

AS TIME PASSED, I FOUND MYSELF CLOSED OFF

My parents always wanted me to go to college, stating that they didn't want me to be like them.

Initially, a friend and I wanted to go to college together in GA, but a change in her family's life made her wish to remain in WV.

After discussing with my family, I decided to come to Concord, far enough to give me independence from my family and the cliques back home, but still in WV.

My friend and I we applied together and were accepted. I chose English as my major, looking to go into film. While it was hard to say goodbyes I was elated and anxious.

I decided to try different college clubs. I couldn't quite find my niche. I end up going back and forth between E-sports and the theatre group. After multiple unsuccessful attempts to be part of the cast through auditions for the plays, I found myself discouraged. However, to my surprise, I was offered the position of assistant stage manager.

As time passed, I found myself closed off, like I was back in high school, simply watching the cast of actors. It seemed like another clique. *My spirits were dampened* but at least I got to work on a show again.

Weeks later I was invited to a party by one of the cast members. My first one. That simple invitation opened the door for me to have the social life I craved. I found myself socializing more and more with the entire theatre group.

The play "Puffs" last spring was no easy feat. We had many stressful setbacks. For me, it was a walk in the park. Due to my history as a crew member in my high school's productions, I was determined to make sure the cast were in their best state and cared for in and out of those setbacks.

On April 21st, we had two shows: matinee and evening. *That day was my birthday*. I was reminded of the loss of my celebration at home, the family time, gifts and going to a favorite restaurant. Now, I could only get a call, text, or money. I really had no one to celebrate it with other than my roommate.

I arrived earlier than needed to help prepare the stage for the evening show. I was met with the sight of a cake, chips, drinks, bouquet of flowers, and a homemade card full of the entire cast's messages telling me how wonderful and how thankful they were for me.

That night after a party I called my dad in tears to tell him everything. The tone of his voice said it all. *"I'm glad college is going good for you."*

So, to all my APO people, you have severely improved my life. Thank you so much.



Allison Dawson
English Major, Theater Minor
Freshman

TRY TO DO MY OWN THING

Being a First-Gen Student is a pretty cool honor to have. I also get to kind of lead the way for my siblings since I am the oldest sibling and the first grandchild on my father's side of the family too.

I'm from Edgewood (Maryland). It is not the biggest community but we do have a lot of talent that does come from it and being involved with different high schools and extracurricular activities, I get to play a role in a lot of the lives of the families of my community. Being a First-Gen student it's not something that is very common in Edgewood, ***so it is a lot of pressure to succeed.***

I started training in martial arts when I was six years old in 2010 and, from the beginning of my years of high school in 2018, I started teaching and instructing students. So, for about five years now I have taught, trained, and competed with ATA Martial Arts.

I have befriended and taught martial arts to a lot of kids since they were five and six years old, they are my kids essentially. The ones that know me for years, *I'm who they are looking up to*, especially for the young African-American and Afro-Latin kids.

I graduated from Edgewood High School in May of 2022 and started my freshman year of college this Fall 2023.

I haven't always wanted to attend college. I really decided to go for it in the summer after I graduated high school. But I knew that I wanted to spend a gap year working before going to college.

During high school I felt stuck into a continuous cycle of classes and the time spent teaching martial arts, I thought that that was all that I could do.

I decided to go against it, try to do my own thing. That really solidified my decision to come to college, work towards becoming a strength and conditioning coach, so that I could apply what I've learned from martial arts to teaching and using that in other sports.

Here at Concord, I chose to pursue Business Administration with a Sports Management emphasis, but I decided to switch my major to Exercise Science because I want to really focus on understanding the fundamentals of strength and conditioning, and learn about kinesiology.

I wanted to know what athletic trainers have to do as opposed to learning how to manage a sports team or franchise.



Alysse Martin

Business Administration Major/ Exercise Science
Freshman

I'VE WORKED TO GET HERE. I DESERVE TO BE HERE.

No one talks about the guilt that comes with being a first-generation college student.

While I should feel proud of my accomplishments and how far I've come, I still feel that little tug. Thinking, "Here I am. And here is where it could all fall through."

At every silent moment, I find myself pondering what would happen if I let things slide out of control.

I've worked to get here, pushed past others academically, physically, mentally. Like many first-generation college students, I competed for scholarships. I never wanted my parents to have to put a cent towards college.

I think about how so many of the other applicants didn't receive a scholarship. I think about how many opportunities I've been given, but I also think about how much my parents deserved those same opportunities.

As a first-generation college student, I feel guilt for the other students. I feel guilt for their parents, and my parents, and their parents before them.

I sometimes feel as though I don't belong, like I'm taking the spot from someone better. Smarter. More qualified.

But as a first-generation student, I also feel proud. I'm proud of the person I've become, proud of the person I'll be.

I deserve to be here, and so does every other first-generation student who finds themselves in this rabbit hole.

ANONYMOUS

I THOUGHT IT WASN'T IN THE CARDS FOR ME

Neither of my parents went to college and my father didn't even finish high school. So needless to say, I didn't really think about it during high school myself.

I thought it wasn't in the cards for me and I didn't even know if I would even be good enough to go and I still wonder that at times to this day. However, it was my cousin who talked me into applying despite not taking the ACT or SAT in high school.

My cousin was the one who helped me apply and do the FAFSA because my *parents had no idea what they were doing*. He was a huge part of why I am in school right now.

Another hurdle that I had to deal with to get where I am today was funding. My family was in that awkward spot where they made too much for me to receive financial aid but still made too little to be able to help me pay for the semesters.

I was lucky enough that they had been putting back money since I was little for either college or whatever else I wanted to pursue, and that money got me through two years and I'm so very thankful for that. *After those two years, I dropped out and worked to save up money to come back.* By that point, I was considered independent and could apply for financial aid with my own income instead and I was finally able to return.

So, if you are having a hard time with certain aspects of the college experience and, your parents have no clue how to navigate all the processes of applying and dealing with financial aid, you can always look to others around you for help and I'm sure at Concord you will find it.

You're also not on a time limit you can take your time and go at your own pace. *Do what is best for you because you can do it just as I have.*

You'll face challenges and difficulties but just keep in mind what your goal is and focus on that.

ANONYMOUS

THE MOST IMPORTANT MOTIVATION FOR ME IS BEING ABLE TO LOOK BACK AT THE PROMISE I MADE TO MY DAD

One of the positive things about myself is that *I love hard work, and the reward that comes from it*. I was raised in a family that expected my best effort in everything I did. I took a lot of pride in the work that I did, but when it came to school, I had no desire to work hard and make something of my education.

High school was good to me, as far as building friendships and playing baseball, but when it came to my education I had no clear plan on what was next after graduation.

My dad, who took a few college classes, decided early on that school was not for him and dropped out to go to work and build a life for himself and my mother. He is very successful in what he does, but the coal industry eventually takes a toll on your body (specifically from black lung), and makes daily activities such as walking up a hill a bit more difficult.

My dad made me promise to stay out of the coal industry, and if you are from West Virginia or know much about West Virginia, coal is a big deal, with lots of job opportunities.

I made a commitment that I wouldn't choose that as a career path for myself, and I would work towards a different future.

I knew I wanted to play college baseball, and if that opportunity presented itself I was going to take it and go from there. Thankfully, I had an opportunity to come to Concord to play baseball, and I decided to major in management, because I thought it would be easy for me.

Being a first-generation college student wasn't easy for me, and to be completely honest, it still isn't. From financial hardship to learning how to balance my time properly between family, friends, and school... I really struggled. *I still face challenges while working towards my master's degree, but it's gotten much easier.*

Along my college journey I have also built friendships with professors who have helped me every step of the way. Whether that meant changing majors or looking at a completely different career path I always had the support I needed.

I vowed that no matter what happens, I would walk across the stage and have the diploma handed to me.

I think the most important motivation for me is being able to look back at the promise I made to my dad, whose influence made me who I am today, and continue to strive towards my future.



Caleb Dangerfield
Concord University - MBA

SEEING THE HARD TIMES MY MOM EXPERIENCED IN LIFE

I grew up in a single-mother household, and I have always had a good life, my mom made it her goal to make sure I wouldn't feel the lack of necessities, but *that didn't shield my eyes from seeing the struggles she had to go through to protect and provide for me.*

Seeing the hard times my mom experienced in life made me decide in high school that I wanted to get a college degree. I want to wake up in the morning and not dread going to work, I want to love what I am doing.

In the future, with my degree, I would also like to be able to send my mom back to school to get her nursing degree, which she had to stop pursuing to be able to get me this far in life.

Getting to this point was a rocky ride. *As a first-generation college student, getting through the college process was difficult* to try figure it out ourselves. With the help of my mom, high school counselor, and travel volleyball coach, I was able to make it to Concord University.

As I have grown, through my journey here at Concord, my plans and goals have changed numerous times. There have been many times when I felt that I could not get through college because no one else in my family has, either because of financial struggles, or difficult classes.

That is when, feeling lost, *I have received help and encouragement* from the professors here at Concord, which gave me the motivation to persevere and the guidance to continue on my academic journey.

Csayjah Barber-Whitelow
Biology Major
Senior

JUST BE RESILIENT AND KEEP GOING

I always knew that I wanted to attend college growing up. I remember it like it was yesterday... It was during my freshman year of high school that I knew exactly what I wanted to go to college for.

I chose to take classes at the Vocational Center that were centered on business and design. I took some basic design techniques classes and general business classes such as Intro to Business. I enjoyed those classes so much and knew that was my passion.

That's the year I decided what I wanted to do for a profession. I now have a bachelor's degree in graphic design and am currently pursuing a master's in business administration.

I chose to go to college because neither of my parents did. My Dad has a good job, but it took him years of experience to get to where he is now. My mom has always worked in the food industry as a waitress or cook for over 35 years now.

Don't misunderstand me, there's nothing wrong with that line of work, but when I began working at our family-owned restaurant at the age of 14, I knew that I wanted something different for myself. I believe that's when I knew 100% that I would go to college after graduating high school.

My goals have changed throughout my journey because I've met them and continued to raise the bar higher. I kept good grades, had great attendance and graduated college a year early with Magna Cum Laude.

I held myself to high standards because I knew my career and future was riding on my college success, so succeeding is what I set out to do.

My struggles through college as a first-gen student were, I'm sure, similar to others. *I was responsible for paying for my college education and didn't get any help from FAFSA.*

So, I did what I had to do which included working three jobs at one point to pay for what tuition my loans and scholarships didn't cover, as well as gas for my car since I was commuting. After about 8 months or so, I quickly realized that was just too much for a full-time student and I had to cut it back down to two jobs.

Just know, that no matter how hard things get, there's always a light at the end of the tunnel. ***Just be resilient and keep going until you can see it!***

There were a lot of people who made a difference in my college life, and I am so thankful for them. Having a good relationship with your advisor is so important as they are a great resource for help and questions.

Knowing that I had resources all around me was comforting, but it is important to know that ***it is okay to ask for help!*** That was one of the first lessons I learned as a first-gen college student!



Dara Ladner, Class of 2020
B.A. in Advertising and Graphic Design
MBA

THE OPPORTUNITY I NEED TO HAVE A DIFFERENT FUTURE

Growing up my family didn't have a lot. We never went without, but I remember seeing my parents struggle.

Around the age of 10 my dad became disabled, and my mom was a stay at home mother. We had little income and without my grandparents I do not know what we would have done. My mother began working as a substitute bus aid and teachers aid to help make ends meet, eventually securing a full time position at Hollywood Elementary where she still works to this day.

Seeing my parents struggle, I realized I wanted a different life for my future children.

Being a first generation college student is the opportunity I need it to have a different future!

Randy Ellison
Education Major
Freshman

A BLESSING

Being a first-gen student in my generation to go to college is a blessing.

I'm fortunate to do something they couldn't do. Especially where I'm from, not many people make it to college because lots of people my age are in jail or dead.

So, being able to go to college and further my education means I can prove to everyone that where you come from doesn't make you who you are or limit your possibilities.



Demarcus Griffin
Sociology Major
Sophomore

THIS PLACE GAVE ME A VOICE WHEN I THOUGHT I DIDN'T HAVE ONE TO GIVE

Although I am a first-generation student, I am far from being traditional. I'm a transfer student here at Concord, currently a Junior, double majoring in Psychology and Sociology.

My college journey began immediately after graduating high school in 2015. I originally attended Bluefield State College studying to be a nurse. However, ***I wasn't happy because that path was chosen for me by my family not myself.*** During that time, I was at the whims of my family, and I pretty much did as they said without question. Not long after I started, due to my mother's health, I had to leave Bluefield State to go back home and take care of her.

After a few years, I tried applying for college again. This time, I was considering Bluefield College in VA. There, I wanted to pursue a major in Theatre. *I had a passion for the performing arts and enjoyed being able to fully immerse into a character that wasn't me.* I even won a scholarship for performing an original piece in front of the director.

It was a long, drawn-out process that required a large amount of documents to be processed and fees for which I didn't have funds.

I had asked favors from individuals I barely knew because my own family didn't even want to help. After fighting tooth and nail, all I had to do was move in that upcoming fall. I had two cars filled to the brim with everything I needed for school that year.

Wouldn't you believe that the people at that college looked me in the face, after giving me the impression that everything was paid for, and told me that I was going to have to take out substantial loans just to pay my way through school? Needless to say, I was devastated.

I had tried so hard just to have it all ripped away in less than a second. I had no other choice but to go back home.

For years, I fought just to get where you guys are today, and I'd almost given up. ***I had convinced myself that I wasn't meant to go to college.***

Against my family's wishes, I inevitably left my home and moved to Princeton before the pandemic transpired. I worked a few jobs just to make ends meet, and after some time, decided to try college again.

After the height of the pandemic was over, I applied to Concord University in 2021. I guess you could say that I'm part of the small percentage that come back to college after dropping out. Some of you may not know this, but research shows that once a person drops out of college, their chance of going back is low.

Ever since then, I've maintained a 4.0 GPA, made lifelong friends, haven't had to take out any loans, and have experienced opportunities that I would have never thought possible for someone like me.

I found a family away from home here at Concord University that seemed to have cared more about what I wanted for me than my own family ever did. Here I've found people willing to fight for me and see me succeed.

Out of all of this, the message I want to send to everyone is *NEVER take anything for granted.*

What may have been easy for you guys, may have been extremely difficult for others. Not everyone can come to college. Not everyone has access to resources to be able to come to college. Although the last couple of years here at Concord have been challenging, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. ***This place gave me a voice when I thought I didn't have one to give.***

Now, I'm doing exactly what I wanted to do and I'm not allowing anyone or anything to stand in my way.



Destiny Endicott
Psychology & Sociology major
Junior

THE POWER OF RHETORIC

My name is Grace King and I'm from Princeton, WV. I am an English major, minoring in History.

I began my college career as a Biology major. I wanted to change lives as a Doctor of Medicine. I falsely perceived that doctors are the ones who change lives daily.

Until, I discovered the power of rhetoric. Advocates can form rhetoric for their purposes, which are powerful and stand the test of time. I decided to become an English major. The Humanities opened my eyes to the world, and the various elements contributed to major works.

Many individuals have supported me through this journey, such as my McNair Scholars program, Honors program, fellow English majors, professors, and peers. Their support has aided me through the trials of college.

Many forget their worth, intelligence, and health in the struggle of excellence. I believed I needed to be perfect, until my mentor reminded me there is no perfection; which makes imperfect perfect in its own complicity. ***Imposter syndrome sneaks its way into your mind, devouring hope and dreams.***

My support system helped me through these difficult times. Due to my mentors and peers, I have a hope for the future, in the career I want to pursue.

I met many under-representative persons in the McNair Scholars program. I found camaraderie in this program. My fellow scholars encourage the continuation of inspiring work, which will impact the world. The career I am pursuing is research and professorship.

I want to inspire my future students, as I have been inspired through my journey for higher knowledge.



Grace King
English major/History minor
Honors Student
McNair Scholar / Editor of the Honors Newsletter

I KNEW I HAD FOUND MY NICHE

I cannot pinpoint an exact time where I realized that I wanted to go to college. It has always just been one of those things that I knew was going to happen; however, in my Junior year of High School, I met a teacher named Angela Steffey who sparked my love for writing.

Throughout High School, I also loved Theatre. Upon coming to both of these realizations, *I knew I had found my niche.*

I came to college to be an English Teacher and Theatre Director in the Fall of 2020. I began my first semester of college during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. I quickly adapted to the social distancing lifestyle. Once the pandemic subsided, *I had a difficult time adjusting back to normal life;* however, my goal stayed the same.

Throughout my college experience, I ran into many issues. Mental health and stress can weigh a heavy toll, however *learning to balance every aspect of your college life is key.*

Many people have had an impact on my college life. I have made so many amazing friends and have met some wonderful mentors.

As far as English is considered, Dr. Michelle Gompf has encouraged me tremendously in my writing career. She is an amazing professor, and I am very thankful for her. Additionally, Logan Reagan, Assistant Professor of Theatre, has been an amazing friend, professor, confidante, and mentor.

I will forever be grateful to these people for cheering me on and enhancing my college experience.



Jordan Simpson
English Major, Theatre Minor
Senior

I REALIZED THAT I WAS JUST MAKING UP EXCUSES FOR NOT WANTING TO GO TO COLLEGE

The road to higher education has not been an easy one, especially for a first-generation student, not only has it molded me into the person that I am today, but also into someone that I see a bright future for.

Growing up with a neglectful mother and a father who was away at work, I was consistently helping take care of my younger siblings ranging from cooking meals to making sure they had clean clothes to wear to school.

School has always been a major aspect of my life because it was the one place where I did not have to worry about anything, except myself and my schoolwork. *If I stayed focused on that one assignment, it seemed like everything else would melt away into the background which made me feel at ease.*

Although I liked school, at the time I was not sure if I was smart or driven enough to excel in college. I constantly thought about the barriers that were stopping me from attending college like financial status, family standing, and intellectual worries.

These barriers weighed on my mind until one day it hit me like a ton of bricks, and I realized that I was just making up excuses for not wanting to go to college and the next day I sent in my application to Concord University.

Over the years leading up to college, I thought about different fields that I could envision myself being successful in like teaching, social work, and even nursing although the sight of blood makes me vomit. Anyway, I finally landed on social work in my sophomore year at college because it had the career aspects that I want, and I will be able to help those who are not able to help themselves.

They say college is the best years of your life, but these past few years have been the most wearing on my mental and physical health.

In the beginning of last year, I lost my grandfather who had a significant impact on my life and even pushed for me to expand my education. Not too long after that, my family was struck again by another loss of my younger brother who died of Sudden Unexpected Death in Epilepsy. I have never experienced these types of losses that made me go into a deep hole of depression to where it caused me to feel numb and not have a care in the world.

Experiencing that loss before the fall semester began made me question whether I wanted to continue my education. *Luckily, by this point I had a stable support system to where I was able to get help with counseling which not only helped me grieve, but has also made me live life to the fullest.*

The time had come for me to return to school and try to live life normally. During that time, I do not think that I would have made it through without the support of my family, friends, and professors at Concord. There were times where I have turned in assignments late, needed help with some of my work, or just needed someone to confide in. They were always there to listen, which I am extremely grateful for.

Today my mental health has improved, and I am doing well academically. I am set to graduate in the Spring of 2024 which I cannot be happier about.

I just want to say for those who are questioning going to college or asking why they even went to college in the first place, I just want to say ***anything worth doing is going to be hard and the only person who can stand in your way is yourself.***



Kaitlyn Hughart
Social Work Major
Senior

I WAS YOU AT ONE TIME

After graduating high school in 2020, I was highly encouraged to go to college by my family. It seemed as if they would be disappointed if I didn't go. So, I began my search for colleges.

I've been going to school since I was 2 years old, so there really wasn't another option for me at the time than to continue my education. I applied and gained acceptance to a few schools. The University of Charleston, West Virginia Institute of Technology, and Concord University were my top choices because they were in-state. I was scared to move away from home, so I picked places that I could commute to.

Originally, I wanted to pursue a career in Parks & Recreation, which Concord had a program for at the time. However, by the time I was supposed to start classes, they had discontinued the program.

I then decided I wanted to become a radiologist and accepted my invitation to attend the University of Charleston. I was offered phenomenal financial aid from the school and their band, but with COVID-19 peaking around that time, I decided I didn't want to go to Charleston and deal with all the protocols and potentially becoming ill with nowhere to go. I would've had to have stayed in the dorms on campus there.

My last option was West Virginia Institute of Technology in Beckley, WV. It was 15 minutes from home, and I had to pick a school quickly because I didn't know what to do. I emailed someone in the admissions department there and accepted their invitation to attend classes there.

I started out in mechanical engineering, and by the time the school year ended in May 2021, I had changed majors 3 times.

I still wasn't satisfied, so I transferred to Concord University as a music education major. *One semester in, and I was struggling (hardcore).*

After taking a psychology class, I determined that this is what I wanted to do. I got to know some of the students and became familiar with the professors.

You know, being a first-generation student with no guidance at all is a battle in and of itself. But, eventually I found pathways and joined McNair where I've been provided with opportunities I wouldn't have gotten anywhere else.

Concord University has truly been a blessing to me. Through networking and interacting with other students and faculty, ***I've made many friends, and I have a solid support system that is there for me when I need help.***

Now that I'm nearing the end of the first semester of my senior year, I'm incredibly thankful I decided to make the switch to Concord because it has so much to offer for first-generation students.

I've found that they really do care for their students, and if there's ever anything you need help with, contact a professor that you're comfortable talking to, or find a student who might be able to lead you in the right direction.

It's okay to be confused. It's okay to be scared. It's okay to not know. ***Just reach out to someone who can guide you through it. I was you at one time.***

You are heard.
You are seen.
We're here for you.



Katelyn Fitzwater
Psychology Major
McNair Scholar, Senior

I WOULD LOVE TO BRING JUSTICE TO FAMILIES AND FRIENDS

I'm 19 years old and a First-Generation College Student. My family had some experience in college but never got to finish and *I want to be the first.*

I've always had a dream of becoming a Forensic Analyst since I was in 5th grade. During my times in high school, I took classes at the Mercer County Technical Education Center (MCTEC) for 3 ½ years to succeed in crime work and fell in love with it in the first year. I studied crime scenes, Use of Force, fingerprinting, etc.

After graduating from my program in May 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, I volunteered within my first two weeks of summer to teach middle and high school students.

As soon as I finished that program I realized that my dream, that I've worked hard for, and the joy that brings me, hasn't changed. *I would love to bring justice to family and friends.*

My current struggle is trying to meet people who have similar interests as me and are passionate about their work.

Being able to finally persuade my lifelong dream, attend college with multiple scholarships and being surrounded by helpful peers when in need are my main successes right now.

As a very nervous student starting college for the first time, I've had professors welcome me with open arms. Several of them have made my college experience better, but there is one in particular. My Sociology 101, Criminology 211 professor and academic advisor, Dr. Pridgen. She has always been there guiding me on an easier path as a student.

I'm always excited to learn something new in her classes, regarding Sociology and Criminology, and I couldn't be more grateful to have a professor like that. To add on, she makes sure I'm staying on top of my grades and doing great in classes.

Dr. Pridgen keeps me motivated, keeps me focused as an individual and student, and always makes me laugh even on my hardest days.

Overall, I'm grateful to have such amazing professors and be part of Concord University.



LILLY PALMER
Sociology and Social Work Major
(concentration in Criminology)

THOSE TWO TERMS I ONCE BELIEVED WERE EMBARRASSING TO SHARE WERE NOW FACILITATING CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

The first time I identified with the word, “first-generation”, I was discussing my career goals in second grade. I felt compelled to follow in the footsteps of the only college-educated adults that I knew in my community: my teachers.

After realizing my love for academia, they sat me down to discuss graduate school, which was something I had never heard of, much less considered. As a pre-teen in southern West Virginia, I could only think of doctors and lawyers as people who had graduate degrees.

After taking a life-changing psychology seminar course to fulfill an Honors Program credit my second semester in college with Dr. Burdekar, I made the unnerving switch to Psychology and decided to forfeit my decade-long law school dream.

My sophomore year, I took an Experimental Psychology course with Dr. Klein, who happened to also be the director of the Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program. He suggested I apply for the program, since I qualified on the basis of being low-income and first-generation.

Those two terms I once believed were embarrassing to share were now facilitating career opportunities.

During my internship, I learned about a different type of doctor through professional development seminars and graduate program visits, a Doctor of Philosophy. I realized that I wanted to achieve my teaching aspirations after all by going to graduate school and becoming a college professor.

Due to Ronald E. McNair Scholars Program, I have traveled to Atlanta, GA., Kansas City, MO., Anaheim, CA., and Albuquerque, NM. I had never flown anywhere before joining McNair and this program gave me the opportunity to see parts of the United States I wouldn't have otherwise got to visit.

Furthermore, I was given the chance to spend the entire following summer at an R1 institution conducting research under a clinical psychology research professor and making friendships that will last a lifetime.

As a student who got here in 2020, you can imagine what my first couple semesters looked like if you weren't also here. Seeing the organizations and clubs spring back up, and all of the bustling on campus now, is so refreshing.

Getting to finally interact with my peers has improved my overall well-being by a mile and it is truly something everyone should make time for in their schedules. I'm involved in a little bit of everything, but you don't have to be the President of every single club to get that experience.

I have always worked between 25 and 35 hours while being in school, and that was the hardest challenge to overcome.

Learning how to manage multiple responsibilities at once while keeping up with due dates taught me a lot about myself. *I learned a lot about what type of studying works for me and how to prioritize certain things over others. I'm still working on how to say no to additional tasks, but I *am* working on it, I swear.*

One of the biggest benefits of a small school like Concord, is the connections you're able to make with faculty and staff. I feel like my professors know me and are genuinely interested in seeing me succeed, their support and trust is similar to how a family should be.

Being a first-generation college student doesn't have to be lonely and intimidating, but there is also nothing wrong with initially feeling that way because everyone does.

Once you start getting involved, you realize how many people, from students to faculty and staff, are actually first-gen themselves. It's reassuring to see so many of my first-generation peers succeed on their path when they accept the mentorship and use their guidance and support.

After hearing about my experience in college, my mom decided to come to Concord too to get her degree and she'll be graduating soon. I have a little brother and sister who love to walk around campus and talk about going to college when they're "old like me".

I have loved my experience at Concord, it has been such a fun and rewarding experience. I really wouldn't have it any other way and hope to mentor other first-generation students in the future as a professor.

I look forward to seeing my children and their children's children also decide to attend college because I decided I wanted to end the generational tendency in my family of not going to college.



Taylor Brown
Senior, Psychology Major
McNAir Scholar / Honors Student