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**CONGRATULATIONS
CLASS OF 2017!**

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY



And now,
some reflections and advice
from first-gen Mac alumni...

I want to give a big "thank you" and "congratulations" to everyone who was able to attend the Honoring the Journey event, and also to everyone who was not able to attend this event. Honoring the Journey will always hold a special place in my heart because I was fortunate enough to be a part of the first Honoring the Journey celebration. I remember how grateful I was to be able to have my parents and my siblings there with me to witness an event that was **specifically made for first-gen graduates**, and for them to meet many of my close friends who are also first-gen graduates. For many of us there that day, it was a tangible way to **thank our loved ones for the sacrifices they made that allowed us to be in the position to graduate.**

It takes a collective effort for each of you to be where you are, and I am so happy that we are able to have an institutional memory for moments like these. Congratulations to all of you - graduates and supporters included.

Wayne Lee '14
he/him/his

As a graduate I wanted to say something inspiring and poetic. Actually I wanted to say something like that because of my ego and the fact that I call myself a writer. However, nothing panned out. Maybe it's because there is no super poetic and profoundly beautiful way to say ***you made it. If no one else says it, I am proud of you.***

Being a first generation college graduate is like being a tourist in NYC without Google Maps. You're just roaming around with no guidance, no one to show you the quickest or the easiest (aka the route with least walking) route. And no one to tell you to take a Lyft instead of waiting for the L train. But you did it. You found your way to your final destination. ***Say thanks to all those who provided directions along the way and celebrate your victory.***

Raynise Cange '14
they/them/theirs
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Dear Pioneer,

You made it! Maybe you never doubted you would, or perhaps you were on the ledge of quitting many times. In any case, you are here now, crossing the finish line, the first in your family. I won't pretend to know how you feel. ***We all have different journeys, but what we have in common is that we are trailblazers.*** We forged our way through Macalester, faking it til we made it, and there's only more to come. The professional world may seem like a big, scary place, but you will make your way as you always have, even if that is just stumbling through the motions. One day you will find that you have stumbled right where you need to be. It will always be difficult; you may feel at the edges of your workplace, yet drifting away from the communities you call home further each day. Remember though that you thrive in this marginal space-- no one owns it quite like you do. Your journey makes you unique and formidable, and you are strong enough to withstand the loneliness. ***Lean on this strength when the time comes to make brave decisions about your happiness.*** You deserve it all.

With loving solidarity,

Jinath '16

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I think the biggest piece of advice I can give to any new first-gen graduates is to never give up. And I know that maybe sounds like a hokey cliché, but it's true. Life after graduation can be hard (which is not to say that it also isn't fantastic too, it totally is).

Sometimes it can feel like it's hard to fit in anywhere or like you're an imposter. You're likely a different person in some ways than you were when you left home for college. And, for me, attending grad school, I find myself even more surrounded by peers from wealthy and upper middle class backgrounds. And it can be frustrating because, due to their similarity of background, there are a lot of assumptions that you share those identities too. And I think it can be easy to let those assumptions stand. But I've found it much more rewarding to own my identity as a first gen student. In fact, it's the basis of my dissertation.

As first-gen students we bring so much to the table. ***Not only do we have a different, really valuable perspective, but we also bring hard work, perseverance, creativity, and passion. And in a lot of ways, we've had to overcome more to get to this point than our peers.*** When you get overwhelmed by life after college, it can be easy to forget this. But you have so much to be proud of. We need to remind each other of this. If you ever need another first-gen to talk to about what you're going through, please feel free to reach out to me. We need to form a community and be there for each other. We need to remind each other to never give up.

You are strong. You are brilliant. You are capable. You have so much to be proud of.

Aubrey Rickle '14

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Congratulations First-Gen Graduates!

What you have accomplished here is nothing short of spectacular, but it is by no means a miracle. Your success here demonstrates your ability to channel adversity into motivation and strength. A skill I pray you recognize and foster as you continue after Macalester. This ability is not fearlessness, but rather tenacity and creativity.

Your roots (your family, friends, history) are not binds; they are resources from which you will draw your essence, what makes you you. In the future, the world will challenge your background, attempt to convince you your achievements are in spite of what they may call "humble beginnings". ***This is bull. Your "humble beginnings" taught you how to find water in a drought and in a world where hope may seem far away, you will have the ability to find it and help others who are unable see it.***

By the definition of a first generation college graduate, you are a leader in your family. Recognize this and I urge you to ***take up this role in the future communities you join.***

Enjoy the day and hug your family, friends, and give Robin Hart Ruthenbeck a hug for me as well. Congratulations again and I hope to see you out in the wonderful chaos of life.

Ian Calaway '16

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For whatever reason, it was difficult to come up with advice for you. Not because there's nothing to talk about, but rather there's too much to talk about with 500 words. In many ways, being first is both a blessing and a curse. It doesn't go away after you graduate and will show up again at other points in your life (your first job, applying to graduate school, having to submit taxes, etc). You might also realize that being the first person to go to your college often meant sacrificing a lot for you to be here. I found myself going back through my journey via my journal and I want to share with you five points which may or may not pertain to you:

1) You find yourself asking questions about how things worked.

Transitioning from college to work life meant having to navigate another system of how things operated. At work, I ask my colleagues a ton of questions because I grew up in a service industry family and my folks didn't really work in a cubicle. As a result, a lot of office culture is foreign to me. Never lose your inquisitive nature. Ask those questions from people and don't ever feel stupid for asking them. It's a good quality to have in life.

2) Recognize your journey might have left some folks in your community behind.

For every one of us that makes it to this point there are probably others who were left behind. Acknowledge that making it to graduation gives you privilege about a system that was inaccessible to many other people. Don't feel guilty. Use your newly obtained knowledge to help guide people through these systems.

3) Your journey was probably a group effort.

Navigating an unknown system is not an individual endeavor. In fact, I want you to email me if you feel you made it through your time at Macalester without anyone's help. Thank the people who made it possible for you to be here. They may be in the audience, back home, or in a different life, take the time to honor the bits of knowledge given to you by people who cared about you.

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4) You're resilient.

I imagine you had several instances where you questioned whether Macalester was meant for you. The fact you're reading my words marks an important quality you had during your time at Macalester: resilience.

5) Honestly, you're never alone.

Remember you have us, alumni, to help you as you continue on your journey. Don't ever feel the need of going at it alone. Reach out and let some of the older folks help you. You've gotten this far the least we can do is help.

These are my truths and ones which I found useful along the way and after my time at Macalester. I don't pretend they're all encompassing or pertain to everyone's experience, but they highlight what I found to be really useful in life: introspection. Take the time to reflect what this journey has meant for you and share it with the community. It's important for people to know both in and out the Honoring the Journey celebration that your experience reflects who you are. And most importantly, to never apologize for being first.

I want to congratulate you for getting to this special point in your life. You don't need my words to demonstrate how awesome, wise, kind, and brilliant you are nor do I need to know you to know this is true. Enjoy the moment and of course be proud of this wonderful achievement.

Felicidades!

Adan Martinez '16

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Most people have zero parents with a college degree.

I think that bears repeating. Most people, in the world and in this country, have zero parents with a college degree. I find myself forgetting this often, since I went straight from Macalester to a doctoral program, two places where first generation college students are grossly underrepresented.

But there is still something so remarkable about us. Macalester students and alumni are the children of some of the most highly formally educated people on the planet. Less than 10% are first gen, yet an ocean of Macalester students and alumni are the children of professors, physicians, and lawyers. Wow: We did it. First we excelled in K-12 schooling. Somehow we ended up at a highly selective college. Then we finished the rigorous curriculum at this college. We are academic geniuses.

We have so much wisdom beyond our academic prowess, though. For me, this wisdom takes many forms. It is the communal spirit that I learned from my parents. It is the willingness to share that I learned from having 11 siblings. It is the rugged ferocity that I learned from paying for my own ACT prep books and test fees. It is my ability to translate across social classes. It is my turkey gravy recipe. It is my refusal to drink wine. I am confident that each of us has wisdom that cannot fully be gained when one is raised by professors and physicians and lawyers. ***I'm sure the children of professors and physicians and lawyers have special wisdom too, but I'm bored of their accolades. I'm bored to tears. So let's focus on us.***

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We're EXTRAORDINARY. We can do, like, literally anything. We're freaking awesome. And that's not just those of us who graduated from Macalester and other elite colleges; it's all of us without college-educated parents and guardians and grandparents and great-grandparents. WE'RE LITERALLY AMAZING.

And there are so many of us. Most of us. We are most of us. Most people have zero parents with a college degree. There are billions and billions of us around to support one another. We're hard to find in academic spaces, but still we are plenty.

I will be at Honoring the Journey this year and the next, because I really care about the first generation college students at Macalester College. Each time you look at your diploma, I hope you feel the warm twinkle of being part of a powerful community.

Christian Smith '15

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There are a few things I need to say to all of you first-geners and my peers:

1) *You have kicked so much ass to get here.*

Even if you didn't do it in 4 years or your GPA isn't the greatest or you weren't as involved as you would've liked, I am so proud of you. You have had soo many more obstacles than the majority of your Macalester peers so remember that and remind yourself you're a badass.

2) *DO NOT feel pressured to take a job in your career field immediately after you graduate.*

As someone who is first-gen, I have experienced first-hand how hard it is to find a job because you don't have the same connections that your peers do (I'm conflating class status here a little too). I then felt pressured to take an AmeriCorps job that I KNEW I would hate because I had just graduated and still no job. There is nothing wrong with taking a minimum wage job for a while or just doing you. Don't let pressure from ANYONE (peers, family, society) get in the way of you living your life the way YOU want to. Six months later, I ended up quitting that job and now I'm a homeless youth counselor AND work at a deli. Looking back now, I am so unbelievably grateful to take those risky steps because truly, I chose happiness, even if I have had to hustle a bit.

3) *I spoke about this last year at my own Honoring the Journey ceremony, but some of us don't want to honor our families, and you don't have to.*

For some of us, our families were not a motivating factor in either going to college or graduation. For some of us, they even tried to impede that. Essentially, what I'm saying is don't feel pressured to honor your family at "Honoring the Journey," just speak from your truth and who REALLY helped you along the way.

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4) We are an unfortunately tiny group at Macalester as Macalester has one of the smallest percentages of first-gen students (9.5%), but we are mighty.

Never forget the amazing accomplishment that you graduated college and that there is a community of first-geners on the other side ready to welcome you. We understand all of the conflicting feelings that are even more complicated and elevated when you are a first-gen student graduating college.

5) If there is any general life advice I could give it is to always be your most authentic self and to try to live the life that helps to guarantee that authenticity.

You can't be your most authentic self if you hate your job. You can't be your most authentic self if you keep putting others' happiness before your own. You can't be your most authentic self if you are living a lifestyle that you absolutely hate. Always stay true to that inner compass, so you can remain on your happiness map (and don't forget, it's okay if you get lost sometimes, we're here to help).

Jessie Miller '16

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Being a first-gen student never leaves you. I wish I could say that I never feel impostor syndrome anymore, or that I'm always confident in my abilities. I wish I could say that I've learned how to easily relate to my academic peers, and that I never feel strangely other when I'm surrounded by the brilliant minds at Harvard. I wish I could tell you that one day you will wake up without doubt, without fear, with the knowledge that you've made it. I haven't yet. But the journey has been one of growth, profound adventures, and of learning to embrace and love myself. There is beauty in the chaos that often surrounds being a first-generation student. The anxiety I feel, that will likely never completely disappear, is nothing compared to the pride that I feel in the way I've persevered and in the community I've found. The sometimes-awkward integration I experience in professional and academic communities is also marked by growth and more often than not, I've been able to create unique connections with the people I have met.

To this day, I am almost never totally certain or secure in the next step I'm about to take. But as a first-generation graduate, I trust in myself to take that step with grace, conviction, and earnestness. You should trust yourself to do the same. We are shaped by our experiences, and first-gen students and graduates have distinguished themselves by taking adversity and making it into a transformative experience. There's nothing wrong with still wondering some days if this shit is real, or if you belong here (you do), or if you've got what it takes to stake your claim in this world. Because we've proven that even without abundant or perfect resources, we will thrive. It is still odd to me that I am a grad student at Harvard. But I'm able to navigate it well because I'm upfront and proud of my beginnings and eager to hear the stories of others. ***To be proud of being a first-gen student necessarily involves some vulnerability. But I've also come to learn, especially in grad school, that vulnerability is a staple of leadership and sustained, meaningful relationships.***

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One thing I have had to train myself to do is to be unafraid of taking space. Recently, I almost turned down a great opportunity because in the back of my mind, I was unsure if I was deserving. I, like some others who grew up with scarce resources, often worry about being prideful or taking up space with my voice and my presence. After some reflection and support from those I work with, I realized what I was doing and why. I immediately fixed my misstep and seized that opportunity that I had almost let sail by. But it goes to show the ways we can internalize things. I remember a certain professor at Macalester telling me not to be afraid to take up space, that I had just as much to offer as those who inherently felt that sense of belonging that had long eluded me. Her words have stayed with me to this day. I also continue to be inspired by my first-gen peers from Macalester who continue to excel and make meaningful impacts in their communities.

Having had such a cohesive, compassionate community of first-gen friends at Macalester left a lasting impression on me. ***It's important, in any community, to seek out those to whom you can connect and relate. At Mac, it wasn't hard. Since leaving, I've had to be more intentional about it, which has inspired me to be a little braver in reaching out to others.***

It has its challenges, but so far, I would trade this journey for nothing. It is integral to my worldview. It has shaped the type of work I'm drawn to, the type of people I'm drawn to, and the impact that I hope to leave on my community and on the world when I leave it. I am learning to view my uniqueness as a first-gen at Harvard as an asset and a point of continued perseverance and pride.

Congrats on this latest milestone!
There will be so many more.

Johnna Loreen '14

she/her/hers

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Wear the pride of your family, your friends, your mentors, and your community, not as a burden but as a badge of honor, a reminder that YOU are the culmination of generations of dreamers, workers, learners, critics, voyagers, and warriors. Their collective hardships and successes are yours. But celebrate that you still have a lot of learning to do, and because of that, you need your community and your support. Gratitude is ongoing: show your thankfulness this week as well as next month and in five years. Make a commitment now to write letters, send texts, leave voicemails, and go on spontaneous road trips to maintain and strengthen those connections with your friends and mentors. Move to a new city and relive the struggle of creating relationships that challenge how you think but make you want to continue on that journey towards your best self. ***Take care of yourself: remember that everyone achieves what they see as success at different paces and levels.*** Remind yourself that getting a well-paid job is a triumph but so is finding an affordable apartment, reading a book for fun, or finding the time to clean your bathroom. Call your family, check in on the siblings who might still be going through school, share your Google Drive with them so they can see your work and feel inspired to do their own. Send resumes and go on informational interviews with the confidence of someone who has been the job market a lot longer. Reach out to other first-generation alumni with questions, struggles, successes, and advice. ***Celebrate this community, celebrate problems and solutions, celebrate friendship and love, and most of all, celebrate yourself. You did this.*** Now go and tackle what's next with pride, gratitude, and courage - you've got all of us rooting for you.

Eura Chang '15

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Congratulations on graduating! I am so delighted to hear that so many more brilliant first generation college students are graduating from Macalester. As you all already know, it took a lot of work to be able to navigate the social and structural barriers that prevent many from getting to this point. I am so proud of you, and I hope that you take some time to celebrate this accomplishment with your loved ones. For me, my accomplishment was not only my own—but that of the sacrifices my family made to support my dream to go to college.

Although we were only a handful, I felt the immense support from the first-generation students at Macalester that I interacted with. It is hard to explain, but it was an instant connection and what seemed a mutual understanding of what we were experiencing at Mac. I appreciated this feeling.

Unfortunately, I felt like I lost those types of relationships early into my first job. It was hard being a first gen college graduate, an immigrant, and a Latina in a predominantly white work environment. Fortunately, I was able to form relationships outside of my job and kept in touch with the amazing people that I met at Macalester which allowed me to fulfill the part of my heart that craved mutual understanding.

I hope that wherever you end up, you are able to find the types of relationships that make you feel whole. And if you do not right away, please know that it is not you.

Unfortunately, there is still so much work that needs to be done to diversify the workforce.

Keep in contact with your friends from Macalester and also feel free to reach out to other Macalester alum (including myself!). Most importantly, don't forget to take care of your physical, mental and spiritual self.

Congrats!

Miriam Magaña López '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 wasted 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 example. 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 and not sure where it will lead. 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.

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Since graduating three 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 - 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.

Zack Avre '14

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I remember walking up to the podium during the Honoring the Journey ceremony trying to hold back my tears. Each graduate was given the opportunity to thank their families and I struggled to find the right words to express how I felt. I looked out at my family with tears streaming down their faces, including my dad. It was the second time I had seen him cry in my entire life. I could see how proud they were of me, but I wanted them to know just how proud I was of them and how grateful I was for all they had sacrificed to get to that point.

My parents grew up in México and came to the United States in search of stable job opportunities and better futures for themselves and the family they hoped to have. Neither of them had the opportunity to continue their education due to the struggles they faced trying to make a living in a new country. Graduating from college is not an accomplishment I can claim as my own -- it belongs to my family as well. The mix of emotions on graduation day rush back to me whenever I reflect on my four years at Macalester.

I didn't quite understand what it meant to be a first-generation college student until I was already a student at Macalester. I knew I'd be the first in my family to attend college, but the challenges I faced in high school didn't make me feel otherized like they did when I arrived at Macalester. I grew up in a diverse working-class community where the majority of my friends were also the first in their families to attend college. We supported each other through stressful application processes, shared our worries about paying for our education, and celebrated our acceptances. I didn't feel different from the majority of my peers because we faced similar challenges and could relate to one another.

At Macalester, however, my reality shifted and I quickly learned that being a first generation college student would have a far greater impact on my college experience than I expected. That experience is also intertwined with my identity as a Xicana/Mexicana/woman of color. I remember overhearing other students' phone calls to their families where they would talk about the classes they needed to take or discuss the books they were reading.

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My conversations with my parents were different. I couldn't communicate my experiences in Spanish about what I was learning or how I felt walking into a classroom where I was the only student of color. I couldn't ask for advice on how to present my arguments in a paper, but they were always there to support me and give me the words of encouragement I desperately needed when I called home crying and overwhelmed. My family carried me through the moments I thought I couldn't keep going.

Some of the challenges I faced at Macalester continued as I entered my first "professional" workplace after graduation. I felt like my coworkers made assumptions about who I was or how I grew up because I had a college degree. At Macalester there were safe spaces where I could share my story, process my experiences, and build a community with other students. At work I felt like a huge part of my identity and my experiences were erased and I felt uncomfortable in my blazers and trousers navigating offices and settings that I hadn't been in before. The struggles I faced weren't about my skills or ability to do my job, but about feeling otherized like I had at Macalester. In conversations with the few friends I regularly spoke to after graduation, I began to realize that I wasn't alone in what I was feeling. My family was also there to remind me that I deserved to be in those work spaces and to not let anyone tell me otherwise.

I wish I had more advice to give you as you get ready to move forward in your journeys. I'm still reflecting on and processing my own journey and trying to figure out what comes next. **Little by little I'm healing everyday, learning to love myself, redefining my priorities, and undoing the harm from institutions that weren't made for folks like me. We're not alone in the challenges we've faced being the first in our families to attend college.** I'm grateful for the friends and Macalester alum who listened to me and encouraged me when I doubted myself and who shared their own stories and struggles.

anonymous

I don't really have any great advice or profound thoughts to share with you. You don't even need to hear those things at this time, believe me, many people will try to provide that for you as you move through the rest of your life.

What I can say, is 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 someone in your family having done it before so they could give you helpful advice. 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.

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As I learned, parents of first generation college graduates just don't completely understand college. 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 are a smallish group who share a wonderful experience. It's an experience of bigger ups and lower downs than most college kids. We have to 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

Breathe. Pause. Take it all in. Repeat.

Savor this moment. Graduation day is the culmination of years of hard work and sacrifice that not many of your classmates can relate to. You see, today wasn't a guaranteed for students like you and me. We didn't necessarily have the same resources available when navigating the selection and enrollment processes that other students did. I still remember being so overwhelmed the first time I filled out FAFSA, and not being able to ask my parents for help because English is their second language. Although our story might be different, we have one strong shared experience – we are both the first in our family to go to college. And that is truly a tremendous accomplishment. I want to offer up tidbits of my personal story, in the hope that some is relatable and perhaps useful for what is to come.

My parents emigrated from Mexico in the early 1980s' and met on the farm they both worked at. To me my childhood was normal, parents working 60+ hours a week to provide me and my brother opportunities that they never had. The expectation was always clear, work hard to go to college so that you can do better than we did. Seven years ago I was fortunate to do just that. My parents drove me to Minnesota and dropped me off for my freshman year at Macalester. I knew it would be a combo of work and play, but ***what I didn't expect was the culture shock and homesickness that was to come.***

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My memories of Mac vary from positive to not so great. I made lifelong friends who have been with me through ups and downs. A lot of times I felt like an outsider looking in, wondering why it seemed that most of my classmates had it easy, that they didn't have to worry about tuition or bills like I did. I also met my partner during my junior year. I came out to my family not too long after that. ***I truly found myself at Mac. It was the experience of being away from home – what to me was a very foreign land of privilege – that, among other experiences, molded me into the person that I am today.*** Despite some of the institutional shortcomings, at the end of the day Macalester provided an environment where it was safe to explore new ideas and grow.

Appreciate both the positive experiences and the harder stuff, because at the end of the day the tough stuff makes the journey and accomplishment that must better at the end of the day. It's that 'grit' that matters in the long run and it will serve you well in whatever your next endeavor might be. I know that it has served me well as I've navigated my career in healthcare. Take a minute to be proud of all that you have accomplished, reflect on the ways you've grown and look forward to the future with steadfast determination. In the humble words of my grandfather - "Ya vez mi'ja, lo lograste." You made it.

Congratulations and all the best in what's to come!

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Congratulations to grads and supporters! Enjoy this day fully because it's one of the rare ones that you will remember more clearly in your memories than through the hundreds of pictures you may take. I want to share a lot of reflections and realizations with you such as: your friendships will change and that is okay (talk to them about it), the successes and vacation photos you see on social media aren't the full story (normalize struggle), dive into things you think might be awkward and do them anyways (especially networking events and asking for help), and maybe the most important thing: give yourself an earlier bed time than when you were a student (it's great). But all of this is general advice you could get from any alumni and that you probably will hear this weekend.

What makes advice between first-gen grads like ourselves special is that most of it is not new or surprising. ***That's because being a first-gen grad is an identity as much as an accomplishment. It will keep coming up in life in different forms and the best thing I can encourage you to do is embrace it.*** In certain situations, you may not want to call attention to it because of all the assumptions others attach to it but I cannot emphasize enough what a gift it is. I've always thought the best compliment you could get was if someone saw you as a bridge. As first-gen grads, this is exactly what we are. My own first-gen identity is closely intersected with being the daughter of immigrants to this country, working class, etc. so I know that being a bridge in other contexts can be exhausting. Being a bridge in a first-gen context gives you one more tool to tackle that imposter syndrome that may come up at your first job. You've likely done this before when you started at Mac.

If you need to, rely on our first-gen community. We get it. If you need to, look back and read the kick-ass papers or projects you did at Mac. Seriously, that capstone/thesis/extracurricular thing can be surprisingly morale-boosting.

You did it once and you will be able to do it again. Just be patient and go easy on yourself. Everything you've gone through in your journey thus far has equipped you to be far more prepared than many of your peers, even if they may have more resources accessible.

I want to be clear: it won't be easy. The rest of the world, and definitely most workplaces, don't value reflection and talk about identities and inequities like you may have grown accustomed to at Mac. Bring it anyways. In my own experience, I have probably made many coworkers feel uncomfortable but then critical reflection catches on and becomes more accepted. Another thing that's not easy: changing your plans. Throw them out anyways and follow what works for you. It took me way too many informational interviews to realize that while in hindsight people far into their successful careers re-tell their path in a neat, logical path, if they told the story in a more in-the-moment way, it starts to sound like a series of detours. I used to plan 5-10 years in advance. It's not easy to throw out but it is doable. One more note about these detours: even if they are not as idealistic as you would have hoped, it's okay. I recently switched from the public sector to the private sector and let me tell you: you don't know you are burning out until the flame is put out. I felt incredibly awkward and guilty when I would tell people about my new job. But you know what? It's nice to have nice things. If you don't take care of yourself, you can't take care of others. I trust that as a first-gen grad that is (perhaps) sitting with your family that you are already giving so much joy to, you already know this.

The rest of life is a long path ahead; embrace its windiness. Embrace the awkward. Embrace vulnerability. I can't wait to meet you!

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We hope you enjoyed this gift!

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