ON GOING TO COLLEGE
"I was so scared for myself in the future. I grew up in Southside Chicago, my mother was a single mother who could only survive through government assistance once my father passed. She didn’t have the skills, and I just didn’t want to turn out like that. I didn’t want to be the welfare kid, the social security kid, and I didn’t want to subsidize off the government and so decided to go to college. Essentially, college was my only escape. Thankfully, I was one of those kids that were able to grasp concepts rather easily, so I leveraged the brain that I had."

"There wasn’t a way to navigate the finances of college, either. Nobody prepared you for the cost of textbooks or these other unavoidable expenses, and unfortunately I hit the loans early. I didn’t have any scholarships, but I didn’t have enough because in the first place I didn’t even know I was supposed to be applying for those things. In a way, my college experience can be summed up by saying that I was trying so hard to balance my impoverished life with my college life. And finally it got to the point where those things weren’t meshing, so I ended up taking out more student loans every year because I had to be able to afford rent, and food, and other needs because I didn’t have the option to go home. There was no one to fall back on for help with affording textbooks and other expenses, and so I just had myself to rely on."

"By far it had to be encountering the professors who actually cared. Every once in a while you find that professor that truly cares about your well-being and progress in not just their class but your college career. I think that was really the biggest thing for me: having a professor that understood when I said, ‘I have to go to work because if I don’t I’m going to lose my job,’ which was so amazing to me. To have professors that are realistic about life in itself and that could truly be considerate of what I was going through as a student and a single mother who could only survive through government assistance."

"Don’t be afraid to ask for help from that one professor that cares. You never know who’s willing or who has the resources to help. Especially on this campus, because I tend to see that I’ve never seen another campus do. For example: the CARE center and the pantry, so there are resources made available. There’s something here that we can help out with, or there’s someone we can point you to that could be of better help. You will never get what you want unless you ask for help, so don’t ever be scared to ask for it."

EXPERIENCES
"What were your experiences seeking an advanced degree?"

"One of the most difficult things about being a college student at the time was knowing that I had no one or nothing to fall back on. I had to have a fulltime job while going to school because I had to be able to afford rent, and food, and other needs because I didn’t have the option to go home. There was no one to fall back on for help with affording textbooks and other expenses, and so I just had myself to rely on."

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"I was confined geographically to the school I attended for my undergraduate degree, and so when I got into the graduate program you would think that things would’ve been a little easier. But the process of being lost started all over again. If you wanted to get your program paid for, you had to apply for assistantships, but you can’t apply to assistantships because the deadline already passed. But these were things that weren’t knowledge to me because I’d never been acclimated to this. So my first year of graduate school I had to take out more student loans."

"I thought that was really the biggest thing for me: having a professor that understood when I said, ‘I have to go to work because if I don’t I’m going to lose my job,’ which was so amazing to me. To have professors that are realistic about life in itself and that could truly be considerate of what I was going through as a student and a single mother who could only survive through government assistance."

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