

Expressions^{1st}

THE NEWSLETTER OF

Thrive. Connect. Transition. Evolve. Advocate.

Generation @Scripps College

Scripps College

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A Letter from the Editors

FAILURE.

It's sort of a daunting word, isn't it? As first-generation students, we sometimes fear that coming across that experience deems us as unprepared or unfit for college, that we don't belong here because of it. Even your fellow Co-Interns did not escape it: there have been plenty of times that "failure" challenged our academic and social decisions, while undermining our sense of purpose on campus.

However, over time we have learned to not see failure as a reflection of who we are, rather as a reflection of our potential to move forward. Each experience reinforced our resilience and our confidence as students, daughters, sisters, mentors, leaders, activists, allies, and friends. In times of "failure," we have reached a greater understanding of the community and support system around us.

In this newsletter we have included amazing stories of this very reality. Including stories from both students and faculty, this newsletter encompasses their moments and perceptions of "failure" and how that insight allowed opportunities for growth.

So...failure. Yup. Been there. Done that. And the best part? It's okay.

Leah Hughes '15
Beatriz Maldonado '15
Program Co-Interns

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In Other News...

We're excited to announce that we're planning an inaugural First Gen retreat for our community on campus. All interested first-generation students on campus should contact us about details on how to participate. We'd love to have you on the planning committee!

I Failed and Made It This Far: a Failure Story from a Senior

Angie Aguilar '15

San Fernando Valley, CA

If ever there was a point in my college journey in which I “failed,” I’d say it was during my first semester of my third year at Scripps. It all started during my second year when I was trying to pick a major. I had already taken a couple of courses that fulfilled requirements for my current major (Latin American and Caribbean Studies), and I loved them, but I let that small voice in the back of my head that asked me “what do you plan on doing with that major?” get the best of me. Eventually I decided to aim for a double major and started taking math classes because it seemed like the right choice. Also, I enjoyed math in high school and could picture myself as a math teacher or professor. Unfortunately, since I was a bit behind on a math major, I opted out of studying abroad during my third year.

“...I’m brave enough to take risks and follow my heart. It’s okay to change your mind and make mistakes.”

One word that encapsulates a flash forward to my third year really well is *struggle*. I was taking four academic courses my first semester of my third year, two of which were math related. On top of that, I was taking one p.e. course, I was the president for Cafe Con Leche, I was in the Ballroom Dance Company and I was a Spanish 33 conversation group leader. I could feel myself slowly falling behind and got a tutor for my math classes, but it was to no avail. I ended up dropping one of my math classes and feeling like such a failure. After a while, I started feeling better about myself as I was able to better manage my other responsibilities.



Angie

Looking back, I see how the pressures of being a first-generation student of color and wanting to be successful got the best of me. Math was a more “practical” major which made it appealing to me, but I wasn’t passionate about it. Do I regret attempting to major in math? No. If I hadn’t decided to try to major in math, I would have probably studied abroad and I would have missed out on a great year of growth at Scripps. I would not have been Cafe Con Leche’s president, I would probably not have thought to apply to be a Resident Advisor and I would have generally missed out on great company and community.

If I hadn’t decided to try to major in math, I would not know what I know now, and I would not be who I am now. Through my “failure” I was able to grow and learn more about myself as a person. I now know that dropping one of my math courses is not a reflection of my inabilities and instead demonstrates that I am willing to admit when I’ve made a wrong choice and when I have too much on my plate and that I’m brave

enough to take risks and follow my heart. It’s okay to change your mind and make mistakes. After all, when you look back in life, you’ll regret the things you didn’t do or try more of than the ones you did.

Failure and Learning from a Professor's Perspective

Professor Nora Sullivan

Visiting Assistant Professor of Biology, Keck Sciences

"Be of good cheer. Do not think of today's failures, but of the success that may come tomorrow. You have set yourselves a difficult task, but you will succeed if you persevere; and you will find a joy in overcoming obstacles. Remember, no effort we make to attain something beautiful is ever lost." – Helen Keller

Learning is hard! And sometimes, when learning, we fail. Although failure hurts and can be really disillusioning, this is part of learning too, and that is ok.

Recently, my five-year-old learned to ride her two wheeled bicycle. This was a long and challenging process in which we went to a quiet parking lot and practiced riding back and forth. It did not go very well. She would start to wobble, then swerve, and then need rescuing so that she did not crash into the pavement (again)! This went on for months, until one afternoon she took off pedaling and going around in circles. When she passed by me, she was grinning ear to ear. She had gotten a few skinned knees, cried some tears, but eventually, she learned to ride her bike.

Learning in college, or after college, is not really all that different from learning to ride a bike. Learning is about gaining knowledge or skills in something new and this can be quite challenging. When young children are learning, we expect a few falls, but now that we are grown up we have higher expectations for ourselves and less patience for our own failures.

Learning requires being *ready* to learn an idea or skill. Sometimes this is a physical readiness (for example, being strong enough to steer the bike), sometimes it is having a strong foundational knowledge or skill (for example, understanding hydrogen bonding), and sometimes it is about being ready to exit our comfort zone and risk failure (for example, my trepidation about learning to speak Mandarin). Once we are ready, we need the opportunity to practice those skills and a chance to demonstrate our success.

My job as a professor is to help *you* learn. Although some consider a professor's most important role is to lecture while students dutifully write notes, I have a different philosophy. I see my role as creating an environment that challenges and supports you as you learn new material, master new skills, and think thoughtfully and critically about the new information. To do this, I provide resources and information (textbook, lectures, videos, links, and animations on Sakai) and support (office hours, practice problems, answer keys, Sakai quizzes, TAs) to make the learning process successful and give you opportunities to practice and demonstrate your new knowledge and skills.

But learning is hard! And sometimes, when learning, we fail (or just don't get it at first). I recognize as a professor, a parent, and as a learner myself that learning happens for each person at his/her own pace and in his/her own manner. Class time does not work for everyone equally (and is not close to sufficient for most); sometimes you need more background, or more practice, or courage to step out of your comfort zone. That is why I have office hours!

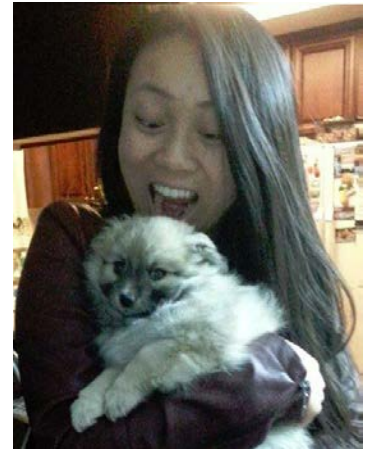
So, if/when you fail, come see me (or your professor) just to talk. I want you to succeed and I love helping you learn. I can help you learn, provide additional information about some topics, discuss ways to practice more effectively with the material, or help you identify additional resources. Learning is hard, and I'm happy to be your cheerleader, coach, and teacher as you struggle to learn.

Trial and Error: Balancing Academic and Social Priorities

Vivian Yu '17

Union City, CA

Coming into college, I anticipated struggling with homesickness and living independently for the first time. While this was all true, there was a greater problem. I could not for the life of me find a healthy balance between my social life and my academics. Looking back at my first year at Scripps, my inability to juggle everything was probably my greatest failure. I desperately tried to maintain good grades to meet not only my family's expectations but also my own. I spent most of my time trying to keep up with these expectations, leaving me with very minimal social activities. It was overwhelming to have all this freedom and not know how to utilize it. It wasn't until most of the year was over did I realize how few opportunities I took advantage of as a first year in college. After acknowledging the lack of balance in my life, I made it a priority to balance out all the activities I participated in. Though I'm still a work in progress, I can confidently say that I have achieved a healthier balance between my social life and my academics. I joined clubs, mentoring and volunteer programs and kept up with my expectations for class work. It is fundamentally difficult to find a balance, but by constantly setting goals for myself, I have been able to figure it out. By no means do I have it *all* figured out, but understanding my weaknesses and strengths have definitely helped me make my second year at Scripps much more eventful than my first!



Vivian

Failure as remembered by Leah Hughes and Bea Maldonado

Because we know it. We've been through it. We've seen it. .. And we conquered it.



Hey Leah, remember that time I got a C for my Intro to Psych class? Looking back I realize that was such a hard time to go through. As a first-year taking that *intro course*, I felt that I wouldn't be able to find success as a student for the following years!

Yes, Bea, you told me! That reminds me of the time I bombed an econ final badly enough to drop my final grade by a letter and a half... it was important for me to have had that experience for me to realize that economics was not for me, which has allowed me to focus more on my art and has made me much happier...and hey, look at where we are now!



COMPLETELY

AWESOME.

There will always be opportunities to rise from times of failure!



Failure: Where to go from there?

There have been various instances in which people in our community have encountered moments of failure. Your Co-Interns did not escape from it either. We want to let you know that failure is a normal process and to assure you that there are certain steps you can take once it happens to help guide you through the experience. We created this chart to help visualize these steps!

Self-Care

- Exercise @ the Tiernan Field House
- Use the centralized health and counseling services @ Tranquada Center
- Share your feelings and concerns with friends and family members (skype, talking on phone)

Academics

- Connect to your professors through email and office hours so that they know how to help you!
- Check out the Office of Student Affairs
- If you're struggling in a particular subject, apply to receive a tutor to help you through it
- Start a study group in advance of other major assignments

Health

- Check out Student Health Services
- Meet with the Health and Wellness Coordinator @ TFH
- Get an appointment with HEO (Health Education Outreach) @Tranquada Center
- Make sure you're eating well and sleeping
- Try a Lyssey from the Motley, packed with orange juice and Emergen-C!

Social

- Engaging socially can help you feel connected to your community and more fulfilled overall—make dinner with friends, or attend a new weekend campus activity with them
- Check emails (Student-L, Official Scripps email, etc.) for opportunities to meet new friends with similar interests and experiences

Let's address a few important things: academics, physical health...

And let's not forget self-care and navigating connections in social life!



Parting Words

Have you failed? Doubted whether or not you belonged? Wondered whether or not you could make it through? Didn't know where to start? We did too, but with a little help from our friends here on campus, we made it through and so will you!

In the meantime...

Leah will continue to fail to get into bed...
And Bea will take advantage of naps outside.



UPCOMING FIRST-GEN EVENTS:

- Gearing Up to Go Home Workshop with Dr. Elisa Hernandez on December 4 from 5-6p.m. at Malott's North Meeting Room!
- We hope everyone has restful and rejuvenating weeks at home for Winter Break!

We Want to Hear From You!

To inspire our readers and recognize your accomplishments, we would like to feature your story in one of our upcoming newsletters. Please send us a personal article or poem depicting your experience as a first-gener to firstgeneration@scrippscollege.edu.