Join Me in Celebrating First-Generation College Students

By Neasha Prince, Florida Atlantic University Junior

The path to success for most first-generation college students is a rollercoaster. First-generation college students like me have ups and downs as we encounter the challenges and complications unique to our experience. Attending college is a blessing and a burden in the day-to-day reality of first-generation college students. As they start their journey in higher education, they face the fearful notion that they are alone in their drive to succeed. Helpful advice from their parents, siblings, or relatives may range from slim to none. First-generation students have tended to accept a lack of guidance as part of the natural process of obtaining a higher degree. They often stifle important questions that are thought-provoking and emotionally charged, because they do not know whom to turn to when their backs are against the wall. The problem is compounded when a lack of guidance reduces the self-esteem of first-generation college students and diminishes their academic performance, presenting the risk of a continual cycle of misfortune.

I was a fortunate first-generation student. I had a helping hand from Florida Atlantic University’s Kelly/Strul Emerging Scholars Program, which awards full scholarships to first-generation, low-income students from across Florida. The Kelly/Strul program addresses the issues of first-generation college students, who often are more motivated than other students but tend to face financial obstacles while struggling to acclimate to a post-secondary learning environment.

The road that led to me obtaining my scholarship started with a dream that is similar to many stories of first-generation students. My parents left a third-world country in hopes of finding greater opportunity for themselves and my sister and me. Years before I was born, my parents and sister moved to the United States from Haiti. My mother became a single parent who alone took on the task of putting us on a path to personal progress. She worked multiple jobs in the health care system simply to put food on the table. Her drive and motivation are the key to my sister’s and my success. It is this same drive that inspired me to take the initiative toward my most prized possession: First and Proud.
First and Proud is an established community filled with FAU first-generation students who are willing to change the conversation on how people view first-generation students by simply changing how we view ourselves. The mission of First and Proud is to create a family for members to lean on when times of trials and tribulations are out of their control. Established communities like First and Proud are the reason why colleges across the country, including Florida Atlantic University, will host campus events in observance of National First-Generation College Celebration Day on Nov. 8. It's more than just celebrating first-generation students. It is celebrating champions, future leaders of their communities, warriors, survivors, and visionaries. I invite everyone who enjoys rooting for the underdog to join me in recognizing National First-Generation College Celebration Day on November 8.