
HONORING THE JOURNEY AHEAD



from First-Generation Macalester Alumni

HELLO AND WELCOME

In our senior year, Gabriella Gomez, Wayne Lee, and I, with the support of campus staff members Robin Hart Ruthenbeck, Ruth Janisch Lake, Sedric McClure and others, took a “wouldn’t it be great” idea and transformed it into Macalester’s first Honoring the Journey ceremony for first-generation graduates and their families. At the time, we were thinking about this on a small-scale: trying to figure out how we could share such a huge day with our families, when for many of us it felt like that diploma was really a symbol honoring their sacrifices and dreams. We wanted to create space for and shine a light on our support systems when so much of the afternoon would be focused on us. It’s a testament to the Macalester community that we were able to make this a reality from staff that took care of so many of the small details (including remembering to bring a box of tissues) to the first-generation students who immediately embraced it and kept it going.

That was four years ago, and in that time, it has been a delight to watch from afar as first-generation organizing on campus continues to grow. I am not sure how this ceremony may have evolved but I hope that it is as meaningful to you as it was to us. I also hope that many years from now, the legacy of this graduation ceremony is that it provided an impetus to gather and organize our first-generation community, to support one another, to love and protect one another, and to keep innovating and pushing the needle as a first-generation alumni community. I can’t wait to meet you and hear your hopes and dreams for building that community together.

Graduates, please join our Facebook group at [tinyurl.com/FirstAtMac](https://www.facebook.com/tinyurl.com/FirstAtMac) to keep in touch. In the coming year, we hope to shape a shared vision and start to actualize it.

Families and friends, thank you for your support of these wonderful graduates. Please enjoy the festivities!

Merita Bushi '14
Editor



**SPECIAL THANK YOU TO THE WONDERFUL
ALUMNI WHO CONTRIBUTED THOUGHTS,
FEELINGS, AND WORDS TO THIS PUBLICATION**

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HI MY LOVES,

It has been two years since I've graduated and WOW, what a journey it has been! We all know as first gen college students that we face the world at a bit of a disadvantage from not having those job connections, that social capital, the lingo etc. I'm conflating class a little bit with being first gen here when I say this but no matter your socioeconomic background being a first gen student in the real world is hard and that is what I want to speak to.

Before I get to that though, you should be SO DAMN. PROUD. of yourselves for getting here, whether you were supported by family or not, you DESERVE to be at this point. I know personally there were a few times in my college career where I thought about dropping out (I can imagine this resonates with some of you too), but you stuck it out despite all the hardships and made it to the other side. Even now after two years, I think I will always consider graduating from college one of my greatest achievements.

You are LOVED and supported. I know the world after graduation can be a scary and stressful place but know that you have us as resources to get you through. PLEASE feel free to reach out with any questions or issues you may be having. I'm sure one of us can help you out.

On this similar note, do not feel pressured into taking a job that is not right for you. Feeling the societal pressure myself, I accepted a job with Americorps that I knew I would hate. I ended

up quitting 6 months later. It's okay to just take a minimum wage job and figure out your plans. It's okay to not have a fancy title and be making \$60K right out of college. The journey of your career is your own. So the best advice I can give you is to just, do you.

It is true that we are at a disadvantage and we have a bit more of an upward battle than most, but it is not at all impossible. There was a sociological study done many years ago about lower income students becoming lawyers at Ivy League institutions and how they had a harder time getting jobs because they were expressing what makes them unique instead of what makes them similar. My advice is screw

We are all on our own journeys, so honor this one.

that. Even if you have to play along and play the game to land that job, do not lose your authenticity, do not lose yourself. Remember your humble beginnings. We already know what it feels

like to have that social distance between us and our loved ones for having gone to college and as upward mobility occurs that social distance can increase. It is crucial however to remain grounded within yourself and not forget who you are.

We are all on our own journeys, so honor this one. You have worked so incredibly hard to get here. Although, I've probably made finding a job sound like the hardest thing in the world, it is definitely not. I just wanted to prepare you for some of the challenges you may face as you begin this next chapter of your lives. I love you all and know you will become your greatest selves, just remember that YOU write the chapters, not anyone else.



WENDY CHU '17

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Today marks a beautiful day. Surrounded by close friends, family members, and those who have supported you along the way, you have made it to the end of this journey where you will finally get to walk across that stage. This journey cannot be accurately described through the countless days where you felt like you were not smart enough as your peers, the moments when you questioned whether you deserved to be here, and especially the difficult moments when you felt like you wanted to let go of it all. I just want to tell you that you are smart enough, you more than deserve to walk across that stage, and you should never,

ever give up. You have shown to everyone, but most importantly, yourself that you are more than capable of earning a college degree. Despite all odds, you are resilient, valued, and strong. And with every journey that ends, another one begins. As a first-generation college graduate, you are inevitably going to have those thoughts of feeling unintelligent, undeserving, and incapable. But today, you join a growing community of individuals who will unconditionally support you and always remind you that you are brilliant, worthy, and capable of anything. Today marks a beautiful day.



JINATH TASNIM '16

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DEAR TRAILBLAZER,

You made it. Congratulations! You are different; you've probably always known that. The road ahead of you will be a mystery, just as college once was. No one in your family has navigated these paths, but you will find your way, as you always have. When feeling lost, don't hesitate to seek out the support systems that have served you for so long. You may outgrow some relationships, but you'll forge new ones, too. You might feel distant from the places and people you call home, because

your education marks you. You will for sure feel lonely. Remember that in this loneliness lies your strength. People like us have been able to thrive in these marginal spaces between tread and unwalked. Know that you are not alone--we are walking with you, on parallel roads. Seek us out, we are here for you whenever you need us. We will find you by your flame.

With love & solidarity,
Jinath



ANONYMOUS

THE WRINKLES IN LIFE

When I participated in graduation not too long ago, I was a nervous wreck. I didn't have a job, I avoided going to my departments' receptions because my parents didn't speak English, I didn't know many people in my class, the occasion forced me to be happy when I felt sad, and people who I thought were close friends were all but non-existent. Then graduation happened. The feelings lingered like the taste of onion. A wave of dread swept over me as I came to the conclusion that my life at Macalester was anything but perfect. And yet I'm alive, barely.

What happened? I couldn't really tell you because graduation seemed far away. That summer I cried more than I cared to admit, but at the same time I enjoyed myself more than any other time at Macalester. I read a lot and I found comfort in children's books. It seems silly to revert back to a time when things seemed simpler, but it makes sense. Think about it. You didn't have to worry about rent, food, loans, housing, etc. Your biggest worry was whether you would lose your mother's Tupperware when you ate lunch. But that changes and I think there's something cool about children's books. As an author you have to write in language that young people can understand. Some would say "simple," but don't ever mistake "simple" for "easily understandable" because the opposite is true. Children's books contain some of the most complex ideas you will ever encounter

in life. Their meaning changes as you age and I recently found that to be true.

One of these books is *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle. The book has many themes, but the most important ones are embedded in these two quotes:

"I do not know everything; still many things I understand."

As a first generation student, it may seem you are venturing out into the world without

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the slightest idea of what's ahead. While this may be true, you also know many things. All the material you learned at Mac and your life lessons leading to graduation will be invaluable in life. The privilege to earn a Macalester education will distinguish you from your co-workers and you find that out soon enough. Most people outside of Macalester don't think about social justice or

their position in the world. Many earned their degrees with the specific purpose of advancing their careers or increasing their socioeconomic status. It's up to you to decide whether you advance the lessons learned during your time at Mac.

In addition, you will find that life and what comes after is like school but without the hassle. Life becomes your teacher and the more you try new things the more you learn. I've taken the time after graduation to reconnect with my ancestral roots and learn more about my family history. Following the advice of a professor, I

interviewed some of the older members of my family and found out that my aunt was a badass labor organizer during her home country's civil war. Your free time may not be spent like this, but free time you will have so find something you care about. Which brings me to my second point.

“Life, with its rules, its obligations, and its freedoms, is like a sonnet: You're given the form, but you have to write the sonnet yourself.”

The biggest lie you will ever tell yourself in life after graduation is that you're not worthy of anything. You matter and your presence on this Earth is all the proof you need. You will tell yourself that you're not worthy of love, friends, fellowships, and research opportunities.

Bullshit. You're worthy of it all and you will figure it out in time. And as the quote indicates you will be bound by the norms and obligations of the space you decide to inhabit. But don't let those decide what you do for the rest of your life. And above all, forgive people not because you aim to be a saint, but because life is better when you do. People hurt people that much is true, but I disagree that people inherently suck. It's way too easy to become cynical in the post graduation world. The world needs people who never lose faith in humanity's ability to show the better angels of our nature.

I think that's all I can offer for now. Breathe. Slow down and appreciate the moment. Your undergraduate celebration only happens once. Take care and good luck.



CHRISTIAN SMITH '15

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I love first gen people so much that it overwhelms me. I still smile from ear to ear when a first gen Mac student or faculty member is featured on Macalester's webpage for some outstanding thing they did. I cry to stories of first gen people in theater and literature. I turn into a truer form of myself whenever I am with a group of first gen people. I love first gen people.

And so I am happy that first gen Mac alumni have a Facebook group. It's nice to feel connected to my people. I hope to see you there.

Did you ever feel like almost everyone at Macalester had parents with terminal degrees? It really felt like that for me. I am sad to report

that I still feel surrounded by people whose parents have terminal degrees, as I am now in a doctoral program. Many of you will probably also end up in settings with few first gen people. The Facebook group is a terrific place to get support from other first gen Mac alumni related to this or any other topic. A lot of folks in that group love first gen people just as much as I do.

To those of you I know personally: I could not feel any more pride and warmth to know you. You are my favorite people. We only spent one year on campus together but I am thankful that I was able to get to know so many of you. I can't wait to watch you walk across that stage.





IBRAHIMA DIEYE '17

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College for me was like traveling on an airplane for the first time. Terrified during take off, I fastened my seatbelt as tight as I could until the aircraft reached a cruising altitude. The plane eventually made it to its destination, despite a few turbulences. Then I realized I just landed on an unfamiliar territory some people call “the real world”. Outside of the travel areas, members of my family held welcome signs with tears of joy. They could not tell me what to expect in this new world, having had a different journey, but they were there to honor my journey. When I stepped into the real

world, I could not turn to them for guidance on how to perform my job, but I reached out to them for love, strength, and motivation. In this new world, I felt intimidated at times when people talked about their journey as if they were First Class or Business passengers and I was in Economy. But I had the courage to own my story and talk about my journey with pride. Those of you who just landed, own your story, honor the journey, and keep honoring it, for today is the end of a beginning and not the beginning of an end.

ZACK AVRE '14

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Welcome to the family. We're so incredibly proud and thrilled to have you join the Macalester first-gen alumni community, and we can't wait to see how you will continue to make your impact in this world.

As a first-gen graduate, you will find that the weeks, months, and years ahead will likely be riddled with some of the same challenges you encountered as a first-gen student. There will be moments when you will feel like you're stuck between stations, an imposter that doesn't quite fit in. Moments when you will feel directionless and question why you spent your time and money on a liberal arts degree. Moments when you feel like you have failed or left people behind.

Yet amidst the trials, challenges, and self-doubt there will also be moments when you will see a younger relative aspire to college, inspired by your model. Moments when you will see and feel the immense pride of loved ones. Moments when you will meet invaluable mentors and fellow trailblazers. Moments when the big

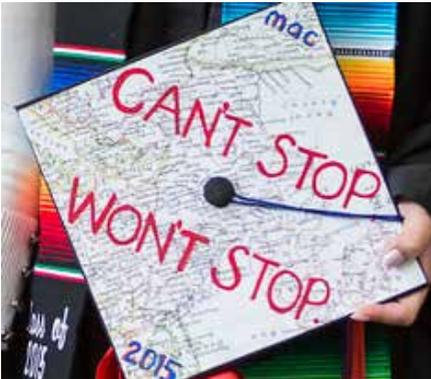
picture slowly comes into focus.

One of the daunting aspects of being a first-gen graduate is that you're staking out your own path. It's at once inspiring and terrifying, like jumping off a cliff and not knowing how to operate your parachute or where you'll land. However, I encourage you to see the post-Mac journey, much like the incredible journey you've just completed, less as a solo flight and more as a team effort. We didn't get here on our own, and we're all in this journey together.

Since my own Honoring the Journey ceremony four years ago, I have found the most persistent but rewarding questions with which I have wrestled relate to community and a sense of obligation, particularly when it comes to where I live and how I choose to live my life. Over the coming weeks, months, and years, I encourage you to reflect on who your people are - what community means to you now that it doesn't come part of the Mac package, and to whom you feel a sense of love and mutual obligation. It's these types of reflections that have helped me stay grounded in moments of uncertainty and self-doubt.

As the late Senator Paul Wellstone said, the future belongs to the those who believe in the beauty of their dreams. As you embark on this new, uncharted adventure, remember that you are resilient, you are brilliant, and you are more than enough. But most importantly, remember to look out for one another and always believe in the beauty of your dreams. Continue to dream big - it has gotten you this far, and you never know who is watching and taking notes.

Keep the faith. The best is yet to come.



VIVIAN LIU

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To be honest, college is hard. It is a difficult path that not everyone can finish. Not to mention, you all had it even harder. No one tells you about the paperwork that you need to complete to be able to afford this higher education. No one tells you how confusing it is to get into the classes you want or need. Heck, no one tells you how hard it is to make friends and balance all the papers and tests you have to study for. For some people, college is easier because they have a map, and resources, and as first generation students, we had to map it ourselves. We had to find out things the hard way by doing it wrong, or we were able to find people who knew what they were doing and they helped us through it. But you all were able to do it. You were able to accomplish what no one else in your family had the opportunity to

accomplish and that is something to be proud of. You may not be the smartest (or maybe you are, and hey congrats!) and I know I definitely wasn't, but you are graduating. Your hard work paid off and now you have this degree that will open so many doors for you. You did this amazing feat not only for yourself but for your family and they are so proud of you. I am sure of that. I don't want to make it seem like the world outside of college will be easy, because it definitely won't be. But remember this: You are all amazing people who did something incredible. If people try to minimize it, don't listen to them. College is hard for those of us who had no idea what it is like and it is quite a feat to come out with that degree. You should all be very proud of yourselves. Congratulations.



ANONYMOUS

Congratulations on achieving this milestone in your life! Upon reflection, this is one of those moments that brought my family great joy because I was not the only one walking across that stage to receive my degree -- my parents, family and community that supported me and pushed me to achieve this moment were ever-present in my time at Macalester. As a first-generation college student, working towards

your degree can be difficult because of this additional "weight" of responsibility you may feel towards family and expectations. While sometimes this weight burdened me and made me feel an immense pressure to succeed, it is also what kept me rooted and focused towards achieving my goals. Enjoy graduation day -- for both yourself and your family! You did it!

JOHNNA LOREEN 14

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I'm going to talk about something that I think is often neglected in conversations about the experiences of first-generation college students. For many of us, graduation is a type of collective accomplishment owned not just by us but also by our families. Parents, siblings, aunts and uncles share in the joy. "This is for my family," was something I commonly heard at the first-gen graduation reception at Macalester. This milestone can be especially significant for families of first-gen students--a symbol of having achieved something against the odds, of perseverance, of boldly claiming the "American dream" not just for yourself but for people like you, for people where you come from. My heart warmed to see my friends surrounded by the people who made them all that they are--resilient, strong, endlessly loving. But I also felt a sharp tinge of something frigid--the cold reminder of what I was lacking.

Even in my accepting and supportive group of first-gen friends, I often felt that this wasn't something I was supposed to talk about. Not all first-generation college students come from families that are able to be supportive or present during such celebrations. Poverty, illness, struggle. The havoc these things can wreak on families is varying. Not all families band together in the face of adversity. Not all families weather the storm or are emotionally able to help each other through it. And for those of us whose families can't afford to attend

graduation, or perhaps those family bonds that feel-good Hollywood films promised would be unbreakable are in fact strained and damaged by the destructive hands of American capitalism and the spiritual strife that is born out of social inequity, these celebratory occasions can be bittersweet. When I did bring this up in my friend group, I was usually met with somewhat awkward nods of acknowledgement, or a swift change of subject. Family discord isn't a sexy or uplifting topic.

My heart warmed to see my friends surrounded by the people who made them all that they are—resilient, strong, endlessly loving. But I also felt a sharp tinge of something frigid—the cold reminder of what I was lacking.

My mother was unable to attend my college graduation. Part of it was logistical--she had a sick spouse to take care of and not a lot of extra money lying around for a plane ticket. But it was also personal. Mine and my mother's relationship has, for as long as I can remember, been strained and complicated. As I've gotten older I've started to connect our socio-economic circumstances to some of our personal struggles with each other. For example, we had unreliable health insurance and a distinct lack of access to much needed mental health care and counseling. Unfortunately, the free stuff wasn't that effective, and the effective stuff wasn't free. My mother's lack of access to the care and support that she needed made for a tumultuous home. The stress of taking care of 4 children on a single, meager salary added to her anxieties and these came out in less-than-healthy ways. So when she said she couldn't come see me graduate, I understood that it wasn't simply about the money. And



while it could be chalked up to interpersonal issues with each other, I felt strongly that it was relevant to my first-gen status insofar as my life and hers had been characterized by the struggles that come with unmet needs, and those unmet needs affected our ability to nurture a healthy relationship. My relationships with my family members are inextricably tangled up with my socio-economic status growing up. If we hadn't been poor--surely we would still have problems and certainly people who have an abundance of resources still have profound family strife. But for me, I don't know where those lines are drawn. Too much of my experiences that define my familial relationships are bound up with the challenges that came specifically with growing up poor. (And of course, it's worth noting here that not every first-generation college student grew up poor, either. I speak solely from my own experience here, with no interest in defining that of my peers).

The point I am trying to make is that not every story of a first-generation college student/graduate experience ends with a heart-warming

scene of family solidarity and a hopeful fist pump for the downtrodden. Nor is the journey over when you graduate. (One thing I often think of and which secretly brings me anxiety is the fact that my future children won't be first-generation college students if they choose to go to college. What will it be like not to be able to relate to my own children over this fundamental part of my identity?)

We need to talk about it more, or at least make space for these conversations. We should not pretend as if the wholly uplifting story of the "grit kid" (which is, let's face it, too often co-opted by the upper-middle class to paint the struggles of others in broad strokes or to place blame on kids who don't fit that image) is somehow the most important or most valuable narrative out there. Celebrations such as graduation can bring moments of sincere happiness and pride. But they can also bring moments of profound pain. And that pain, I think, is just as important as the joy. And if we want to embrace our identities fully, we have to honor and hold both.

AUBREY RICKLE '14

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I think it can be really easy, as first-generation students, to focus on why it can be a difficult identity to hold. Which is fair, because being first-generation can be really hard sometimes and we often feel like we straddle two incongruent worlds at the same time. But I also believe that holding this identity can be beautiful. We are resilient, and strong. We have a unique perspective and, because we have had to learn how to balance between multiple worlds, we are able to see a situation from multiple angles.

My hope for you, as you leave Macalester and enter a world that wasn't designed with you in

mind and that may not always know what to do with you, is that you are able to hang onto all of these strengths. I hope you are able to step into the world bravely, proud of who you are, where you come from, and what you have been through. It will not always be easy, but I know that you're capable and I promise you're in good company. You are such a gift to this world and I know that I am not the only one excited to see what you accomplish.

Congratulations, good luck, and welcome to the family!



IAN CALAWAY '16

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Often when I tell my college graduate friends about my desire to return home at some point in my career, I am met with a look which asks, "What on earth are you going to do there?"

My home is Dubuque a large (or to small) lowan city of 65,000 people. The question is, therefore, not unwarranted; Dubuque simply cannot compete with the obvious diversity of opportunity in much larger cities like Chicago, Boston or New York. Furthermore, Dubuque is not a glamorous place. It isn't the location of any hit television series, though the Bachelor has filmed there a few times. Despite these facts, I see more opportunities in Dubuque

than any other city. It is where I come from. I know the hills and the bends of the Mississippi river, the streets and the businesses, and, most importantly, the people with whom I share the city. To me, it is more than glamorous, it is the Masterpiece on the Mississippi.

If you are a first generation college graduate, you likely come from a home (whether you define it as a place, collection of people, or something else) that would benefit from the skills you have acquired during your time at Macalester. Don't let the world convince you your home isn't worth the effort or returning to. Decide for yourself where you will change this world. Congratulations!

DEBORAH LOCKE '90

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I read somewhere that you can't hold two particular thoughts in your head at the same time. One is gratitude, and the other is any form of sadness. What that has meant is this. Many times when I could be subsumed by negativity, I think of people and places that made my life so much better. Macalester College is one such place. For years I attempted to leave dead end jobs and save enough money to attend college full-time and finish my degree. Everything finally came together with an acceptance letter from Mac. Here for the first time I encountered people with high expectations. Professors saw

through the lack of confidence and fear and an amazing thing happened. I learned how to think critically and express those thoughts. It was a tremendous watershed, to go from nowhere to somewhere, to eventually find challenging work that made a difference.

Each working day since May 1990 I have used those thinking and writing skills. Each day I feel gratitude for the people to whom I owe an insurmountable debt for their gift of recognizing and encouraging potential.

MERITA BUSHI '14

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First and foremost, congratulations to you and your supporters!

These days, my time at Mac feels far away but graduation day is one I vividly remember. A lot of my college experience was something I didn't know how to share with my family, so I still remember how great it felt when I was finally able to introduce them to the home and community I had built over four years. Honoring the Journey was one of the few spaces that weekend where they felt at home and fully included in the celebrations. Your experiences may be different, but I hope that many years from now, this special day, however and with whomever you celebrate, remains a sharp memory. Please take some time to put aside any uncertainty or fears about the future and celebrate how far you have come.

That day, I also felt a strong sense of resistance. I didn't want to let go. I knew our tight-knit community would spread across the globe. I felt like I had just figured out "how to college" and even though I felt like I had lived through "real world" difficulties, I was still scared of not being able to find spaces where I had room to continue exploring identity, social justice, and all things embraced in the Mac bubble. I feared letting go because I had conflated my time at Mac with my growth at Mac. The former was ending but the latter was something I could take with me. My growth at Mac largely came in the form of a stronger understanding of self and the world. When I came to Mac, I didn't

strongly identify as first-generation. I knew that objectively I was the first in my family to go to college and the challenges that that presented but most of my friends were in the same boat so it never struck me as unique or an identity that would shape/explain my worldview. Four years later, it had a central identity.

In large part, my first-generation identity has only grown since graduation. It has taken on a new flavor as a "first-gen professional" navigating salary talks, imposter syndrome, networking, and the various unwritten rules and experiences that it feels like everyone else already knows. Four years later, it once again feels like I am just getting into the groove of how this works. It might take you longer or you might get there right away. Your post-grad path, much like your Mac experience, will vary based on other identities your first-gen experience intersects with.

Embrace awkwardness and vulnerability. Reach out to us (seriously)!

Have faith that just like graduation, you will eventually get to where you want to be no matter how winding the road is. And just like at Mac, it's the process that will make the destination worth it. For the record, I still don't know where I'll ultimately land but it has been a great ride so far! Use the tools and network that you gained at Mac as you navigate the journey ahead. Embrace awkwardness and vulnerability. Reach out to us (seriously)! Your class is the first class that I did not overlap with during my time at Mac but I am just as eager to connect and I know I am not the only one.

JOSH ORTIZ '05

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Congratulations! You have done something that nobody in your family has done before. You have achieved something that nobody can ever take away from you, and you have done so without the benefit of family advice from someone who has been there before you. You are a college graduate...let that sink in for a bit.

A first-generation college graduate is a special person with a special experience. It's quite possible that your family doesn't really understand what you did or how you did it. The idea of graduating college is foreign to them because they've never experienced it as closely as they are now. If you're anything like me when I graduated from Macalester, you may have felt over the course of your time at Macalester that your family wasn't supportive or didn't think you going to college was something worth supporting. If that's the case, don't blame them; they love you so much and want more for you than you will ever know.

As I learned, parents of first generation college graduates just don't completely understand college. Through the last four years they wanted to support you because they love you and care so much for you, but they just probably didn't

know how to. It's hard for them to understand why it's important to spend so much money on 'a piece of paper.' It's hard for them to understand that it is so much more than that. But...they are proud of you and they love you and they will celebrate you for the rest of your life. You have done something for your family so great, that people who come after you will strive to achieve what you have.

We first generation college graduates share a wonderful experience. It's an experience with huge highs and huge lows – there is no doubt that you have experienced an emotional roller coaster through these last four years. We must celebrate our failures as well as our accomplishments because that is what makes life so wonderful; the ability to get up when we're down and to know when we are on top of the world. You may not know what's ahead for you, and that's completely fine. You can rest knowing that the sky is the limit for you and that you will find your place in the world. Understand what a big accomplishment this is for you and because you've reached today, you can reach anything. You should be so proud of yourself.





ANONYMOUS

Congratulations! In honor of your graduation as a first-generation student of the class of 2018, I'd like to offer you eighteen pieces of advice that have helped me in different aspects of my life.

1. Show gratitude more often than you apologize.
2. Take care of your body. Floss, drink lots of water, wear sunscreen, and have regular check-ups if you can.
3. Maintain a master resume or LinkedIn page and update it as you go. This will make it a lot easier to remember all that you've done and will make applications less stressful.
4. Read for fun.
5. Finishing college doesn't mean you stop learning. There are many free resources available – the internet, public libraries, etc. Use them.
6. Keep studying that language you've been learning. You can look for language partners via apps like HelloTalk or find reasonably priced tutors on sites like italki.
7. Really consider when to say "no" and when to say "yes." Evaluate what your priorities are and what truly matters.
8. Friendships and relationships in general take effort. Put in that effort. Work to maintain the connections that matter to you.
9. Some of the best opportunities in life may come to you through conversations with the people around you. Be sure to listen.
10. Explore the area around you as much as you'd explore a different country.
11. Write down your goals.
12. Help the younger generation to have even more opportunities than you have had.
13. Most things in life really don't matter as much as you think they do. Enjoy yourself.
14. Friends who agree with you are great, but friends who challenge you are equally wonderful. Have conversations with people who are different from you and learn as much as you can.
15. Write thank you cards.
16. Be kind.
17. Learn how to host a dinner party, or better yet, a brunch party. One of the nicest things in the world is to be able to share food with people you care about or want to get to know.
18. Ask for help when you need it. No matter what you're going through, there's almost definitely someone who's gone through the same thing or something similar.



OLLIN MONTES '17

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I remember the last two weeks leading up to graduation felt like a sprint. You deserve to honor your success in your own particular way and to relish in your victory. Giving yourself time to sit with what you have accomplished constitutes an act of power. It is an unassuming act but subversive in undoing the lies you and the world around you has spun about your strength and abilities and of the possibilities for someone with your story.

I want to be honest with you. My time after Macalester has not been easy or certain. I led myself to believe in the months remaining at Macalester that if I didn't have an opportunity lined up upon graduating that not only that I had failed, but that I had failed my family. As a young boy, my family recited what came to feel like their prayer for me: "Mijo, study and go to college so you don't have to work like we do. So you have a better life than ours". I didn't want to disappoint so I took an Americorps Service program from a place of comfort and security rather than what I felt called to do after Macalester.

For 4 months, I felt miserable. I did work not aligned with my passions, or strengths, and felt trapped without an exit. I realized that I had a choice: remain feeling miserable and powerless or confide in others with the hope of changing

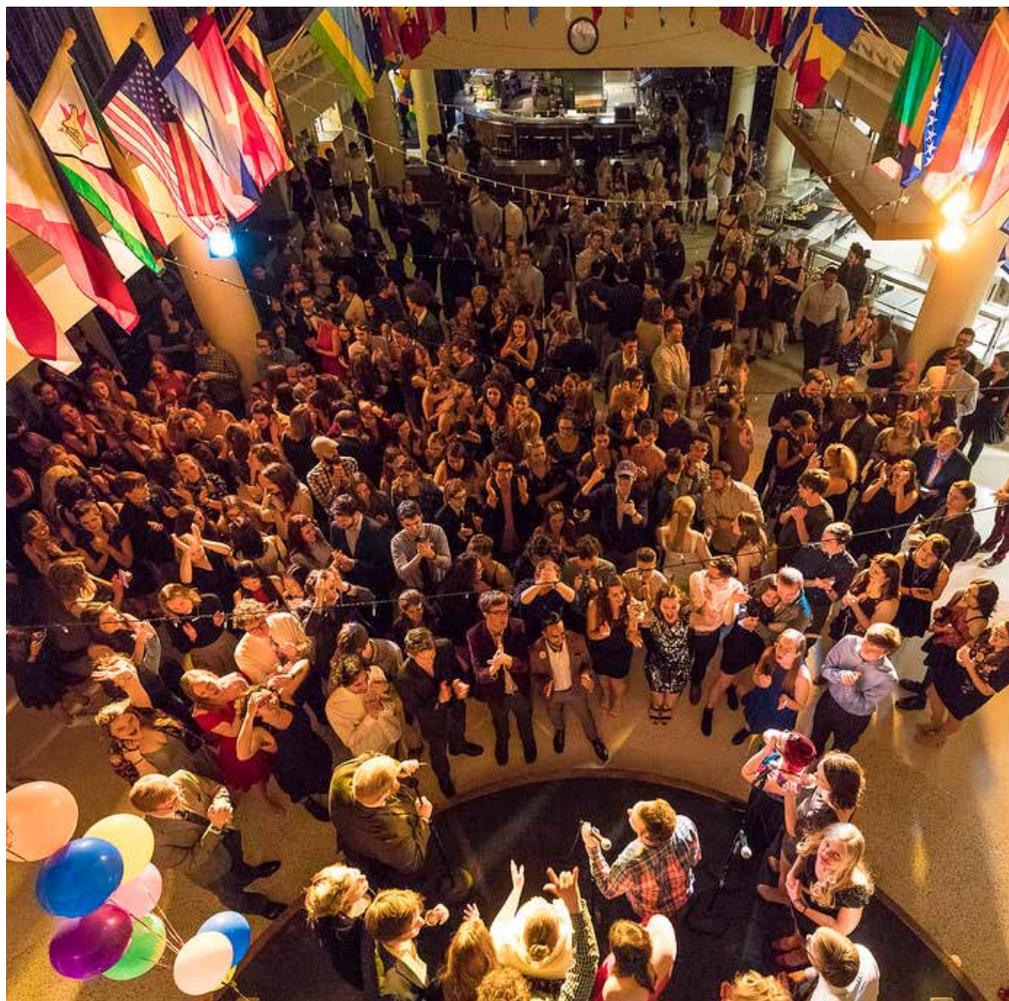
my circumstances. At the cost of my pride and discomfort, I chose truth and community over solitude.

I now work as an Immigrant Rights Organizer with a progressive faith based advocacy organization. Although, I engage in challenging work I feel it aligns with my values, passions and what I think is my call in this moment of life. I would not be here without the mentors, fam and friends who walked with me into uncertainty and fed my faith in something better.

At times like right now, when I feel life and work has thrown me to the ground it can be seductive to believe I have no options. To believe that I'm stuck means to relieve myself of responsibility. Yet, I have faith.

I have faith that you and I have available to us every day and every hour choices that can author stories of freedom and power. Even amidst experiences and people that would intend to have it otherwise.

So, Congratulations dear Alum! Your friends, family and alumni community are expectant to witness and support you in the stories you forge in the coming years.



CONGRATULATIONS!