

FIRST-GEN JOURNEY

Through my Lens as a First-Gen

by Tam Do

After I graduated from high school in 2011, I never would have imagined that I'd be getting my bachelor's degree as a first-gen.

People always ask, "Tam, how do you have time to work and go to school?" And honestly? You just do it. Coming from a low-income immigrant family of 7, my parents were not able to provide the finances to continue my education for college. Meaning I worked twice as hard by waking early and sleeping late to manage work and school. 2014-15 was the hardest time for me, I had lost my dad to Lou Gehrig's disease and ended up taking a year off from school, working a 9-5 job, and had no desire to go back. I was indecisive, vulnerable, angry and clueless because I had no direct path or someone to guide me.



My Mom (3rd from the left) in Vietnam

My Dad (middle) in Vietnam



During my break, I reflected that last moment with my dad, I remembered him telling me his last wish.

His wish was for me to finish school – doesn't matter what major it is as long as I was happy. His advice to me was to not give up on anything in life, believe in myself and create my own path. That instantly gave me the courage and motivation to return to higher education. It is through Anthropology that I have found and continue to grow within myself. It's a place where I have established lifelong friendships along the way whose ambitions were the same as mine. I am truly grateful for all the amazing mentors and professors who go beyond to help students achieve their goals by sharing their knowledge and fostering our self-esteem. I never regretted my choice to get into college, because it has helped me find my passion and the best part of it all will be walking across the stage without any student loan debt. I realized I grew up in a different culture from my parents and simply appreciate my ability to be a first-generation, I can only imagine how proud my dad must feel.