



FIRST GENERATION FACULTY/STAFF

HOW WE GOT HERE

Volume 2 | 2024-2025



First Generation Faculty/Staff
How We Got Here

November 8th, 2024

Dear Reader,

In 2017, the Council for Opportunity in Education and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators' Center for First Generation Student Success launched the inaugural First Generation College Celebration on November 8, the anniversary of the signing of the Higher Education Act of 1965. Each year since, colleges across the country have joined in celebrating the first generation college students on their campuses on this day. As we did in 2021, the Concord University First Generation Committee has collected firsthand accounts from our Faculty and Staff about their first generation journeys and their advice to current first generation students.

We hope you find these messages encouraging.

Respectfully,

Concord University First Generation Committee

- Cristina Reagan – CU-Aspire Coordinator
- Anna Hardy – Chief Student Affairs Officer & Dean of Students
- Rodney Klein – Distinguished Professor of Psychology & Director of McNair Scholars Program
- Tricia King – Director of Student Support Services
- Beth Sampson – SSS Academic Coordinator
- Katrina Matney – CACD Program Specialist
- Andrea Sullivan – Upward Bound Director
- Elissa Pugh – Upward Bound Educational Counselor
- Adrian Cabello Espinar – Educational Counselor for Upward Bound
- Nola Gum – Assistant Professor of Social Work
- Tiffany Everette – Instructor in Social Work
- Jacob Abrams – Chief Organizational Development and Success Officer
- Lilly Palmer – Student
- Levone Stephens – Student
- Caroline Telano – Student
- Jennifer Hernandez – Student
- Connor Lundy – Student



Dr. Kendra Boggess
President

1. What degree did you get and from where?

- Associate of Arts degree from St. Petersburg Junior College (which is now St. Petersburg College in Florida).
- Bachelors degree in Business Education from the University of Florida.
- Master of Science degree in Vocational Technical Education at Virginia Tech.
- Ph.D. in Career and Technical Education (Business Education foundation) with a cognate in Business Management from Virginia Tech.

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

First, from my parents' home and later from their business.

When my father began a small business, we all pitched in to do all we could to help it become successful...I worked there part-time from the age of about 15 until I graduated from UF, then returned to the business working full time for 3 additional years. It was a terrific experience to learn what it takes to build and operate a business...seeing the good, the bad, and the ugly about small business ownership during those years; truly it's not easy nor is small business ownership easy.

Second, I learned a great deal about leadership when I joined a national sorority at UF (Kappa Delta). I was elected to several offices and eventually became president. Before that, I never recognized that I had leadership potential, so those experiences taught me a lot about my abilities to work with others in a community, with a focus on service.

Finally, I learned so much from my many experiences at Concord. I am so thankful for the mentors, colleagues, and friends who helped me to understand higher education and its importance in changing the lives of young people. While I knew how it had changed my own life, seeing it change the lives of my students was beyond fulfilling. I also learned about higher education in terms of its economic impact on our community, and as an industry that drives job creation, learning opportunities, while also serving the purposes of the state of WV. Our mission is broad and rightly so, it touches the lives of thousands of members of our community every single day.

I can name dozens of people, including Kristen O'Sullivan's father, Dr. John Minick, Economics Professor and Dr. Rebecca White, along with former and current faculty members who were so kind

in helping me to understand the “we are a family” feeling of work at a regional college/university. I could probably write a book about those experiences, so if you ask additional questions, I’d be happy to respond.

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

There is no doubt that my parents were the most influential people in my life. They dedicated their lives to my brother’s and my success...and taught us both about responsibility, about building a family, the need to help one another and our communities, and the requirement that we work exceptionally hard to be the best people we could become.

My husband, Ted, was certainly one of the three people who taught me the most. He inspired me and taught me more about faith, kindness, friendship and about how to become a better person than anyone else in my life. He was an incredibly strong person who came from a very difficult background; nonetheless, there was no “harshness” in him. He was strong and was the rock in our family, but he emanated kindness, support and helpfulness to others. I am still inspired by his example, and can only pray to one day become as kind and helpful a person as he was. Ted’s work ethic was complimentary to the work ethic of my family and I am convinced that without his support and that “drive to achieve”, I would not have been able to reach the goals I had set in my life.

Another influential person in my life was my first employer. Lee Scarfone gave me the opportunity to join his firm in the first “professional” position I held; he was a prominent architect in Tampa. The experiences he provided me and almost every other member of our organization were beyond amazing. He hired me and about two weeks later left me in charge of his business while he and half our staff moved to Saudi Arabia to establish offices. It was hair raising, terrifying, and also full of learning experiences and challenges on an international level. I could never have thanked him enough for the opportunities and learning experiences he provided me.

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

There have honestly been so many...but I can share that one of my most uncomfortable decisions relating to education was the decision to go back to graduate school. Once I began teaching my first class at Concord, I realized that teaching was exactly what I wanted to do, but I was not well enough prepared. I only had an undergraduate degree and needed a masters (at least). So I spent some time speaking with colleagues here about what was involved, where the best programs were, what to avoid, and how to apply. I spoke with my husband and since we were already sending one of our sons to college, we had some financial issues to work through in order for me to take on this challenge and expense. I could not stop teaching in order to go to graduate school, so I had to figure out how to continue my responsibilities here and also at home. I went down to VT and spoke with an advisor in the Masters in Education program and was relieved to find I did not have to take the GMAT because I had been out in the real world and their faculty believed that test did not determine students’ success in their program. Instead, they put me into the most challenging class they had and told me I would be admitted into the program if I did well in the class.

You can imagine that I worked harder in that class, studied longer, and had more anxiety than I had ever had in a class before. I took my best friend to Blacksburg on the day final course grades

were available, because I was so concerned that I didn't do well. I earned (and I can promise you that is an accurate term for the effort I expended) an A for the class.

Earning my masters was the beginning for me...I later returned to VT to earn my Ph.D. and that included many additional uncomfortable experiences that I learned I was capable of overcoming. Working hard, being determined, seeking the encouragement of friends, family and colleagues, along with just plain stubbornness to succeed, were what helped me to get through those times.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

First, I would advise them to find out who they are and determine exactly what they want in their lives. This can take some time and it is my belief that a four-year degree program is the best way to make that determination. Taking courses in the Liberal Arts helps one to build a foundation upon which so many avenues to success are available. When one enrolls in courses in English or in Math, or in History or Languages, helps to develop one's understanding of the broader world. It also helps us to know if those are fields in which we have great interest. If they are not, then there are even more areas of study to test one's skills and interest. An Art or Music class, a Business class, a Social Work or Education class can pique one's interest and lead to a real passion that might not have been discovered had it not been explored. Once you've had the opportunity to try those ideas and courses, it is far easier to determine one's focus and plan for life (and major).

Second, enjoy every moment of your college experience and your life. If you are not certain you are headed in the right direction to satisfy your dreams, take a moment to think seriously about exactly what you want and once again, who you are. It may take four years, it may take longer. You may need to "stop out" of education for a bit and work in a field to learn if that's what you want to do for a lifetime. Make sure to enjoy what you do. The old saying that you "should work at something you like, because you'll never work a day in your life" has been true in my life. I have loved teaching, working with students, being surrounded by faculty and staff who are superb, dedicated and loyal to our students, has made my years at Concord ones that I would never trade. I wish each student the same success in having the opportunity to do what they love.

If I can ever be of help to any student who reads this, please come by my office and let's have a chat about what I can do to assist you in reaching your goals.



Dr. Scott Inghram
Director, MSW Program
Associate Professor of Social Work
Department Chair for Social Work and Sociology

- 1. What degree did you get and from where?**
BA Concord College/BSW Concord University, MSW Tulane University, EdD Marshall University.
- 2. Where are the three places you learned the most?**
Practicing social work in post-Katrina New Orleans, practicing social work in Wyoming County, and working with persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- 3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?**
Norey Laug (past employer), John David Smith (mentor), and Dannette Light (professor)
- 4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?**
I have no idea what the most uncomfortable experience was, but I have often utilized my community of support (ex. pastor, mentors, family friends) in times of struggle.
- 5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?**
Build yourself a community of support, ask for help if you do not understand, sit in the front of the class, attend every class, and treat school like a job.



Darrick Scott
Director for Student Success

1. What degree did you get and from where?

BA Psychology, Concord College

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

Growing up in McDowell County, WV, the United States Marine Corps and Concord University.

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

Bill Wade, William Kell and Darrell Taylor.

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

A flyer expressing racial stereotypes and threats was distributed throughout the Athens campus in 1998. It was uncomfortable because it was the first time that I had seen ignorance and negativity threaten the peace and auspices that Concord College provided for its student body. I had been coming to this campus since the early '90s and never had a negative experience here before that. I got through it by already knowing that the Concord student body was already unified and could not be divided by ignorance and insecurities. We put together some events and spoke to media outlets to let the world know that this ideology could not thrive on this campus or in this community. Turning the most uncomfortable experience for me into a blueprint for building with others going forward.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

It's hard to live a life while trying to build a life. If college is not number 1 on your list, it can only be number 2 without causing you greater stressors. Get through college as quickly and economically as you can. Write out your plans and goals, don't let others decide them for you. Classes will challenge you, they're new to most of us; ask for help, learn something and repeat.



Beth Sampson
Academic Coordinator, Student Support Services

1. What degree did you get and from where?

BA in English from Concord College

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

I learned the most in the classroom, in my relationships, and in my extracurricular activities.

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

The three people who taught me the most are Dr. Bill Ofsa (English), Dr. Jim Lile (Theatre), and my roommate, Sarah Lewis Klingbeil.

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

One somewhat silly uncomfortable experience I had was accidentally dropping my keys in the dorm trash chute. I was embarrassed, and the custodian was not having an empathetic kind of day. I dug through 9 floors' worth of garbage and tried not to cry. I found the keys, washed up, and decided two things: I will only carry trash to the chute, and I will try to be patient when others make simple mistakes.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

My advice for first generation students is to live on campus if you can, and learn about and take advantage of all of the resources available to you.



Lisa Miller
R&D Corp Fiscal Officer

1. What degree did you get and from where?

B.S in Business Management and A.S in Office Supervision Concord College 1997

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

I was a work study student in the Business office. I thoroughly enjoyed gaining hands on experience while completing my degree.

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

Dr Rick Crandall - He was my advisor and a Professor for a few of my classes. Also the ladies who worked in the Business office at the time. They were very helpful and supportive to me during my time as a student at Concord.

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

I honestly cannot remember lol!

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

My advice is to keep pressing on in your studies. Hang in there and be that first one to Graduate College in your family! You won't regret it!



Dr. Susan Robinett
Director, MBA Program
Professor of Business

1. What degree did you get and from where?

BS in Education, Radford University; MS in Career and Technical Education, VA Tech; PhD. in Career and Technical Education, VA Tech

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

Not sure how to name only three; I find I learn something new every day. Even with classes that I have taught for years, each semester I learn something new.

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

Mr. Bob Russell, my high school math teacher; Dr. Clarence White, my undergrad advisor and mentor; Dr. Daisy Stewart, my dissertation chair.

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it? There are too many to name one. You just prepare and do your best.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

Always value your education.



Tiffany Everette, MSW, LGSW
Instructor of Social Work

1. What degree did you get and from where?

BSW/MSW both from Concord University

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

Student Support Services, Department of Health and Human Resources (CPS), Concord University
(Specifically the Social Work Department)

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

My aunt, Dr. Joan Pendergast, Judy Saunders

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

This is a hard question for me to answer. I feel like most of my life has been uncomfortable. When you experience childhood trauma in the form of abuse and neglect, your mind becomes a place of nothing but discomfort. I've had to overcome so many challenges in life; nothing about life is "comfortable" to me. Every time I go to a social event, every time I meet someone new or go somewhere new, every new job or location, literally anything causes me to have so much anxiety making the experience completely uncomfortable. I literally have to talk myself through the uncomfortableness and remind myself why it's important to be social and to put myself out there. Even when going someplace that I know a lot of the people there, my mind wants to go into panic mode. The way I get through this is truly with positive self-talk. Reminding myself that I am good, and I am worthy. Reminding myself that people do like me, and the voice inside my head is not truthful. I talk through some of my anxieties with the people I can trust. I remind myself of how far I have come, and I tell myself the benefits of attending events and doing things that make me uncomfortable, such as we can't live this life alone. I know that's a different kind of answer, but I really can't pinpoint something that has been uncomfortable when every new thing I do puts me in that space. Coming to college, away from all my family and friends, was extremely uncomfortable. To overcome that, I found my people, organizations, and places that helped me get through the uncomfortableness and live up to my full potential.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

Get involved with TRIO programs such as Student Support Services and McNair; they are designed to help first generation students succeed! Focus on your passion, and don't let anyone tell you that you don't belong in college. Believe in yourself. Ask for help when you need it.



Tom Saladyga, Ph.D.
Professor of Geography

1. What degree did you get and from where?

West Virginia University (PhD), West Chester University (MA), Penn State University (BS).

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

(1) Working at an orchard, (2) On the road across the U.S., (3) Graduate school.

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

Parents and graduate school lab mates.

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience?

Medical issues while a Peace Corps volunteer in El Salvador. How did you get through it? Humor.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

Try things you don't think you will learn from or enjoy. Push past the initial urge to follow the path of least resistance.



Dr. Amanda Sauchuck
Associate Provost
Director of University Assessment

1. What degree did you get and from where?

Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, emphasis in management from Concord University, MBA with concentration in Human Resource Management from Liberty University, Doctor of Business Administration with specialization in Human Resource Management from Capella University.

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

My home, church, and college

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

This is difficult. There are so many people I have learned from and who have influenced me. I do my best to surround myself with people from which I can learn and grow. My parents, Beth Jarrell (colleague), and too many teachers to count.

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

At my first job out of college I made a mistake. It was uncomfortable to admit I had done something incorrectly and had to bring it to the attention of my supervisor and peers. I had to work with my colleagues to remedy the issue. It was embarrassing. I could have swept it under the rug, or blamed someone else, but then could have never lived with myself. I was honest and had to correct the issue.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

Set goals, find people who lift you up and support you (not tear you down), be proactive, you determine your future.



Anthony Guy Patricia, PhD
Associate Professor of English

1. What degree did you get and from where?

I received my Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas in December 2004; my Master of Arts in English from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas in May 2008; and my Doctor of Philosophy in English from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas in May 2014.

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

Southern California (an hour east of Los Angeles) where I grew up; Las Vegas, Nevada where I took all of my university degrees; and London, England, which is one of my most favorite places on Earth.

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

My parents, Richard and Margaret Patricia -- who brought me into this world; and William Shakespeare, who has, quite literally, given me the life I have now.

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

Losing my father in September 2020; the world is just not the same place it was before he died. Remembering that my dad will always be a part of me even though he's gone.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

Don't ever give up on your college/university education -- no matter how hard it gets (and it will get hard); it will truly open the world to you.



Dr. Sheila Womack
GEAR UP SWV Assistant Director

1. What degree did you get and from where?

I earned a Bachelor of Music (BM) from Westminster College – New Wilmington , PA, and a Master of Music (MM) and Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) from West Virginia University – Morgantown, WV.

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

Patterson Hall (Westminster), Creative Arts Center (WVU), Concord University (I love learning, and I learn constantly from those around me. I've learned so much during my time at Concord, and I hope to continue to do so!)

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

My parents (I know it's cheating, but I'm counting them as one), Dr. Nancy DeSalvo (undergrad piano teacher), and Dr. Christine Kefferstan (graduate piano teacher)

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

Performing, in general, is probably the most uncomfortable experience I've had. Repeat exposure is how I worked through it. The nerves don't go away, but you learn how to handle them. I remember one performance in particular, my first recital as a freshman undergrad. I bit off more than I could chew and I had a memory slip that I couldn't recover from – I left the stage without finishing my piece! I returned backstage, crying. Dr. DeSalvo, my teacher, comforted me, and redirected my focus to a new piece that she thought would be perfect for me. Then, my fellow piano majors and other music friends encouraged me, and helped reassure me, and they really carried me through what, to me, was a humiliating experience. I'm still close with that group of friends, and imagine I always will be.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

Don't give up. It's easy to get discouraged and it might feel like there's no where to turn and no one to help. But, everyone here at Concord wants you to succeed – so ask anyone (faculty, staff, admin) for help and they will get you connected with who you need!



Darla J Wise, PhD
Professor of Biology

1. What degree did you get and from where?

B.S. in Biology Secondary Education; M.S. Liberal Arts Biology both from the State University of New York (SUNY) College at Fredonia Ph.D. in Veterinary Medical Sciences - VA Tech

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

This is hard to answer because you have limited me to three. I try to learn something at every place and from all people. I think if you combined all my experiences, they have taught me how to be self-reliant, when to ask for help, and how to see things from multiple perspectives.

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

Again, limiting. Dr. Gordon Carter

My parents

My children and my students

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

Being at my first international conference to present my data on Lyme disease. The room was packed as Lyme was relatively new. I was the last presentation in the session. The second presenter (also a graduate student like me) gave his talk and someone in the audience told him essentially why his research was worthless with references. Major panic attack to say the least, as I feared someone would do that to me.

My advisor told me that these folks were from competing labs and there is some animosity between them. I did get through my talk and it went well, but I learned that even scientists play games.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

Through all my degrees, I had to work off-campus in addition to taking a full load of classes. However, I graduated debt free, never taking out a loan (without parental assistance). This means learning to juggle things in an efficient manner, working on all things some so that you really don't fall behind.

If you don't know or are unsure, ask questions. First gens do not have the luxury of someone who knows the ropes.

Don't let a setback academically hold you back; keep moving forward.



Todd May
Head Men's Basketball Coach

1. What degree did you get and from where?

Elementary Education, Ohio University

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

College, my first job, my current job.

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

Parents, Larry Hunter, my first mentor, Paul Blankenship, my first principal at my 2nd job.

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

I've been riffed 3 times, all were uncomfortable, knowing there was a better situation out there for me and finding those opportunities.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

Stay positive, and stay persistent. Life is hard, don't make it harder!



Melissa Buckland
Upward Bound Office Administrator

Business Administration concentration in Management. Minor in Travel. Concord College.



Dr. Gabriel Rieger
Professor of English

1. What degree did you get and from where?

I earned my Bachelor of Arts in English from The University of Toledo in 1997, my Master of Arts in English from The University of Toledo in 1999, my Master of Arts in History from The University of Toledo in 2000, and my Ph.D. in English from Case Western Reserve University in 2007.

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

I learned the most in Toledo (because I was essentially introduced to the profession there), Cleveland (since I learned how to undertake doctoral-level scholarship there, and also learned how to teach diverse student populations while adjuncting at various schools), and here in Athens (where I learned how to be a working faculty member, balancing the various responsibilities which that entails).

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

The three people who taught me the most were Dr. Barbara Riebling (who directed my Master's thesis in English at The University of Toledo), Dr. William O'Neal (who was my undergraduate Classics professor and directed my Master's thesis in History), and Dr. Charles Brichford (who taught me, largely by example, how to be a working faculty member with all of the responsibilities which that entails).

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

I had two experiences which I think are closely related. My family were from Eastern Kentucky and I used to have a bit of an accent which became more noticeable when I was nervous. I had two professors who openly mocked my accent at various points in my graduate career. I was embarrassed and intensely angry, but there was nothing I could do about it. I got through the experience by reminding myself that I hadn't been selected for graduate study at random, and that my work was good enough, and more than good enough. A little arrogance can be useful in college, and even more so in graduate school.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

Be arrogant enough to believe that you belong here, but not so arrogant that you take anything for granted. If you are afraid of failure, or ever feel as if you don't belong, use those feelings to motivate yourself to over-prepare.



Kyle Moore
Instructor of English as a Second Language

1. What degree did you get and from where?

BA Spanish / Otterbein University

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

Dr. Carmen Galarce's office

Córdoba, Argentina

Working in the classroom as a TA with Dr. Galarce

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

Dr. Galarce

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

Being an exchange student in Argentina.

By making friends, not taking my mistakes too seriously, and keeping an open mind.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

If you feel uncertain about your path in life, don't sweat it. Focus on finding something you enjoy studying at university.



Dr. R. Shawn Allen
Associate Professor of Social Work

1. What degree did you get and from where?

Bachelor of Social Work – Concord University – 2007

Master of Social Work – West Virginia University – 2011

Doctor of Social Work – Tulane University – 2021

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

Home: It would be hard not to list home as the first place I learned the most. Growing up, I learned a lot of lessons from my parents and my grandmother. While none of them even graduated from high school, they were all wise in many other ways. This is where I learned a lot of lessons about life.

Public School System: The public school system gets a bad rep for many reasons, but I don't know where I would be without the experiences I had attending public school. Even in the poorest county in West Virginia, I had a few great teachers that impacted me, and I wouldn't have gotten where I am today without them.

Concord: My time as a student at Concord opened my eyes to a lot of things. Like most individuals, my undergraduate years were a transformational time for me. Having grown up in an area that was not very diverse, I learned a lot of lessons about others, their lived experiences, and understanding even though we had lived different lives, some aspects made us not so different. Being a part of a college campus that was rich with diversity helped shape the person I am today.

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

It would not be easy to narrow this down to just three people. So, I am going to cheat and discuss three groups of people.

Parents: While I didn't learn a lot about the specifics of going to college from my parents, I learned many things about life that helped me pursue a college degree. From my parents, I learned the importance of a work ethic, empathy, and perseverance. Without all that I learned from my parents, I would not be where I am today.

University Faculty: I have been blessed to encounter excellent faculty at all three universities that I attended. This great group of people taught me a lot in their classes and have been there to offer support outside of class. Many of which I have been able to form bonds with that have lasted long after graduation. These types of relationships have been imperative in my success as a first-generation college student.

Colleagues: The peers I have had the pleasure of getting to know throughout my college career have taught me a lot. These lessons range from helping me understand the processes involved in going to college that I had no prior knowledge of to helping me understand the importance of diversity in our backgrounds.

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

My most uncomfortable experience as a first-generation college student was getting started in the entire college process. I was very lost and had not had much in the way of support to understand simple things. I remember when I first stepped on Concord's campus, I couldn't help but think, "I will be lost every day." However, I overcame this by getting to know others on campus who could help navigate some of the systems I would need to understand to be successful. It was a challenge, but through hard work and building relationships, it became a doable process.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

The best advice I can give someone who is a first-generation student is to keep pushing forward. There will be times that you will feel completely lost but hang in there. Build relationships with peers as well as university faculty and staff. There are a lot of individuals who will be willing to help you. You just have to ask. Also, get informed about the great benefits of TRiO programs, including Student Support Services and McNair. Excellent opportunities await you in these programs.



Dr. Tracy Luff
Professor of Sociology
Honors Program Director

1. What degree did you get and from where?

I went to Salisbury University (it was called Salisbury State College back then!) in Salisbury, Maryland.

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

I'd say the three places were the library (I had a work-study job there in addition to going there to study); in the classroom and in my dorm.

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

The three people were my Sociology Professor/Mentor, Dr. Charles Cipolla; my supervisor, Sharon at the Library; and my roommate Donna

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

My most uncomfortable experiencing was being made to feel like I was a country "hick" by my roommates during my first semester. I grew up in a rural, working-class community and thought everyone had a similar upbringing to mine, but my roommates were all from the suburban Washington D.C. area and I quickly learned their lives were very different from mine. Some of them made fun of the way I talked, and I'll never forget my cousin coming to visit me at the dorm and bringing me a bag of fresh tomatoes from my uncle's garden. But when he announced, "I brung ya some 'maters," my friends laughed hysterically, and I really didn't understand why at first. He had a good sense of humor about it and to this day I still call him 'Mater! I thought about going back home to the local community college, but I got through it by having a family that kept me grounded and sticking with new friends, like my roommate Donna, who always made me feel accepted even though I didn't have as much money as the other kids.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

Just remember you are good enough and you deserve a college education as much as anyone else. You will change as you move through college, so learn to identify the family and friends who will stick by you and support you no matter what.



Edward W. Huffstetler, Ph.D.
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

1. What degree did you get and from where?

B. A. in English and Drama from Coker University in Hartsville, SC; M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

Do you mean disciplines? I would say English, Anthropology, and Political Philosophy.

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

Dr. John French (English), Dr. Phil Lemke (Political Philosophy), and Dr. April von Frank (Sociology)

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

My first paper in English received an F grade. I went to the professor and asked why, since I believed I was a good writer). He gave me a copy of White and Strunk's *Elements of Style*, which taught me about the rules regarding the writing of English prose. It literally changed my life.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

Don't give up, even when you have setbacks. Try to always learn from your mistakes. No one expects you to never have them. Making mistakes are often the best way to learn.



Blake Farmer

Director of Alumni and Donor Relations

1. What degree did you get and from where?

B.S. in Business Administration from Concord University 2017 – M.A. in Communication from Liberty University 2020.

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

The three places I've learned the most would be working in the Advancement Office, during my time with the Bonner Program, and here on campus

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

Three people who have taught me the most would be my parents, my coworkers, and my mentor/youth pastor Aaron Stepp.

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

The most uncomfortable experience during my undergraduate studies would have to be making the initial transition from high school to college. Going from never having to really study for academics in high school, to having to study for college was a big adjustment for me. Learning how to actually study was not easy in the first year but I learned a lot about myself and how I can succeed academically.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

My advice to today's First-Generation students would be to surround yourself with good people who have your best interest for your future. Get involved in your community and on campus, make valuable connections. Find a mentor who can help guide you in the different areas of life that you endure during your undergraduate years.



Rodney Klein, Ph.D.
Director, McNair Scholars Program
Distinguished Professor of Psychology

1. What degree did you get and from where?

I earned my BA from Central College in Pella, Iowa with a major in Psychology and a minor in Sociology. I then earned my MS in Psychology from New Mexico Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico. I then went to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque where I earned my PhD in Psychology.

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

This one and number 3 are difficult questions - I am going to answer them as the places and people that have had the biggest impact on me - hope that is ok - I think so, and I am on the committee (LOL)

My undergraduate French class - once a week the professor showed her personal slides of places in France. It really opened up the world to me - that someone from Iowa could see the things in person that we usually only see in books, movies, on tv. I probably would not have been interested in spending a semester in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico or going to Europe with a Eurail Pass for 6 weeks after graduating.

The master's degree program - was the first time I was living on my own and doing it in a place where I initially knew nobody! It was also in a new environment, moving from Iowa to New Mexico (probably impacted and motivated by my now 'world' travels). Also developed the confidence that maybe I actually could be successful in a graduate program. In a small program there was not nearly as much of the "imposter syndrome" as when I went to the PhD program.

Moving to Athens, WV and becoming a full-time professor at Concord. Again, seeing a different part of the country - but also realizing how similar people can be no matter where you go. Trying to have an impact on students, but them also having an impact on me. The relationships are truly bidirectional. Becoming involved in the McNair Program was like an immersive experience that has continued.

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

Dr. Ed Willis and Dr. James Shulze - two professors in the psychology program at Central College. I actually just exchanged emails with Dr. Willis a week ago. Although I was never the best student in their classes, they did provide just enough confidence and suggested that I should think about going to grad school, putting me on this crazy train.

Dr. Karen Griffie - the list of the impacts would be far too long, but the experiences of becoming a family, relocating, raising our kids (which never ends), and being together for all of these years has clearly shaped me for the better.

My parents - Ralph and Glea Klein. I know it is cliché to list your parents, but I consider myself fortunate that they were always supportive, as best they could. I see too many first-generation students that are not supported or encouraged by their family, and it breaks my heart. Seeing other students limit their grad school goals because of family - and looking back and seeing how supportive my parents were, even though I still think that they never really understood the whole Academic 'thing.'

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

I have probably had a lot of these, but one that comes to mind happened in my first year in the PhD program in the Learning class, my specialty area, that was taught by my academic and research mentor. He asked a question to the class that nobody could answer, then he called me out by name, clearly assuming that I knew the answer. I did not. I got through the moment by reconciling that "nobody else knew either" and that I would be better prepared for each and every class going forward.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

To be prepared and to take advantage of every opportunity that comes your way. You never know what experience will have an impact or what that impact may be. Step out of your comfort zone on a regular basis and challenge yourself.



Dara Ladner
Title III Data Analyst

1. What degree did you get and from where?

I got my degree in Bachelor of Arts in Advertising and Graphic Design from Concord University in Athens, WV.

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

The three places I learned the most are home, work, and school. My parents taught me a lot at home, working with the public gives you a whole different understanding of people and the real world, and school is where I gained my knowledge on how to be successful in my future through knowledge and experience.

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

The three people that taught me the most is my mom, grandma, and my professor/advisor from college.

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

My most uncomfortable experience was being in a long-distance relationship, being a full-time college student, and working 3 jobs at one time. I got through by setting my priorities straight and digging in to be the best me I could be. I ended up quitting one job and working a few less hours at another. My long-term relationship was very hard and tiring, so he moved here so we could be together. Everything worked out in the end, I graduated, had money for food, gas, etc. and ended up marrying my former long-distance partner.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

The advice I would give to today's First-Generation students would be to follow your heart and don't worry about what everyone else thinks. I had so many people tell me that I would "never find a job" or "don't go to college, the loans are not worth it", etc. etc. But if you have a passion and drive for something, go after it, no matter the what odds are against you.



Anita S. Deck, Ed.D.
Associate Professor of Education

1. What degree did you get and from where?

I earned my Bachelor of Science degree in Education from Concord University with certifications in general science, biology, chemistry, and physics. I also hold a Master of Science degree in Science Education from West Virginia University and am a graduate of the Integrative STEM Education doctoral program at Virginia Tech.

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

Concord University (biology dept.), WVU (science dept.), Virginia Tech (STEM education dept.)

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

Dr. Roger Shepard (Concord), Dr. Jim Rye (WVU), and Dr. John Wells (Virginia Tech)

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

My most uncomfortable experience was failing chemistry. I was an "A" student in high school and didn't have to study for any of my classes. The learning came easy and soon not studying became the norm. However, everything changed when I went to college. I didn't have the study skills to be successful and subsequently made low grades and eventually failed chemistry. Instead of giving up and going home, I sought help to gain the skills that I needed to succeed in my classes. I made use of content tutors and took classes in study skills. By the next semester, my grades improved, and I became a better student eventually making the Dean's List. Also, as a side note, I became a chemistry teacher and taught 13 years in public school.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

Don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask for help. Get to know your advisor. Make use of all services available to you on campus. Choose a major you love. Build a support system both on and off campus. Be proactive about financial aid.



Carly Kestner
Director of Financial Aid

1. What degree did you get and from where?

BSBA, CU

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

Classroom, library, of course the student center (we all meet up and have lunch and study or work on homework together).

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

Gina Stanley- taught accounting, and Dr. Doyle- taught history.

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

Giving my first speech. Everyone was nervous, so that made it easier knowing I wasn't alone. I learned that it is okay to be uncomfortable and have only found that those experiences help you grow as a person and in your profession. It is so important to find your voice.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Be patient with yourself, give it a few weeks and you will find your place and a routine.



**Daniel "Dan" Fitzpatrick, MA, SPHR, SHRM-SCP
VP and Chief Operating Officer (COO)
Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO)**

1. What degree did you get and from where?

First Degree: BS in Industrial Relations and Labor Studies from WVIT in Montgomery, WV; MA in Applied Organizational Management from Tusculum College in Greeneville, Tn.

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

As an administrator at Appalachian Regional Healthcare for 34 years; As an administrator at Concord University for seven (7) years.

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

Ronald T. Vance, VP Human Resources, ARH; Philas Smith, Controller, ARH; Authors Herb Cohen and Stephen Covey in Negotiate This: By Caring but Not Too Much and Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, respectively.

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

Brutal Boss(es); Faith, and perseverance in the face of diversity, and doing the next right thing.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

Find a mentor; get a life compass; read The Little Red Hen, The Little Engine that Could, and Seven Habits; Never, ever, give up! You can do more than you think and all that you were created to be and do.



Jessica Lilly

**GEAR UP SWV Communications Manager
Cheerleading Coach**

1. What degree did you get and from where?

B.A. Communication Arts (Emphasis in both Public Relations and Electronic Media) with a minor in Business Administration from Concord University

2. Where are the three places you learned the most?

While obtaining my degree I learned the most in the TV studio, Fine Arts building and in the library.

3. Who are the three people who taught you the most?

While getting my degree William Bailey, Kendra Boggess and Dr. Parker.

4. What was your most uncomfortable experience, and how did you get through it?

The most uncomfortable experience was when a professor corrected my grammar in front of the entire class. It was honestly something I didn't realize was incorrect. I was confused at first but smiled, used the correct word and finished my presentation. I got through it by focusing on what I got correct in the presentation. I was also thankful that someone told me about this mistake and knew that I could move forward with better information.

5. What advice do you have for today's First-Generation students?

You are not supposed to know everything about higher education. Communication is the best way to know you are on the right track and understand what you might be missing. **YOU CAN DO THIS!!** Just take one test, assignment and semester at a time. The work will get intense during your college years but it won't last forever.