

STARS ON CAMPUS



CHRISTOPHER WEIKLE
History, Junior, Student Veteran
Association



CELEBRATE WITH US ON NOVEMBER 8TH - NATIONAL FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT DAY!

My name is Christopher Weikle, and I am a First-Generation college student. I am from a small town called Ballard, WV, but I grew up all around Monroe County.

My family comes from a blue-collar background where college was never a big deal. The mindset was that you could graduate high school, get a job, and make a decent living working in a factory, sawmill, or driving a truck, rather than going into debt for a degree you might never use.

I graduated high school in 2019 and enlisted in the West Virginia Army National Guard right after graduation. After completing basic training and AIT, I decided to enroll at Concord University in the Fall of 2020, since I wouldn't have to pay for it out of pocket.

My goal was to become a history teacher at my old high school. However, after completing one semester, I didn't perform as well as I had hoped due to poor time management. I began to think that maybe college wasn't for me. I then entered the workforce and spent three years before realizing that if I was going to work, I wanted to do something I was passionate about.

One of the hardest things about being a First-Generation college student is knowing where to start. You don't have anyone to guide you unless you seek out those people. Since college wasn't a priority in my family, I never truly valued education the way I could have. I had to do most of the research on my own, and I wasn't sure what I wanted to do in life until I had the experience of being in the workforce. That experience made me realize that life can be so much more than a 9-to-5.

The Office of Veterans Services was also a major factor in helping me stay motivated and providing resources that helped me stay ahead and achieve my goals.

As for the future, I hope to combine my passion for history and teaching with traveling."

George Williams - Assistant Professor of English / Director of Veteran Services:

"I nominated Chris Weikle because he has been an inspiration to our students. As the SVA President, his leadership has been instrumental in improving student success in our office. I think Chris displays the traits that we all want in our students- strong work ethic, caring attitude, and he is always willing to help his fellow students.

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HAILEY LAWSON

Business Administration, Freshman



"I'm a First-Generation college student and I'm from Iaeger, West Virginia. I spent most of my life on Johnnycake Mountain, which is probably a place most people will never even drive by.

My father and brother did not finish high school. I was taken out of school in first grade and homeschooled since then. I did not get homeschooled through any program, so I never technically graduated from anything accredited. Not having any accreditation was the beginning of my many challenges in my pursuit of attending college.

I originally just wanted to get a decent paying job because my living situation was not the best. I did not have running water or heat, which made winter tough. I did not want to live like that, though. That's when I searched for a job. In my head, my first step was going to get my HiSet, which is basically a high school equivalent. I passed my HiSet test, and the administrator encouraged me to apply for college and follow my passion.

I was not convinced I would perform well, my family told me that I would not make it because I was homeschooled and uneducated. They also made an argument that I would fail financially and would not be able to afford it. I entered DRS, a program to help people that are struggling. Holly Estep, a DRS counselor, told me that my ambition and enthusiasm would get me somewhere if I truly wanted it to, and I truly do.

I really want to work with communities to find sustainable methods in outdoor recreation. I took a course through Yale where I learned about the issues between communities and conservation efforts, and it was like my arrow of passion to work in conservation finally found its target. The immediate goal was Concord, because my boyfriend, now fiancé, had spoken about the great programs available. I took classes at New River Community and Technical College to qualify for Concord.

I did not have a laptop prior to New River, but DRS gave me a computer so I could do schoolwork. They also helped fix my vehicle in order to have reliable transportation! A lack of good family relations meant getting my information for FAFSA was nearly impossible. FAFSA requires a ton of information, which is very intimidating to someone alone and already anxious. Thankfully, I powered through and got it all filled out in time for the semester to start. After finishing New River, which only had three or four students, I applied to Concord University.

Concord was a very intimidating school for me because it had an actual campus with multiple buildings and professors walked around in business attire. Despite my fear, I was excited to be accepted. Grasping all the new locations, programs, textbooks, and meeting professors, really overwhelmed me at first. However, just explaining how I felt to people at Concord really lessened that overwhelming feeling when I realized just how much Concord faculty wanted me to succeed.

It's very heartwarming to think people believe in me and see what future I am striving for. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to be at Concord, because so many steps had to be taken for this chance. I do not intend to stop moving forward, and I will be forever thankful to the people who convinced me to try."

Prof. Timothy Anderson - Assistant Professor of Business and Economics:

"Hailey provides an inspirational tale of persistence and a genuine desire to better herself through education. Her conversations with me are a reminder of my own childhood and her personality is a refreshing breeze of enthusiasm in my day; her personality is one of her greatest attributes. I can easily associate with her journey and fully expect her to successfully meet her goals."

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HALEY LAWRENCE
Nursing, Senior



CELEBRATE WITH US ON NOVEMBER 8TH - NATIONAL FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT DAY!

My name is Haley Lawrence, and I am 24 years old. I am from originally from Peterstown, WV, where I grew up with my mom and my younger sister.

I now live in Narrows, Virginia with my significant other and my 2 dogs. My family is very important to me, and I value spending quality time with them. I also enjoy being outdoors and reading in my spare time.

Growing up, I always knew that I wanted to attend college. I enjoyed school all throughout my life and felt like going to college was a great opportunity for me. I was very excited about the idea of expanding my knowledge; however, I did not know what I wanted to major in until the summer before I attended Concord University. As I explored different areas of study, I was drawn to the biology field, which led me to major in Biology with an emphasis in pre-PA/PT.

As a first-generation college student, I have encountered some difficulties along the way. For example, navigating the college application process, financial aid paperwork, and academic expectations. In addition, as a first-generation college student, there is a sense of pressure to succeed not only for myself, but for the family members who had to sacrifice to provide this opportunity. While this was new territory for me and my family, I never lacked support or encouragement through this process. Not only did I receive support from my family, but Concord University faculty and staff were always there to help me along the way.

I graduated from Concord University in May of 2022 with a bachelor's degree in biology with emphasis in pre-PA/PT. A year after graduation, I decided to return to a familiar setting and further my education once more. In the fall of 2023, I returned to Concord University to pursue nursing and began the BA/BS to BSN program.

With one more semester to go, I will be saddened to see my time at Concord University end once more. I have countless memories and valuable experiences which I will forever cherish from my time here. I am excited for all the future opportunities my education has provided me as I continue my career as a Registered Nurse.

Amanda Nichols MSN, RN, Assistant Professor of Nursing:

"I am honored to nominate Haley Lawrence to be featured as the nursing departments first-generation student. Haley has consistently demonstrated dedication in her courses, integrity, and trustworthiness. She has proven to be a role model for her peers, embodying the core value of nursing through her ethical conduct. In the clinical setting, Haley has demonstrated empathy, respect, and compassionate care to her patients. I would like to congratulate Haley on all she has achieved so far and look forward to seeing the contributions she will make in the nursing profession in the years to come."

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KADEN KASPER

Interdisciplinary Studies, Freshman



CELEBRATE WITH US ON NOVEMBER 8TH - NATIONAL FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT DAY!

Back when I was in my sophomore year at Pikeview High School, still on my way to completing and not sure what I would be doing with my life, a college and career fair was being held. I figured it was a good option to check it out, but I did not expect I would find my future path there. Concord Esports was something I had never heard of, but I am so glad I have found it as it inspired me to attend Concord University.

I was never big on the whole college thing, as I imagined I could figure everything out and make it on my own without a degree that would possibly put me in debt. In my time here, I learned that college was the best possible choice I could have made. I have learned more than I could have ever possibly in the world alone, I have made multiple new friends with which I have created strong bonds, and I have had completely new experiences I will cherish for the rest of my life.

When it came time to fill out the FASFA, I did struggle a little due to not having much outside help with figuring out stuff, but in the end, I managed to complete it and get full benefits to pursue my degree at Concord University, my first-choice college.

I was nervous when I first arrived, never having been away from my home, but I have slowly become comfortable with what are now everyday things I manage. I make sure to get my work done in a timely manner and make time for social gatherings. I do miss my family a lot, but I know I have their support with going into esports marketing as a future career, my stepdad being my biggest supporter in achieving my dreams.

As I stated, Concord was my first choice, primarily being introduced to their esports degree and finding out I could make a hobby into a career. Another thing that made me choose Concord was the fact I lived so close to the town of Athens and wouldn't have to travel across the state if I wanted to see my family.

I have had a rough childhood with many things that could have stopped me such as parents who dealt with drug usage and bullying within the school system, yet I made sure school was a top priority to make it where I am today. I am proud to be a Mountain Lion, and I hope to make everyone proud of me and my potential."

Nathan Lockhart, Interim Assistant Director of Esports:

"Kasper may be freshman, but the leadership and maturity already shown in our program by meeting all the due dates, attending our events, and attending matches for other teams speaks volumes. The esports department is very fortunate to have Kasper in our team, and I cannot wait to see his performance in our program and where his path will take him after graduation."

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KYLEE LOVEJOY

Advertising/Graphic Design, Studio Art, Freshman



CELEBRATE WITH US ON NOVEMBER 8TH - NATIONAL FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT DAY!

My name is Kylee Lovejoy and I am double majoring in Advertising/Graphic Design and Studio Art. I graduated from Van Jr./Sr. High School in Van, WV. I also went to the Boone Career and Technical Center for Drafting. I was a part of NHS along with NTHS.

I have always wanted to go to college because I believed it would give me better career opportunities and allow me to gain access to ways of art that I would not be able to have on my own. I love trying and learning new ways and knowledge of art and going to college gives me that.

I would like to say that my overall experience as a first-generation student has been mainly positive. I have already gotten to meet new people and experience new things I could probably never if I did not attend college. I am now a Bonner Scholar through Concord! I definitely enjoyed Welcome Week events and making things like the signs and vision boards.

Being first gen, I did not really know what to expect heading into my freshman year of college, and was kind of nervous to get started. The obstacles I've faced are time management and financial aid. It was in my opinion easier to keep up in high school compared to college just because there is more to do here than anything. I have struggled to find the right balance between work, personal time, and sleep, but I am working on it. Since FAFSA went through changes the year I started, filing it out it became extremely difficult to understand and submit without any issues.

With that being said even though my mom has not graduated from college, it definitely helps give me advice of any subject or topic she can and I am forever grateful for that and would probably be struggling without her help."

Beth Little - Assistant Professor of Graphic Design:

"Kylee is naturally talented with drawing, and it is clear from her performance in two of my courses so far that she is creative, dedicated, and possesses a strong work ethic. She goes above and beyond on her projects and turns them in before their deadlines. She seems to enjoy the work and is a positive influence on her classmates."

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LILLIAN JONES
Health Promotion, Graduate



CELEBRATE WITH US ON NOVEMBER 8TH - NATIONAL FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT DAY!

Hello, my name is Lillian Jones, and I am a First-Generation college student. For the longest time I was embarrassed of my story, but now I am proud. I am proud of the hurdles I have overcome, the sacrifices that were made, the ability to beat another statistic, and not succumbing to all who doubted my abilities to become a better human being.

Being the second oldest of seven children was never an easy task. My grandparents raised each child due to my mother being an alcoholic and drug abuser. By 13 I was in foster care and by 18 I had removed myself from state custody and decided to go to West Liberty. I signed myself back into state custody to qualify for the Chafee program. This program along with being a member of Upward Bound sparked my interest in college and travel. I never wanted to go to college by nature, but after seeing generational poverty, dysfunction, and neglect determine my entire life, I changed my mind. College was never part of the hand I was dealt with, but fortunately with the help of teachers along the way I was guided along a different path. I can attest to education and educators that I would not be a teacher today without the positive influence they had on me.

I went on to get my bachelor's degree in physical education and health. While at West Liberty I faced multiple challenges of being a first-generation college student. I did not have a vehicle and had to get rides from my roommate for the first year. When I was able to get a used vehicle, I had so many issues with it and no help. I worked 3 jobs and had little free time to just be a student and enjoy breaks. During breaks I stayed with friends since we had to leave the dorm. The Chafee program paid for my 4-year tuition and books so that was a major relief. The overall challenge was poor support and no help when something was wrong.

While in the education program my professor asked me if I would be interested in traveling to China. I did a fundraiser to help pay my way, and while there we observed different classroom environments, tried new foods, and went sightseeing in our free time. I viewed these opportunities as a once in a lifetime chance to see the world! Little did I know another opportunity would come for me to teach abroad when I graduated.

When it came time to graduate, I could not work full time and do my student teaching. The dean of the education department then offered me the chance to move in with her. I took the opportunity since I would not be able to graduate otherwise.

In the last semester of school an opportunity arose to teach abroad in South Korea. I looked at this as another chance to travel, meet new people, and make more connections. I was accepted into this program and went on to live in South Korea for two and a half years. I made lifelong friends, had amazing opportunities, and learned how to travel alone.

I moved home after receiving a phone call that my grandmother had passed unexpectedly when I was 26 and, 3 weeks later, my mother passed away from an overdose. After moving home, I found myself always looking for the chance to leave. Years later I realized this is a response to childhood trauma.

I went on to become a flight attendant and worked out of Pittsburgh Airport for the next year in a half. This job gave me the opportunity to travel and work. Unfortunately, it did not pay sufficiently to be able to live comfortably. I went back to subbing and teaching before I would land a permanent job teaching physical education and health. This is my 6th Year in Tyler Consolidated High School and I currently teach 9th and 10th grade health.

After having my two sons and teaching health full time, I was looking for growth in my career and life. I decided to look for a master's program that would work with my busy schedule and family life outside of work. I started Concord's Master's program in Health Promotion this year. I realize I cannot do it in the period as most, but slow is better than never. I thrive for change and hope others can see hard things ARE POSSIBLE if you do not give up, work hard to be the best version of yourself, and learn to willingly accept help.

Regardless of what I do I hope to always be the "Person I needed" and a positive role model for the future generations to come."

Jill Nolan, PhD - Chair, Department of Health Sciences:

"Lillian is a First-Generation student who started working on her graduate degree this year. She is a full-time educator, working in Tyler Consolidated High School teaching health. Lillian has an amazing story and has persevered through loss to create an amazing life. I wanted to feature her because she is working full time while earning her degree, she is contributing to the health and wellness of students in WV, and she performs extremely well in her courses academically."

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MADISON CORNETT

Biology, Environmental Geosciences,
Senior



CELEBRATE WITH US ON NOVEMBER 8TH - NATIONAL FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT DAY!

"Growing up, I always knew I would attend college, even though no one in my close family had before. My parents always taught me that college would allow me to have any career I wanted and were persistent that it would lead me to a career I enjoyed. Both worked jobs they did not necessarily enjoy, my dad had worked in the coal mines my entire life and used that as an example to always strive for a career I was passionate about.

Their advice resonated with me throughout public school and motivated me to apply to college. During my high school years, I picked up track and cross country and the interests from college coaches also gave me some confidence to pursue college. I doubted my academic and athletic abilities to handle college as a student and an athlete, especially without any idea of how college was like. I felt like I was walking into it blindly, but decided I needed to take that leap into the unknown to prove to myself I could do it and set myself up for a successful future.

The difficulties did not end at the application process, as there were certain things I just did not know about college. I had no clue what the dynamics of college life looked like, I did not know what credit hours were, and I did not know random roommates were something to avoid. However, I luckily learned these things through experience and time in college.

One difficulty that has seemed to linger is being able to relate my issues and short-time availability to my family. Since no one had experienced college before, they did not know about the difficulties that came with it such as the fast-paced lifestyle or the complicated concepts that were to be learned, especially being a double major in biology and geosciences.

Though college was something I had never questioned whether I would attend, I underestimated it. I had no idea the opportunities and prominent experiences it had in store for me; the classes I have enjoyed, the field trips, conferences, a summer internship opportunity with the National Parks Service, and the track/cross country meets. It has been one of the most challenging things I have ever done, but I know that my parents (though they had never gone) were right about how college would move me in the right direction with my future.

I am very thankful that they have set me up for success and I am proud to be a First-Generation student!"

Douglas Creer – Professor of Biology / Chair, Department of Biology:

"Madison Cornett is a senior in Biology with a double major in Environmental Geosciences. She is one of the top students in the major academically, with an impressive record of success in her coursework. She is also very active in research. She has engaged in independent research with Dr. Tom Saladyga studying forest ecology and fire regimes. She has also served an internship at New River Gorge National Park, surveying vegetation and working in control of invasive species. The Biology faculty feel that her achievements merit recognition."

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SERENITY BROOKS

Biology, Studio Art, Senior



My name is Serenity Brooks, originally from Rainelle, WV, now residing in Beckley, WV when my family moved since I was in fifth grade. My parents still live there, and although I am a campus resident, I still return there every weekend. My mother is a beautician, and my biological father is a bus driver for Greenbrier County Schools. They are divorced and live in separate counties. I mostly live with my mother.

In early elementary and middle school, I was mediocre when it came to academics. I am not sure what changed between middle school and high school; but I became more academically competitive, and I started to develop a love for learning.

I created a bunch of loose goals that I wanted to achieve, but all the goals pointed to college. If I wanted to have a certain job when I got older, I had to go to college; and I believe my stubbornness helped with my choice to go to Concord. Because I really wanted a future job that I enjoyed doing.

To be honest, I was not even sure what a first-generation student was when I applied to college. I had to google what it was. I was not familiar with the layout of college in comparison to high school. I did not know the significance of credits; I did not know about advising or that I was able to pick my own classes each semester (essentially). I did not know that interdisciplinary degrees existed. I did not know that professors had connections and conversations with students like they do in high school; I thought they were terrifying.

The first wave of learning how to navigate all the new things that college presented was the most challenging part, initially. Now, the most challenging part really lies within my family. Because my family does not understand my workload, it is hard for them to understand when I have to miss family events for school.

In high school, it was relatively easy to catch up if you had to miss a day. In college, I am scared to miss a day; my family finds it difficult to understand that. They think I am prioritizing school over my family, and this dilemma has caused me to be even more stressed. It honestly puts me in a bad mood when they cannot comprehend it. They have a lot more time to spend with family than I do, and I do not think they even realize how much work I do. Last year, I mentioned a Freshwater Ecology lab to my family, where we analyzed fecal coliforms, and they made a big deal about me "sounding smart." And that day kind of haunts me because fecal coliforms are one of the easiest concepts to understand (out of all that I have learned), and it made me think about how they really do not know all the things I am doing/learning here at the college.

I also pay for my tuition, books, and other materials on my own. My family helps mostly with gas to come back and forth to our house on the weekend. So, the financial aspect is hard as well, especially if you are not prepared for it.

I plan to attend graduate school and become a Wetland Ecologist. Wetlands are very important for the environment to the point where they are governmentally protected; so, I would like to help monitor them and keep them healthy. I eventually would like to become a professor after gaining enough experience and research, because I love teaching and sharing my experiences with others."

Douglas Creer – Professor of Biology / Chair, Department of Biology:

"Serenity Brooks is a senior in Biology with a double major in Studio Art. She is an excellent student academically who has impressed her instructors with her enthusiasm and talent. Despite her always busy schedule, she serves as a tutor and takes time to help other students. She has also put her artistic skills to use in preparing drawings and diagrams for use in teaching materials in Biology. Because of her outstanding record in both scholarship and service, the Biology faculty sees her as worthy of recognition."

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SYDNIIE DICKERSON
Advertising/Graphic Design,
Freshman

CELEBRATE WITH US ON NOVEMBER 8TH - NATIONAL FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT DAY!

My name is Sydnie Dickerson and I am majoring in Graphic Design. I completed the Graphic Design course at the Vo Tech during high school as well as becoming a member of the Technical Honor Society. I have also been hired for a custom sticker and label printing company for a short period of time due to the owners moving locations.

I decided to attend college due to the various opportunities that are available to the students. I have been able to be a part of so many things as well as earn many things for my participation, not only physical rewards, but emotional and social earnings as well. It was slightly difficult to know exactly what I needed and how much it would cost and what to expect, but with the help of my friends I received excellent advice and, if I had not, I fear my first weeks on campus would have been a little less enjoyable.

Beth Little - Assistant Professor of Graphic Design:

"Sydnie has an amazing artistic talent, and came to Concord already possessing skills in both drawing and with the Adobe software. She comes to class prepared and eager to participate, turns in assignments on time, and excels in her projects. She brings a positive attitude and sense of humor to class, and is always willing to help her fellow students."



STARS ON CAMPUS

AIDAN BISHOP

Graphic Design/Advertising and
Studio Art, Senior

CELEBRATE WITH US ON NOVEMBER 8TH - NATIONAL FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT DAY!

I am double majoring in both Graphic Design/Advertising and Studio Art. I grew up in this area my entire life and went to Concord because it was close to home.

I had an interest in design and art but did not feel like I had the skillset I would need for any career, so I had planned on going to college early on in school to help improve those skills. I know that with art it is possible to learn on your own but I have benefitted greatly from having professors who can give me feedback and steer me where I need to go.

As a first gen student there are really no major obstacles that come to mind. It was nerve wracking deciding on colleges to apply for and waiting for responses, but my parents have been very supportive of me going to college and have helped me whenever they have been able to.

Beth Little - Assistant Professor of Graphic Design:

"Aidan is a very creative and dedicated student. He appears to be serious about his studies, often doing research on his own, and pushing himself to go the extra mile on his projects. He consistently performs well in class and is constantly producing a steady stream of great design projects that look professionally done."



STARS ON CAMPUS



TARA SPENCER
Advertising/Graphic Design, Senior



CELEBRATE WITH US ON NOVEMBER 8TH - NATIONAL FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT DAY!

I am 22 years old, majoring in Advertising/Graphic Design, and working in the Fine Arts Department as a Mac Lab Assistant.

My dad has been a Coal Miner for many years and my mom is working as an Outreach Coordinator (Domestic Violence Advocate) for a couple of years now. Neither one of my parents has completed college and from my understanding, nobody in my direct family has besides my oldest cousin.

I made the decision to attend college because I wanted to succeed and challenge myself so that I could provide the best future possible for myself.

I have encountered many obstacles along the way. My high school counselor assisted me with my application; I was unaware that she had enrolled me in Concord until I received an email from Concord confirming my acceptance.

Since my younger sister had been in and out of college for a few years, my mom had a pretty good understanding of what to do when it came to financial aid navigation, so she helped considerably. Scholarships are something we didn't do or knew very little about. Since we didn't know much about them, I only had a handful, but there are so many out there that we had no idea, that could have helped me pay for college.

My mom had to take a loan to help pay for it as well, and I am dealing with loans because we didn't know much about it. Since we didn't have anyone who had finished college, my mom and I had to figure it out on our own. Other than that, I think we've done fairly well in terms of college-related matters.

Beth Little - Assistant Professor of Graphic Design:

"Tara brings a lot of positive energy to class, which helps to encourage her classmates to do well on their assignments. She engages with the course material and is eager to participate in class discussions. Her technical knowledge with the software is good, and she turns in high-quality work on her assignments."