This is part of the Spotlight series created by the First-Gen Planning Committee.

If you are a first-generation student, faculty member, staff member, or alumni interested in being interviewed, please contact us at firstgen@kennesaw.edu to schedule an interview or to complete the brief survey.

SPOTLIGHT: NATALIE WASHINGTON
Natalie is a senior majoring in Integrative Studies with a focus on Sociology and Human Services.

ON GOING TO COLLEGE
"I knew I wanted better for myself. Having parents that didn’t go to college made me curious to know what college was about. I also saw that going to college helped you get access to a better job, so I went in and looked at all the different paths that college could take me and how it would benefit me."

EXPERIENCES

What have been your overall experience as a first-gen college student?

"My experience has been a little bit all over the place. It’s been a learning curve and a roller coaster of emotions for sure. When I decided to go to college it took a lot because I ventured away from my family in Washington, D.C. — in addition to not even knowing how college worked. But I’m glad I followed my heart to do so because I learned more about myself, and I also grew into adulthood because of these learning experiences. Also, having to figure out everything on my own, from applying for financial aid, budgeting expenses, getting acclimated to how everything works, registering for classes and all that was quite a learning experience but in turn one that was quite memorable. Thankfully, my grandparents helped financially with my tuition and played a huge part in helping me get set-up for college by furnishing my first place. If it wasn’t for their help and support I probably wouldn’t have had the confidence, yet alone the peace of mind to take on the world of college.

What have been some of your most memorable moments?

"For me, having so many opportunities and ways to get involved was very intriguing for me. I was so overwhelmed during my freshman year, and I didn’t know what to do most of the time, but through meeting great people I was able to get well acclimated and adjusted to campus. Meeting people who had gone through more than I had was so beautiful to see, and just learning about the different lifestyles that others have had to go through was very comforting and very memorable."

What have been some of your least favorable moments?

"I would probably say one was when I failed my first class during my freshman year. I really didn’t know how to process it generally, and I certainly wasn’t able to process how to deal with failure at the college level. Because none of my family had attended college I didn’t know how to go to them about this, so I kind of beat myself up about that a lot."

LESSONS LEARNED

"I wish I knew like the basics of college, such as how to apply for financial aid and other things that seemed like the mere basics to other students. I also wish I knew how to budget my expenses as effectively because I always had my parents to fall back on with regards to expenses so this was a whole new learning experience I had to endure on my own. I had to teach myself all these new things that were oftentimes may have been well known to other students unlike myself."