt was absolutely necessary to start.

Being first-gen is something that is informed by so many other parts of the self, one of the many things that shapes us as individuals due to intersectionality, and I think that each first-gen student has such a special (although not without its challenges) experience navigating college because of that.

It's amazing to see so many people come together to submit pieces into Elevate, and I hope to see the magazine move forward with the Newbury Center in the future.

Thank you for reading, submitting, and being.

KATARINA QUACH
COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION '24

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katarina Quach". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small heart symbol above the letter 'i' in "Katarina".

Being first-gen is a core part of our identity that shapes our point of view, our perspective, and our voice. My hope is that first-gen students can express their unique identities through a creative medium.

It's been amazing to be able to be part of the creation of a space like this. I enjoyed receiving submissions and was touched by them all. It was an honor to craft them together into the first edition of Elevate.

To readers: I hope that in reading this, you feel connected to a growing community and know you are not alone in your struggles or achievements

To those who submitted: Thank you for being vulnerable and sharing your work with us, we hope you truly feel represented and valued as a first-gen student.

VALERIE SANCHEZ COVALEDA
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES '24

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Valerie S.C." in a cursive, flowing script.

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Readers,

I am thrilled to see what initially began as an idea in spring 2021 manifested one year later into Elevate, the very first edition of the Newbury Center magazine. We began this project this past fall semester with some wonderful faculty and staff who volunteered their time to come together on Zoom to mentor our first-gen students. Through weekly discussions, the mentors ideated with the mentees on what form their contribution would take and also provided support and advice on navigating life as a first-gen student.

I hope you enjoy reading this magazine that is exclusively by students, for students, to “elevate” their first-generation student identity. Their creativity highlights all of the wonderful attributes and brilliance they bring to the greater BU community.

BEST,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maria Dykema Erb". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a stylized "E" at the end.

**MARIA DYKEMA ERB, M.ED.
DIRECTOR OF THE NEWBURY CENTER**



Graduating from the University of New Hampshire in 1992,
pictured with my parents, Cornie & Wilma Dykema.



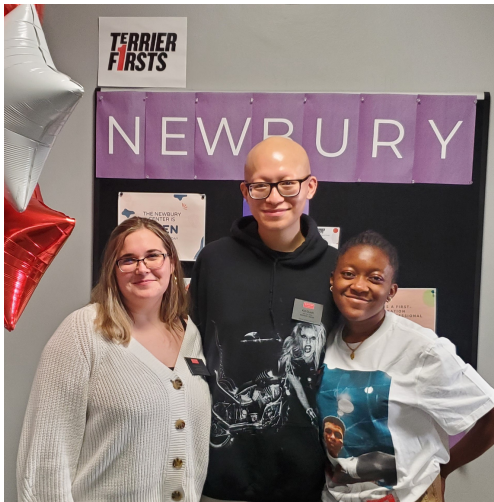
Graduating with my Master of Education from the University of Vermont in 2011,
pictured with my dear friends, L to R: Beverly Colston and Monique Swaby.

HONORING THE LEGACY OF NEWBURY COLLEGE

IN THE SPIRIT OF THE NEWBURY COLLEGE MISSION, THE NEWBURY CENTER AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY IS DEVOTED TO FOSTERING THE SUCCESS OF FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS BOTH DURING THEIR TIME AT BOSTON UNIVERSITY AND AS THEY PURSUE CAREERS AND FULFILLMENT AFTER GRADUATION.

DEDICATED ON OCTOBER 26, 2020

NEWBURY CENTER STAFF



**TERRIER
FIRSTS**

I ALWAYS ANSWERED

SUHERA NURU
SARGENT COLLEGE '25

My first essay in high school
was the simplest
Arguing against the SAT
was its own test
But somehow I passed

I fell in love with words
But I blanked out on them
when it came to
The college essay

Everything I wanted to say connected
With
History I wasn't aware of
History that I hadn't tried to comprehend
History that belonged to my parents

I wrote on their history
Or at least
My interpretation of it
And
It wasn't all that easy

But I could have asked
questioned
prided
I could have explained why I wanted to know

But I was tired of explanations
I wanted independence
I wanted what was beyond
every expectation and aspiration
they could have ever imagined

I never asked
I always answered
They always asked
They never answered
I always answered for them

It was just the way it was



"This poem is indirectly about the relationship I have with my parents and the miscommunication that was built. When I was applying to college, I didn't get much support from my parents because I constantly felt this pressure to be independent. It was also my unwillingness to accept help from my parents that contributed to it. I concluded beforehand that they wouldn't be much help because I was first-gen and never proceeded in asking them for help. My essay for colleges was one of the biggest difficulties I had throughout the process and because my parents couldn't really help me in that way, my essays had a lot of different directions. This poem is about that experience and also about how being first gen for me was about the lack of communication I had with my family when it came to anything related to college."



PHOTOGRAPH

BY DOLLY YIN

COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES '23

This is a film photograph taken by me in November 2021. Driving to the East Point Lighthouse with my friends, I saw countless people come a long way to visit it just like we did. The bright sunlight that afternoon warmed all of us in the cold winter. People walked under the setting sun like pilgrims with faithful hearts. As first-gen college students, we worship knowledge, hope, adventure just like those people from that day worshiping the beauty of the landscape. I think college for first-gens students is fascinating, not because it'll lead us to the most beautiful view of our life, but it made us see that we had the courage to take a giant leap of faith for exploring something new.

RELAX?
I DON'T KNOW HOW:
MY EXPERIENCE AS
A FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT
IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

ALEXA FRIEDMAN
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
PH.D. CANDIDATE

For

the first time in my life, I have only one job: being a Ph.D. student. Being a full-time student in a fully funded program is an incredible privilege, however it is a role that leaves me with more free time than I've experienced in the past. Too much free time in a Ph.D. program might seem like an oxymoron, but when I started my Ph.D. program in September of 2018, I had never felt more lost in my life. I realized that I didn't know what I liked to do; I didn't know what my hobbies were, since I had never had the time to figure out what I like to do fun. I had spent the majority of my life as a student who always had a number of jobs. How was I supposed to spend time when I wasn't working? This was a real challenge as having a hobby or something that you do in your free time is an important tool to destress. As I reflect now, in the fourth year of my program, I realize my experience has (as it usually is) been informed by my first-generation identity.

When I turned fourteen, I went directly to the town hall to get my work permit (which was required in my home state for teenagers younger than 16 to work a part-time job). Upon receipt of my work permit, I maintained a steady slew of jobs that continued up until my Ph.D. program. In my freshman year of high school, I walked over a mile after school to a small tutoring center where I worked each day. During senior year I quit field hockey, a sport I had played for my first three years of high school, to work essentially full time (at 3 part-time jobs). These patterns persisted into college.

When everyone was heading to the Fall Concert, I was setting up a catering event. After the concert when people were going to the bar, I was changing from my catering gig and heading to my overnight shift as a personal care assistant (which gave me just enough time to make it to my student assistant position in the residential life office at 8am the next day). Most of us are familiar with the idea we inherit genetics and physical characteristics from our family. Yet, beyond physical characteristics, we also inherit a wealth of other things - communication skills, our social status, and for me, a necessary work ethic. While raising two small children, my mom worked as a full-time city employee, doing overnight shifts and working holidays, co-ran a home improvement store, and taught at home exercise classes. My grandfather, originally from Puerto Rico, joined the Air Force and later settled in New York with his wife, who he met abroad and immigrated to the U.S, knowing almost no English. While raising two young girls, he drove a taxi, worked full time as a correction officer, taught driver's ed, and moonlighted as a cashier at the bodega (these are the jobs I know of, and I am sure there are more). My story is not unique and is likely that of many of my fellow first generation students.



All students feel the weight of academic pressure - to get good grades, to engage in our community, to graduate, and to get a job. Though for many first-generation students, like myself, it is not only about just being successful by academic standards, but I've always felt a pressure to make my parents', my grandparents', and my great-grandparents' sacrifices worth it. I had more to prove. Yes, all those Thanksgivings or Christmases that my mom was not home, she'd find it worth it on the day I walked for graduation. Not only do I feel pressure to make others proud, but I also have always felt that I had to prove myself to my institutions, that what they saw in me on admission day, was really there.

Stress is not a novel experience in any academic or work setting. Yet in 2020, when a pandemic overtook our lives, we collectively experienced what has been termed "unprecedented times". We were all at home, most of us struggling to find a sense of peace, stability and relief from the constant bad news. The self-care movement was on the rise for a while, that is, the general sense that everyone should make space for themselves outside work. The advice most frequently given during the beginning of the pandemic was to make sure to make space for the things you enjoy doing or revive your favorite hobby. But when would I have developed a hobby? My hobby, like most first generation students, was working

In any interview I have ever had, I've been asked what I like to do for fun. Sometimes I'd lie and say I loved running (I ran, but it was more of a means to an end). But really, I felt like I had nothing that I liked to do, because between full-time work and school, I previously never would have had time to do it. At my first departmental social as a Ph.D. student, people were connecting through their shared experiences (as most do). Students and faculty alike discussed their favorite local hikes, what instrument they grew up playing, their experiences skiing at different places all around the world, their shared love of camping, or which gym had the best climbing wall (I am in an Environmental Health department - Can you tell?). These are things I simply did not think of as a norm, and I felt as though I was less able to build social capital based on shared experience. Then, and especially during the pandemic, when I had first experienced more free-time and more of a need to find ways to de-stress, I came up empty.

Today, four years into my program, I have a much better sense of time management and am more comfortable with my only job being a student. I feel more confident in spending time doing things that do not include work. Though, if I am honest with myself, I have still not found the answer to that question “what do I like to do in my free time.” I still tend to take on more responsibilities in my department and take free online courses on the weekend. Though, I am proud to say I have tried the camping thing once. Teaching myself to relax and to say no will continue to be something I struggle with, but I am slowly getting there with the support of my advisors, my department, and most recently the community at the Newbury Center. Recognizing that I am not alone in my experience has allowed me to feel at peace, and I hope that my experience will do the same for others.



My submission is an essay about how I felt that my first-gen experience deprived me of the chance to "find myself" outside of my school and work identities and how that was a challenge for me as a Ph.D student where school was meant to be my only focus. I am glad to share my experience and felt supported throughout the mentoring process. I also felt more heard and connected from speaking with other mentors and mentees from the magazine working sessions - I hope the opportunity to work in small groups continues!

Alexa Friedman is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Environmental Health department at Boston University School of Public Health.

<https://twitter.com/lexafriedman>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/friedmanalexa/>



Be true to yourself

I need more money
I can't do this!
Not too bad

I am only a person

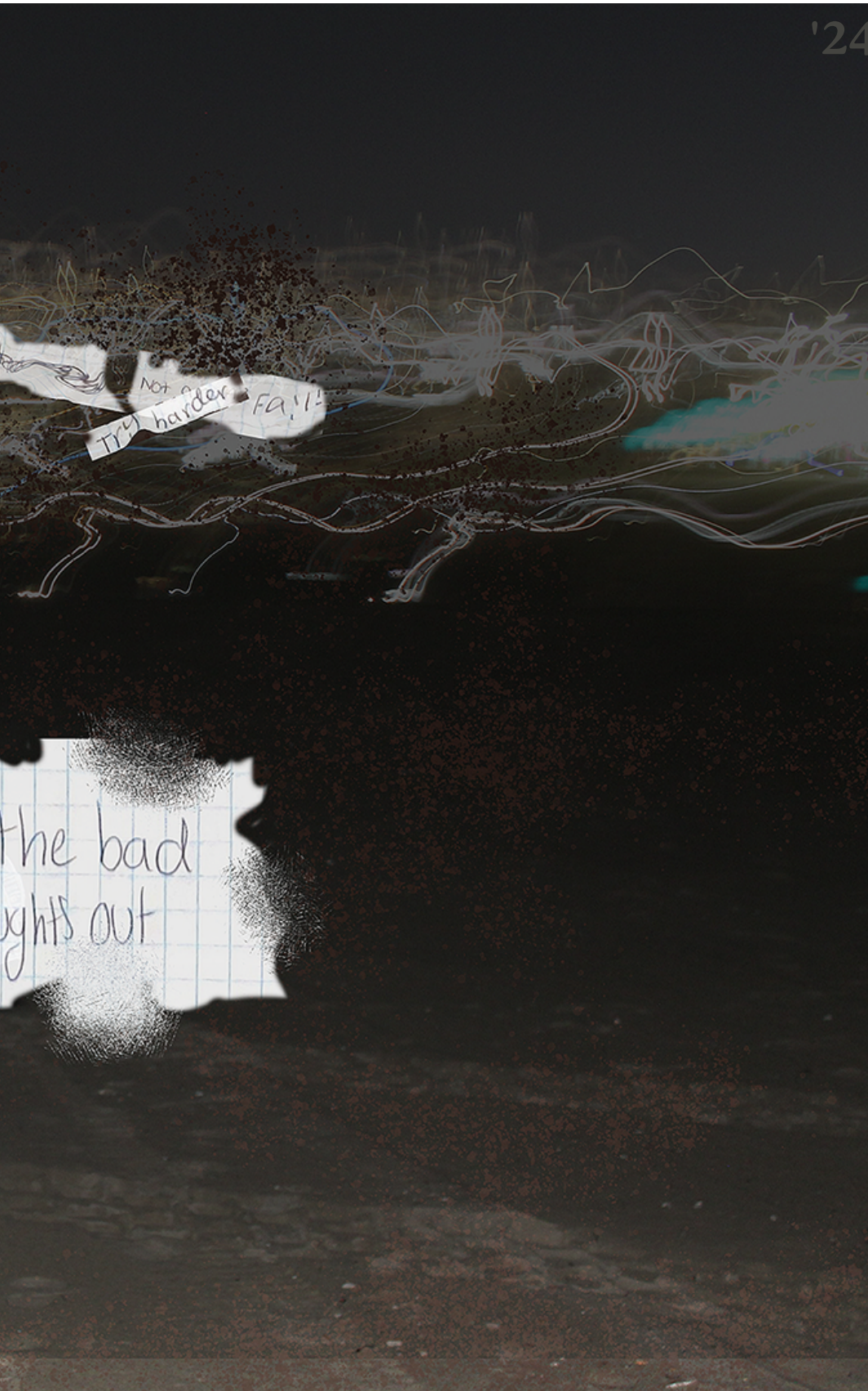
Why do I feel

Rip the
thought

Don't give yourself a person

MARIA NINO-SUASTEGUI

COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION



*"While being a human being, in general, brings everyone many thoughts of self-doubt, a certain feeling that I have been exploring is feeling guilty for advancing myself. **As a first-generation student, I saw my parents work hard to the point where once I got into college it felt selfish to reap what they sow and it felt selfish to not achieve great things.***

There is such pressure that I put on myself to pay back all the effort that was put into getting me to where I stand today but what I failed to realize is that I was giving myself unintentional stinging papercuts with my thoughts. My parents are like ever-changing lights around me that are trying to illuminate my path towards a better life. I owe it to them to crumple all my bad thoughts and try my best at BU and in all my endeavors. I hope this self reflection helps others to be mindful of their thoughts and to be nicer to themselves. "



**"CAMINANTE, NO HAY CAMINO,
SE HACE CAMINO AL ANDAR"**

**"TRAVELER, THERE IS NO
PATH,
THE PATH IS MADE BY
WALKING"**

ANTONIO MACHADO, "CANTARES"

**M. DAMM, M.DIV.
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF THE NEWBURY CENTER**



**first gen. kids when they think
they can do it all without help.**

**LEONEL DE LA TORRE,
COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING '23**

THOUGHTS OF A SCIENTIST FOR MY FUTURE PATIENTS

AMANDA HUTCHINSON
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK G '23

All of us,
This throng of
humans:
Two helixes hinging

On anchored alleles,
programed to build
brain stem and bloom
neuron bouquets

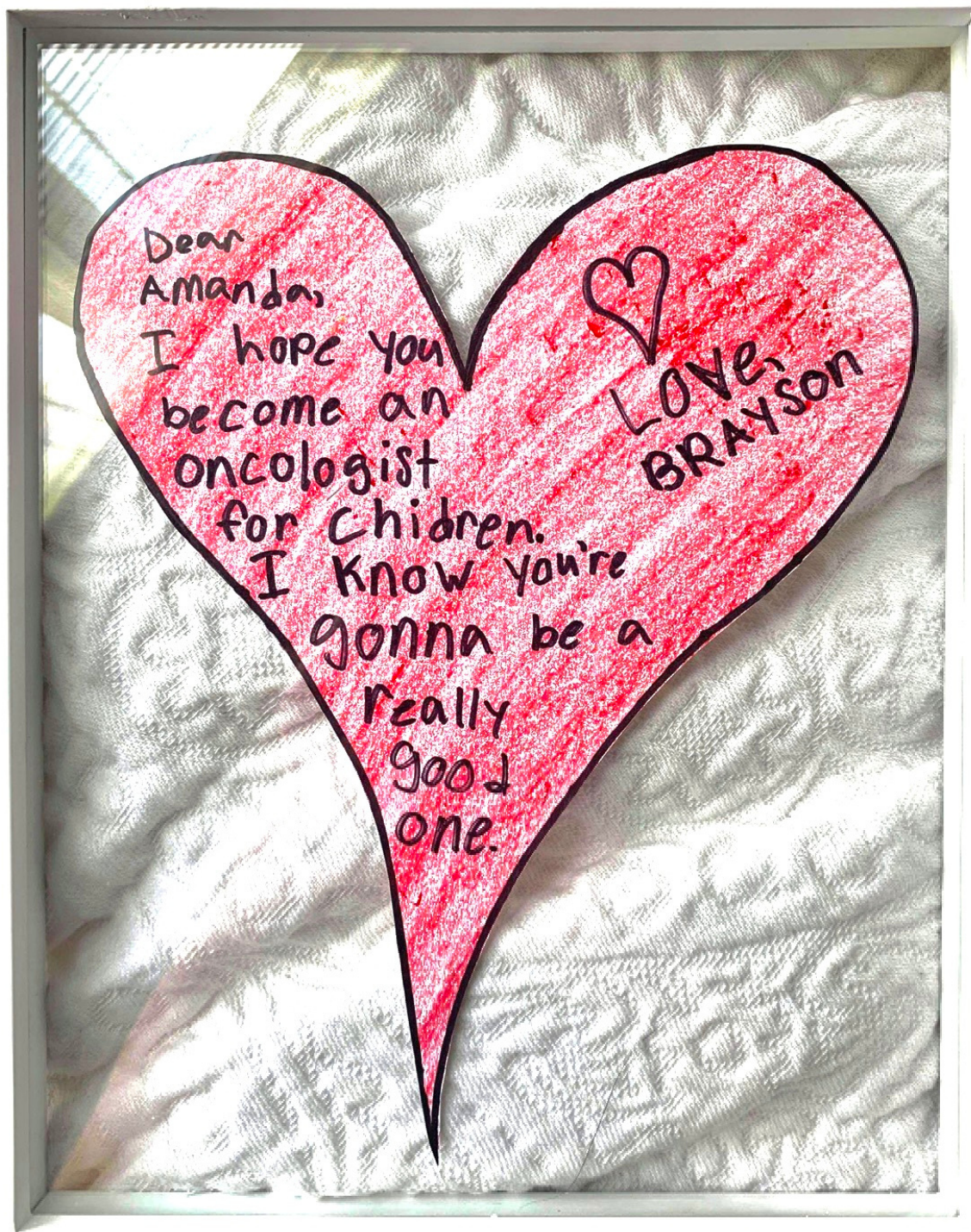
that fling questions
to corners
of the not-yet-known.

When the unseen
forces alight in the air resign
themselves to be
not angels, but atoms,
these fierce forces of the mind:
what better hope
could we have for mankind?

We are filled with the breath of the same god.

To untangle the knot that disease twines within us,
to bring wellness into a body,
the way ink disperses
when spilt to the paper,

For this
I will give the grinding of hours,
straining of eyes,
turning of pages
-to medicine.
For each self
to grow well.



"I am a first generation college student aspiring to be a pediatric oncologist. I decided to earn my MSW at Boston University School of Social Work first, as the biopsychosocial implications of cancer are equally as important as the biological mechanisms that govern the illness. This poem serves as a roadmap through the mind of a first-generation college student entering the field of medicine; it paints the picture of my mind. The photograph is a picture that was drawn for me by a dear friend, an 8 year-old boy who defeated cancer."



PHOTOGRAPH

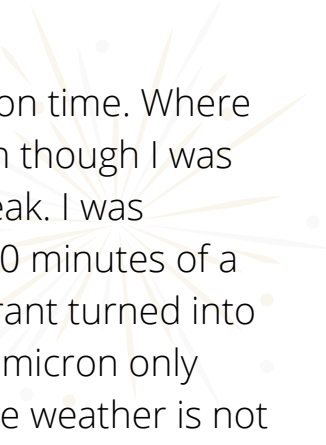
BY VALERIE SANCHEZ COVALEDA

COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES '24

This piece is a photo I took when I went to Mexico the first time, where my dad is from. Both my parents are immigrants, and some of my favorite memories are those I made when visiting the countries where they're from (Mexico and Colombia), and seeing where they grew up. Being first-gen is difficult because you have to carry both your heritage and your family's history, while venturing into new spaces and navigating completely foreign experiences. This picture reminds me of that feeling, and I picture myself as the person standing on the stairs, looking into the horizon, at the unknown.

THOUGHTS ON THE BELL

**YUANDI TANG
COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION G '23**



Okay, there is only one hour left before the New Year. It is reflection time. Where am I? Sit in my cozy room at Fenway—isolated. Yes, isolation. Even though I was very cautious and did not live in New York, considering the outbreak. I was unfortunately awarded by Omicron on my trip to New York. Just 40 minutes of a pleasant meal with my ex-roommate in a delicate Chinese restaurant turned into a scarlet “positive” mark on my test report. Gratefully, Monsieur Omicron only entertained me, and everything was fine with my close friends. The weather is not beautiful on the new year’s day holiday. At this moment, I think back to the four months I have been in the United States and can’t stop wondering

First, who am I? I am an international student, a first-generation college student, a student of color. You see, it seems like a triple depression. Why not ignore these labels a little bit? Because I think too many labels will drag me down and let me shape myself in a pessimistic and miserable direction. I am just a student, yes, a student like those 50,000 at BU. Thinking of myself from this perspective alleviates lots of burdens. I would focus more on my self-growth and bonds with others rather than magnifying some small part of my identity and keeping warm alone.

And activities. I participated in plenty of activities this semester, too many to count. CDC, ERC, COM, Art Initiative, and especially the Newbury Center gave me vitality and various rewards on Fridays morning this semester. Why did I participate in so many activities? Look at my tuition bill. (just kidding!)

Checking the newsletter has become my daily routine. Every morning, I check my mailbox for 10 minutes and add something interesting to my schedule. Sometimes, I'm like a big boss in charge of 10 listed companies. You could have seen me rushing back and forth between various activities on campus. I feel good about not being swamped. My dearest grandma told me that I could only die from laziness rather than busyness. As a first-gen student, I am always anxious if I just miss one opportunity. Sometimes, I could be exhausted after participating in too many activities and be emotional in the end. I found that setting goals are crucial. There are numerous institutions at BU. I could even fill my schedule by joining in those activities without having classes. My friend told me to always think about what I will do after leaving the Terrier town. I should always match my routine with my goal and learn how to choose. It is so true! Some activities are better to be experienced several times at the beginning of my study trip. Still, most of my time should be spent carving my path to the future. Everyone will leave school, so planning is always a wise choice.

Then, some changes in mind. Typical stereotypes told me Asians are shy, and Chinese are calm, modest, and good at math. I beg to differ. I learned how to be "thick-skinned" after coming to Boston. When I first came here, watching some students share their daily routines, the people next to them repeatedly praised them. I wonder how they can be so talkative. Then I thought about it. We both have two pieces of lips, though. Wouldn't it be great to say that it's great to be able to make friends together? Just say what I want. If my English is not perfect, I have arms and hands. Anyway, their Chinese is much worse than mine. Also, always be adventurous! There are so many institutions and school activities that are prepared for us. I have the ticket, so I will definitely be on board!

Any regrets? I fought with coronavirus but forgot to apply for HEERF, but this is the most minor thing. My biggest regret is I should have been more diligent in my studies. Since I am still working hard to adapt to the academic requirements of the United States, I have just reached the standard of Tri Alpha. I knew it was challenging since I hadn't been on campus for seven years. Why am I studying at BU? There is a saying that science solves material problems, and the arts solve mental problems. My answer is to be better by solving problems. But how? Academic consultation, learning from others, reading books (highly recommend *A Field Guide to Grad School* by Jessica Calarco). Watching me come up with solutions and improve step by step is like going upstairs from the stairs after a power outage. I know I must do it, so I don't need to overthink. Just moving and moving, then look back: Wow, I am on the fifth floor!

Talk that much. I just want to make sure I am not annoying. At least the people around me still greet me, so I have no worries now. Then I'm always wondering why the same thing ends up differently in different people's stories. Maybe the reason lies in their diverse abilities and practice access to resources. Most people work hard and know how to walk after finding their door of success. But unfortunately, many people don't have the key to the door or don't know where the door is. If there is a place to help people find doors and keys, I think there would be much less regret and desperation in this world.

Well, the new year bell urges me to sleep. From 2021 to 2022, I sincerely wish you a happy and prosperous new year.



My written piece is a reflection on the new year's eve of my experience as an international first-gen student of color who came to the US for the first time. It is positive with humor and also deep in thoughts. So it could also be helpful and encouraging for those first-gen students like me. To be a first-gen student at BU means to be gritty with pride and positively overcome obstacles with the support of the Terrier F1RSTS family.

BREAKING DOWN STEREOTYPES

My art piece serves as a simulation of the bigger picture of why many families of Hispanic descent travel to America. Many of us are not criminals despite the act of illegally crossing the Mexican border, for we are not here to steal jobs, distribute illegal substances, nor other illicit activities. What many don't emphasize with us is we transcend borders into the unknown for the opportunities. Opportunities to radically transform our families for future generations to come in where they know of no suffering caused by social inequality and financial gaps. This piece was especially inspired by my parents who abandoned all they ever known to chase their American Dreams. My mother, at the age of fourteen, crossed the border with only the clothes on her back after being diagnosed with Leukemia. My father, in his early twenties, left the farm work to seek a higher paying job to make ends meet. To this day, my mother is cancer-free and my father works construction while nurturing our family. I owe it to them making it to the prestigious Boston University and with great gratitude will work hard here at BU to go to medical school. That's how I will repay them for their bravery for crossing the border, a stereotype not many will understand.



LIZBETH BOTELLO
SARGENT COLLEGE '25



ODE TO THE FIRST CREW

You know what's crazy
That no one here is lazy
I have been on teams big and small
And often I have seen many falls

The Newbury Center is the start of something grand
Centered around an identity many still don't understand
Yet with the workers we have in here, our impact grew
So, this is my Ode to the First Crew

Now of course I must start with the "OGs"
Whom I'm sure were able to start with ease
A virtual start was a heck of a first
But, hey, it could have been a whole lot worse

I start with a fellow cookie lover, triple minor, a joy to us all
She is never one to miss out on any important call
From working to prospective students to engaging with youth
And a powerful news story that expressed her inspiring truth

Now this next one is certainly a professional not for hugs
But shows his appreciation even towards the people he bugs
His business savvy thinking and financial galore
Makes us all excited and proud for what he has in store

When she attends the law school of her dreams
We would have known her as a valuable member of this magazine and our team
She will be on the rise whose known for her skills in great debate
In which I know her lovely family will come to celebrate
From the time I met her to when I wrote this ode

I did not expect to meet an awesome lady so bold
She has an infectious laugh, a trait so rare
From Paris to the U.S., she always gives her time to care

We can't forget our grad students, one from a place I haven't known
From her ice-skating days to speech guidance, she has surely grown
Her work reminded me of those who helped when I had a bad stutter
She has a constantly supportive, a constantly caring presence among her

Caribbean food, public health, and wonders she provide
I haven't got to speak with her much, but I knew she thrived
Our brief meetings in the semester she was never once upset
And wherever she is now after graduating she is someone, I am grateful to have met

As you can see, the OGs, I truly adore
But our team does not end there are a few more
Despite a year since opening, our team has grew
And each of these members deserve to be in the Ode to the First Crew

Another grad, one of which who lives near my dorm
Whose visual skill set helps our center's outreach take form
Her skills with design and camera work are impeccable
And her passion for the media is always incredible

Es orgullosa de su familia, apasionada para su comunidad
A fellow BU Wheelock student who I see as rarely mad
All of her studies is in relation of what and who she cares about
And I know in her life direction her impact will be paramount

Right-handed and left footed, this dude is pretty cool
Yet he pursues an engineering field with a workload that's particularly cruel
His demeanor reminds me of a friend I once known in my childhood days
Chill, calm, collected, and sometimes in a bit of a haze

Last but not least we have an amazing artist in our team
Hones the talent and beauty of curating this First, inaugural, magazine
Her passion for her projects combined with her major displays her range
And I can't wait to see the steps she will take in her life as she enters a period
of everlasting change.

Finally, our staff, the one who supports us
The ones who ensured our needs are a must
There are many things I could say about these three
And they give us opportunity to work here and feel free

Our AD for whom I have known, so far, for a short time
She is daily and constantly engaged and ever so kind
I can't get over how obsessed I am with all her office plants
And her patience when listening to the many inaudible times I rant

Our AC has observed and seen the work the team puts in daily
And she works from the heart, and always greets everyone so gayly
Her attention to detail and passion for what she does
Allows everyone in our team to show her lots of love

Finally, she is someone who took a chance on me
When I was in a vulnerable position of figuring out where I wanted to be
She ensures that everyone in this crew doesn't fall
And we are so appreciative of our inaugural director who has started it all.

Ode to The First Crew is an anonymously submitted poem inspired by the Newbury Center staff, both former and present. It celebrates each individual staff member, ranging from our director, Maria Dykema Erb to each individual graduate and undergraduate staff member. The reference to the "OGs" refers to the initial staff hired before the beginning of the 2021-22 school year.



migration is beautiful.

"My Guatemalan mother and Mexican father left their home countries as teenagers for a better future. June 17, 2018, was Father's day. That day, I was able to give my father and my mother one of the best presents they had ever wished for. That was the day I became the first person in my family to graduate from a 4-year university."

**SELENA HERNANDEZ
WHEELOCK COLLEGE OF EDUCATION &
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT G '22**



"The most important part about being a first-gen student to me is having a strong community. Being at a school like BU can be a bit daunting for first-gen students. We are surrounded by privilege that we have never had the opportunity to have and are expected to keep up and perform at the same level as those without our backgrounds.

I wouldn't be this far if I didn't have a strong support network and community of others just like me. Pictured here are two fellow first-gen grad students and close friends of mine. Naveen and Selena have been supportive in ways that others could never be, as they understand my background and the extra hoops I've had to jump through because they have faced similar challenges themselves. Without the Newbury Center our paths would likely have never crossed. I'm so grateful to the Newbury Center for giving me a space where I could form these friendships (and many others) and feel like I truly belong."

**KARLI CECIL,
SARGENT COLLEGE G '22**



PAINTING BY TAMMY DONG COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES '24

"To me, being a first-generation college student means having to pave your own path and working to fulfill your goals. In this painting, I wanted to offer one interpretation of that first-gen college journey: Every step we take contributes to the future we are chasing. Our dreams may seem so distant, but they are always guiding us, giving us the strength to keep going. In the background, I wanted to portray growth and change over time: As we are navigating college, we are also finding out who we are. Like the seasons, our self-perception may change, but it all forms a continuing cycle because with every endeavor we challenge ourselves with, we are learning more about ourselves. I hope this piece will remind students that they are doing something amazing."

A WHOLE NEW WORLD, LITERALLY: STUDYING ABROAD AS A FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT

**JENNA HANSEN
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES '23**

When I was accepted into the Boston University Paris Internship Program, I was both incredibly excited and apprehensive. As a first-generation, low-income student from rural Vermont, my first few years in Boston were a culture shock. The process of traveling to and navigating life in Paris would prove to be an entirely new type of challenge than I had ever experienced — but nothing has ever been so worth it!

It must also be said that I did not take the “easy route” (not that there truly is one, but, you’ll see what I mean!). I went into the BU Paris program hoping to gain as much as I possibly could from the experience; thus, I pursued the French track. I took three intensive French classes, conducted my internship in French, and lived in an entirely French-speaking homestay. It was truly the definition of diving-into-the-deep-end, if you will, given that the extent of my experience in French at the time was only through BU’s fourth-semester level. I was, to put it kindly, not *great* at French.

While I think throwing yourself out there in the way that I did would be a humbling experience for anyone, being a first-gen low-income student certainly added another layer of uncertainty. The imposter syndrome was very real. For the first month of being in Paris, I was constantly wondering: *what am I even doing here? What made me think that I was qualified for this?*

Not being able to communicate effectively, while challenging and even isolating, was incredibly motivating. Of course, I know that language acquisition is not always a part of the study abroad experience for students in the U.K. or Australia, for example, but this goes for cultural differences as well! Some aspects of life in another country will feel surprising and even “weird,” but if you approach the experience with an open-mind, you will soon find yourself growing immensely! I always used to say “growth isn’t comfortable,” but I didn’t truly know what that meant until I went abroad.



The other challenge (that I know other first-gen low-income students are concerned about!) was, of course, money. As an FGLI student, I couldn't travel all over Europe like many of my peers, or go out for dinner and drinks everyday. While that might sound like a bummer — those are things you should aim to do in moderation anyway! It's easy to forget that study abroad does indeed involve a lot of studying, especially in an internship program; you only have a few months to finish classes and an internship. That is not to say that I didn't travel or eat a lot of delicious food — I did! I went on two separate weekend trips wherein I visited London, England as well as Toulouse, France. Not to mention that I was in Paris!

From visiting the Louvre to exploring Le Marais, there was a ton to do right where I was!

Studying abroad was an incredible and eye-opening experience, as well as something that I had never thought possible as a first-gen student. Despite the unique set of obstacles we face, I don't think there is another group of students more well-prepared to take on such a challenge. I am so deeply thankful for this experience, and I hope that you will take advantage of what the world (or BU Study Abroad) has to offer!



THIS WHOLE JOURNEY SHAPED ME INTO WHO I AM AND WHO I'M SUPPOSED TO BE



INTERVIEW CONDUCTED & STORY WRITTEN BY LARA WERNECK,
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES '23

"I remember being scared of the unknown, because I didn't understand what was about to happen. All I knew was that we were going to meet with my dad and be reunited again."

At the age of 6, Paula, together with her mother and older sister, migrated from Itanhomi, a small town in the southeast of Brazil to Plymouth, Massachusetts. Despite her fear of what was to come, she was thrilled to meet with her father once again. She shared that he "came to the U.S. in 1998 because he saw the opportunities that were available" for their family here.

As the only Portuguese speaking student in her ESL class, Paula described how at first transitioning to school life in the U.S. was "a scary process." She elaborated on her challenges by mentioning how she had to "roll with the punches without helpful technology such as google translate which didn't exist at the time."

"The lack of knowledge and ignorance from other people" who looked at her as "a foreigner speaking an unknown language" is what shocked Paula soon after she arrived in the U.S.. She specifically recalls a time where she "got a letter sent home from school asking if she along with her sister needed clothes donation because their attire was deemed as inappropriate by administrators." She explained that "it was simply the clothes that people wear in Brazil" and a custom "that can be found in pictures and other forms of media showcasing Brazilian culture."

As she grew older, Paula gained the confidence to educate those around her, starting with her classmates and friends by doing things like "teaching them different words in Portuguese and responding to their questions about her Brazilian food by allowing them to taste a bite of it!"

"I used the fact that I am not an American to push my way through", said Paula when describing how she found her inner strength. She elaborates on how she "always used [her] languages to [her] advantage" and "has never been afraid to tell [her] story as a DACA recipient." Her bravery has paved the way for her career as a Victim Services Coordinator for the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance.

The community support that their family had was something that Paula still cherishes to this day, as she recalls that "there was a huge fruit basket which family friends had dropped off for them as soon as they arrived at their home from the airport." Additionally, she reflects on the tremendous help that her dad received from "friends and family" in Plymouth who he "knew from Brazil."

When asked about her greatest sources of joy, Paula answered with the words “my sister” in a heartbeat. With tears in her eyes, she proudly proclaimed that Karla, her older sister, “has always been the go-getter and a hard worker, always inspiring [her] and showing [her] that [she] can do whatever [she] puts her mind to.” She continued to appreciate her sister's support by stating that

she has been “her rock” and that if “[she] didn’t have Karla that [she] doesn’t know if [she] would have been able to do all that [she] has accomplished thus far.”

Paula also described how her “parents always worked hard day and night” and were also a motivating factor. She’s “very thankful that they decided to come and pursue the American dream as now they are each pursuing their own.” Paula states that “it may not be the white picket fence like the actual American Dream but that it’s [their] own special version of it. A version that is much better than the reality they would be facing if they had stayed in Brazil.”

Despite all the challenges she faced, Paula stated that she “wouldn’t want it any other way.” To those who are new to the U.S.. She encourages them to “be prepared for the tough times but also be prepared for the reward.” She continues to give her advice by saying that “the U.S. is the land of opportunity, where you can literally do what you want if you work hard.”

“Everything I am today, I wouldn’t have become if I was still in Brazil”, Paula states as she looks back at how far she has come. “Here I was able to get everything I wanted, I graduated college, and bought my own house all at 26 years old”, a life that she didn’t even think was possible before migrating to the U.S.

“This whole journey shaped me into who I am and who I’m supposed to be”, Paula shared proudly.

**“I HAVE A DIFFERENT SENSE OF IDENTITY THAT A LOT OF
PEOPLE AREN'T AS LUCKY TO HAVE”**



**INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY LARA WERNECK
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES '23
STORY WRITTEN BY MADELINE HUMPHREY
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES '22**

"My dad's grandma told him to come to the U.S. for a better life. And my mother came here because she was in love with my dad who was already here, so where else would she go."

Allyson's parents moved to the United States from Colombia. After getting married in their native country, her mother had to live two years separated from Allyson's father while waiting for her papers so she could legally migrate to America. Allyson said that her parents faced a vast range of difficulties and fears while immigrating.

"For my dad I think it was probably the fear of the unknown because he didn't have any money, any connections, no family or friends here in the U.S.," Allyson said. "He was very scared because he wanted to make a name for himself but was scared that he wouldn't be the man his mom always wanted him to be."

As for her mom, Allyson said that overall, she was less anxious than her dad about coming to the U.S., however she possessed some hesitancy towards speaking English.

"My mom was very fearless for the most part," Allyson said. "I think the one thing that scared her the most was her lack of English proficiency because since she was poor in Colombia she never really obtained an education nor never got the chance to learn English. She didn't want to marry my dad just for his papers."

Allyson said that the most prominent way migration has changed her family was that it forced her to develop motivation to succeed after observing her parents work tirelessly for their family.

"The biggest thing was working hard to achieve their goals," Allyson said. "My parents went through a lot to be able to get to America. If it wasn't for their experiences, I wouldn't have such a strong work ethic or determination that I have now today."

As a child of immigrant parents, Allyson strives to carry on her family's dreams in America. For example, her mother always wanted to be a healthcare worker, and since she was not able to pursue that career, Allyson's dreams of becoming a doctor are that much more important to her. "I want to make my last name represent what my parents always wanted it to," Allyson said. "Being a child of an immigrant is different; everything you do is not only for yourself, but for your whole family tree."

Her family's migration experience gives Allyson a strong sense of identity. Growing up, she struggled with bullying due to her cultural history, but these hardships have taught her how special it is to be a part of her culture, according to Allyson.

"I am now equipped to defend my culture and educate others who are uneducated on it," Allyson said. "It has been hard being a daughter of immigrants but I wouldn't change it because I have a different sense of identity that a lot of people aren't as lucky to have."

*These two interviews and stories are written by Lara Werneck, the Co-founder and Co-president of **Migration Tales**, a website run by a collective of Boston University students to amplify the voices and experiences of immigrants, in both their history, and their hopeful futures.*

We acknowledge that as first-generation college students, this is often informed by being an immigrant, and how this especially creates a difficult transition period.

<https://www.migrationtales.org/>

LATE NIGHT LOVE LETTER
STELLA RIGDEN
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES '23

the city feels more like home
when the sun sets
and moonlight reigns

airplanes flash like shooting stars
taking up space among the
handful of stars dotting the sky

hustle and bustle crackles like static
background noise as
brick buildings whisper stories

spinning peaceful lullabies and
tales of love as old as time
catering to hopeless romantics

sunshine warms the soul
but moonlight draping cities
has a serenity akin to an empty forest

A photograph of a city street at sunset. The sky is filled with dramatic, orange and red clouds. In the foreground, a tram is visible on the left, and several cars are on the road. Pedestrians are walking on the sidewalk on the right. The overall scene is a busy urban environment during the "golden hour" of sunset.

**"Sometimes courage is the little voice
at the end of the day that says I'll try
again tomorrow."**

MARY ANNE RADMACHER

**SASHA LALMONI
ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR**



PHOTOGRAPH BY NAVEEN INIM COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION G '22

This is a picture taken at my third birthday party. This is one of the few photos anyone captured of me from that day because I spent most of it hiding in my room flipping through a picture book. I grew up debilitatingly shy, scared to make space for myself, terrified of stepping into a spotlight even if it was made for me. The shyness felt in my youth morphed into a sinister imposter syndrome that made me doubt myself at every junction. When I entered grad school I didn't have the safety net of parental wisdom to help me through the struggles I would face. My dad has always been someone who has challenged me to be the best version of myself. Even when he didn't have the frame of reference to help me through the obstacles of graduate study, his encouragement and humor helped me gain the confidence to say no when I wanted and yes when I needed.

Every day I still have to overcome my reservations about my sense of belonging but I know I'll always have my dad to lean on when life gets chaotic. It's his laughter that lured my three-year-old self out of hiding to receive love and celebration and his care that pushes me to pursue even the craziest of dreams. Being a first-gen grad hasn't always been an easy path to take, but there's an immense pride I carry knowing that every day I'm being pushed to reach higher and higher and that there will be someone to catch my fall.

MULTITUDES

KAT QUACH
COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION '24

i wholeheartedly believe in the concept of intersectionality,
kimberle crenshaw writes about how each individual aspect of our
identity
cannot be separated from the whole.

i think about intersectionality when i think about being first gen,
i don't solely exist as someone who so happens to be a first generation
college student,
i exist as a first generation, vietnamese-american, trans woman.

i am many things, and none of those things exist without the others.

"i am large,
i contain multitudes,"
says walt whitman

each day i walk down commonwealth i feel like something's a bit off.
i brush off the impostor syndrome, like it's dust that settled overnight
i fought to be here. i earned my place here.
but i can't help but feel as if this place isn't meant for me,
never will be.

a white institution built to maintain class differences
between rich white folks
and just about everyone else.

trans women of color aren't expected to go to college, get degrees
and go off into the workforce.
we're subject to discrimination, pushed out of jobs

it feels like i'm not supposed to be here because i'm not supported
enough to be here.
to afford to come here.

i crunch my feet into the snow trying not to slip.
there's no footprints that fit mine, let alone any that i can see.
it feels like there has never been anyone else walking my same path.
financial aid. office hours. working two jobs. maintaining my social life.
maintaining my mental health.
wondering how on earth i'm supposed to join clubs or
overload credits
how do i get into classes for my minor?
healing. growing.
trying to figure out who i am and what i want out of the world.
i can't do this all at once.
all alone on the east coast.
a stranger to the space, the people, the culture.

but i must.
and i will.
I will fight the fight,
and remember that i'm not alone.

THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO SUBMITTED A PIECE INTO THE
FIRST ISSUE OF ELEVATE MAGAZINE.

THANK YOU FOR READING.

THANK YOU FOR BEING YOU.

WE APPRECIATE YOU.

