

First-Generation Strong: Upholding Our Commitment to First-Generation College Students

Rashné Jehangir

Narrative Accompanying First – Generation Photo Voice Images

Photo Voice 1: Alexis

There are many identities that make up Alexis. I decided to take a picture of myself showing dual reflections of myself. When I look in the mirror, I see an African American and Native American girl. I see a daughter of Dede and Willie Johnson, and sister of Martez Johnson. However, that's not all that makes me who I am today. I'm a University Freshman, a State Business Professionals of America Historian, a first generation college student, a dedicated and committed worker, and many other things that goes beyond what may lie visual to the human eye.

Photo Voice 2: Jong

For me, there were four parts of my identities that tell me who I am and where I came from. Some parts of these identities were traced back as far as when I wasn't even born yet. The Hmong traditional head wrap was a piece that goes with our traditional Hmong clothes. I had grown up wearing them every New Year celebration in Thailand and in the United States. The second picture is a shaman ritual table, I was born to my mother who is a Hmong shaman, someone who could communicate with the spiritual world and able to bring a human spirit back to their empty body so they could be well. The third picture is my Ucard because I am currently a freshman at the University and I'm very proud of myself through my achievements. And the last picture is a pair of high heel, it represents that I am a young lady who has a three brothers. I am the first generation to go to a four year college in my family, and I might not know much English but as long as I work hard, my hard work has begun paying off.

Photo Voice 3: Irene

This is a picture of my mom and I just weeks after I started college, and truth be told it is my favorite picture of us. Growing up my mother and I did not have the best relationship due to the fact that she was always working, and when she was around I still felt like she wasn't there. I felt this because she never understood what was going on internally within me in regards to social and academic contexts. Eventually with time this created tension and explosive arguments between us, because she had not realized that her baby had started to grow up without her there. Once I started college my mother realized that I was no longer a child, and in fact a growing adult who was ready to take her next big steps. Slowly, but surely she has started to accept, respect, and trust my decision-making skills and this has helped our relationship grow. I know it has been hard for her to see her little girl grow wings, but the fact of the matter is that I still need her help and this is the reason that I cherish this photo. In this photo I am still under her "wing", but at the same time I am standing at a distance where I can still see and explore who I want to be.

Photo Voice 4: Sydney

My granny is my heart and soul. She and my grandpa raised me as their very own. My granny has taught me many things, such as the value and importance of education. My grandma was a woman who grew up in a time where she was not given the privilege of education. She and her oldest brother alternated days in

which they could attend school. Times have changed and I am blessed with the leverage to attend school and become the person I want to be in spite of the discrimination my granny had experienced.

PhotoVoice 5: Sofia

My image reflects the yellow line that divides the street and keeps each car from crossing each other which represents a symbol of how I view my own social class. I believe that the quote "If only you work harder, you can move up the social class" is not true at all. In my own life I have experienced the effects of working hard and facing many obstacles that restrain you from moving up the social class ladder or sometimes working harder to be in the same social status as my fellow peers... This image makes me feel like I am standing right in the center of that social class divider. We were neither moving up in the social class nor moving down it's like being stuck right in the center of that yellow line pulling you down by your feet.

PhotoVoice 6: Pa

Even though my family grew up making the most of what we had, my mother never let us starve or look dirty in front of other children. We children grew up with no father, but we always had each other. We were looked down upon by plenty of people, but we stood strong when people blew their wind at us. I have come to realize that although my family's path has clashed with poverty, we are only poor in wealth. The many other aspects of our lives are enriched with experiences and perspectives that people have yet to discover about us.

PhotoVoice 7: Afia

The shoes represent two things: the one at the back represent the struggles I went and how it took time to overcome them. It all shows all the steps that I went through to get here. Like pushing myself to take advance courses and getting involved although a part of me was scared of failure. The other pair of shoe that is front represent my journey as a first year college student. It shows my college identity - success. I have a great desire to succeed in life. Like shoe in the back, I have faced some obstacles and I will probably face some obstacles in the future. However, I do not feel alone. I will be the light in my family. Since I am the first student in my family to attend a 4-year college, I will inspire my siblings about the importance of education. I have come a long way and I still have a long way to go in life

Photo Voice 8: Nou

My image is of bike gears. I learn from my bike. I go everywhere with my bike. I see it as something that will take me far. Simple machine that is made up of many parts, I see my vocational identity as this. Everything that I have done is made up of the little parts which will make up my career of this machine. I believe that my career is still unknown, but know that it will fit together. The image also represents something that I would like to have in my future. Working with machines is one of my favorite things to do. I love taking things apart and seeing how they work. Although it is seen more as a man's job to work with machines, I believe that that needs to be changed. Anyone can work in whatever field they desire, and I want to break down this belief. Instead of working in the medical field as a nurse as many family members suggested, I want to make my own decisions and be the one to break the stereotype.