

Viviana Diaz
California State University, Los Angeles

Beautiful Walks: Overcoming Adversity

Abstract

In “Beautiful Walks: Overcoming Adversity,” Viviana Diaz reflects on what it means to move through the world as a first-generation Latina student and traveler. Her multimedia piece blends storytelling with photography and visual collage, tracing a path from Los Angeles to New York and London. Diaz honors the women who shaped her resilience and opens space for other first-gen students to see movement as transformation rather than risk. Each “beautiful walk” invites reflection on how identity is made and remade through the journeys we dare to take.

Recommended Citation

Diaz, Viviana. “Beautiful Walks: Overcoming Adversity.” *Text & Type*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2025. CSU Open Journals. Available at: <https://journals.calstate.edu/textandtype/issue/view/558>

Articles printed in *Text & Type* are published by CSU Open Journals under a Creative Commons (CC) copyright license. Authors retain ownership of all rights under copyright in all versions of the article. Specifically, the journal uses a CC BY-NC-SA license. This license allows reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format for noncommercial purposes only, and only so long as attribution is given to the creator. If you remix, adapt, or build upon the material, you must license the modified material under identical terms.

Beautiful Walks: Overcoming Adversity

As I walk out of my International Politics class, my professor walks behind me and catches my patch that reads, “BUT DID YOU DIE?” She asks what’s behind the patch or what that patch is about. I was caught off guard by her curious question but was excited to answer her. I responded, “I bought this patch because it signifies not to live in fear.”

One of the biggest leaps of faith I’ve ever taken was a trip I planned for 3 weeks in December 2023. The original plan was to fly to Puerto Rico and then to Miami for a few concerts that held great significance for me. A friend of mine who is a flight attendant knew about my trip to the East Coast and asked if I would be willing to go to New York to see the city during the holidays. I coordinated the days and flights to stop in New York first before Puerto Rico, but a few weeks later, my flight attendant friend notified me she was not going to be able to go to New York after all, as she had failed to recall that she had already said yes to another trip to the UK.

I was let down and thought, “Well, I have no one else to join this close to the trip, so I’ll just have to go alone.” My close family and friends were afraid I would be traveling to the other side of the country all by myself and advised me not to go. They were worried about me as an only child, and even more so with all the videos circulating social media after COVID when it was not so popular to travel by subway.

But I changed nothing.

Guess what I did? I flew to New York. I took an Uber from Central Park to Times Square kind of late at night to take advantage of my time there, but searching up the Uber fare to go back home was like \$60 for two miles, so I chose to take the subway instead. I asked for directions and saw that a huge crowd was taking the subway at midnight.

My professor was interested in hearing my story. I told her that I believe we should say yes to all opportunities when they present themselves. Later on, we might not have the funds or health to do so. It is not just about being rebellious by taking the other route than the route most tell you to take. If you really believe in what you can accomplish, I advocate taking the risk. I refuse to live in fear. The only question to ask yourself after a crazy moment or experience is, “BUT DID YOU DIE?” just as Ken Jeong famously does as Mr. Chow in the movie *The Hangover*.

I remember taking an Uber to take a ferry around the Statue of Liberty, only to miss it due to weather circumstances. I asked the Uber driver if he could drop me off at the start of the Brooklyn Bridge. It started to rain cats and dogs as I was getting close to getting dropped off. He saw that I had no umbrella and opened the trunk of his car to hand me his. I was taken aback and told him, “No, it’s okay. I’ll survive.” He persisted in me taking it, and so I did. I walked the bridge on long knee-high boot heels to the other side and arrived in Brooklyn. I thought about Dan from *Gossip Girl*. I grabbed a coffee and visited the nearest Post Office. I was taking it all in and decided to head back as it was getting darker. On my way back in my knee-high boot heels, wandering the bridges of New York, I saw the most amazing views ever!

In front of me was a gloomy night sky behind the tall skyscrapers of New York that I would only see in shows or movies. It was for sure an “I made it” moment for me. I brought myself there with my own hard-earned money and my courage to take the step.

When I first started traveling, I was actually trying to find ways to cope with a rejection from my dream career at 24. I was looking for answers of my own, achieving other dreams of mine to travel, when that dream career of mine crashed. I have always been hard on myself and have micromanaged every decision I have had make. I tend to overthink my every move, but I’ve come to understand that we are not perfect, and life is about trial and error. I won’t stop until I achieve that dream of mine and make the best of it.

Dig deeper.

There are very few people in life who will always be there, no matter the circumstances. I am an only child raised by a single mother and my aunt, who also assisted in raising me; both have been strong pillars in my life. There were financial struggles that caused some setbacks in some events of our lives, but leaving it in the hands of God, we always manage to get through. There is one person who is behind the drive that lives within me, and that is my mother, Andrea Miranda Diaz. Though she feared having her little girl take off to break barriers, throughout all of my decisions, I managed to gain her trust.

It has been the three of us on this life journey. I graduated from high school in June 2015. In August of that year, I enrolled full-time in college. However, I initially struggled with time management skills and lacked the awareness needed to succeed in that environment, which led to academic probation. Since I had financial limitations, I prioritized working full-time and part-time jobs. I struggled to balance work and school effectively, and I did not give education the attention it deserved. I knew that I did not want to leave anything halfway and that I needed to hold myself accountable for what I started and finish it through. I received a phone call from a counselor at LBCC checking in on my academic status because I was so close to an Associate's Degree. I will forever be thankful for her because she was the alarm bell for me.

Growing up in a culturally diverse environment, I developed critical thinking, rhetorical analysis skills, interpersonal communication, media studies, and public discourse skills. As I progressed through my undergraduate studies in Communications, I built relationships that shape outcomes in every area of life, starting from personal growth to social changes and onto different perspectives people may have. Beyond academics, I have sought opportunities to apply my skills and knowledge in real-world settings. Adventures and experiences like the ones I’ve had have given me confidence to act the part in society. I have learned what it is to build character, resilience, and courage. Traveling solo for most of my trips has been amazing and a great atmosphere to learn more about myself, on how I act, adapt, and change in different settings.

In December 2022, I completed my Associate's Degree and transferred to California State University of Los Angeles to obtain a Bachelor's Degree in Communications. My academic performance was recognized through multiple Dean's List honors, and I was awarded a certificate from the United States Department of State Virtual Student Federal Service Internship Program. An accomplishment I hold dearly is meeting an American women's health advocate, best-selling author of the book *First-Gen: A Memoir*, and former White House aide, Alejandra Campoverdi. In the summer of 2024, I traveled to the United Kingdom to study at Durham University; there I worked with Cal State LA and Durham

students to write the International First-Gen College Experience. My article, "Farewell to the Past and Hello to the Unknown," was published in *Text & Type*, under CSU Open Journals, a Creative Commons. On May 21, 2025, I graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Communications with a concentration in Organizational Communication. I am now in graduate school at Cal State Long Beach in the Master of Arts International Affairs Program (MAIA). Never did I expect to go this far. I am forever thankful for the staff at Cal State Los Angeles who assisted in opening up ideas within me and helped me gain insight into opportunities that are within our surroundings. I live by the saying, "When there's a will, there's a way." One "YES" can take you further than you ever imagined. I saw an opportunity to go to the United Kingdom, to form connections that led me to publish my own piece; it is unbelievable what I was able to accomplish.

Although I am very thankful for the everlasting connections I made obtaining my Bachelor's, I chose to go a different route in grad school by studying International Affairs. The ways in which countries collaborate and connect all over the world is so interesting to me. I yearn to learn about different backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge from others. I fall in love with the intellectual side of people and am always ready to hear about someone's growth and the lessons they learned throughout their journey. The people I have met through traveling probably do not know this, but every conversation I have had has either taught or healed my soul to know there is life and dreams all over the world. A wish of mine is to connect with people who wish to learn more about my experiences, my journey, or myself.

Throughout all of this growth, there have been some low points, of course, but the key is to hold a positive attitude and think beyond the low. Look towards the silver lining. The only person who can give you limitations is yourself. I am very thankful for my beautiful walks. As you take your own walks, make it beautiful because you have that control. As I finish this journey in writing this piece, listening to "Don't Stop" from Fleetwood Mac, I say, "Yesterday's gone, Don't stop thinking about tomorrow." Thank you.

*First-Generation
Student/Latina*

By Viviana Diaz

- Contents
- Introduction
- Struggles
- London
- The Inevitable
- Rhetoric
- Keep Dreaming
- Community Challenges & Community Listening
- Miscellaneous
- Travel Solo
- Alejandra Campoverdi
- Bibliography
- End

What is First-Generation?

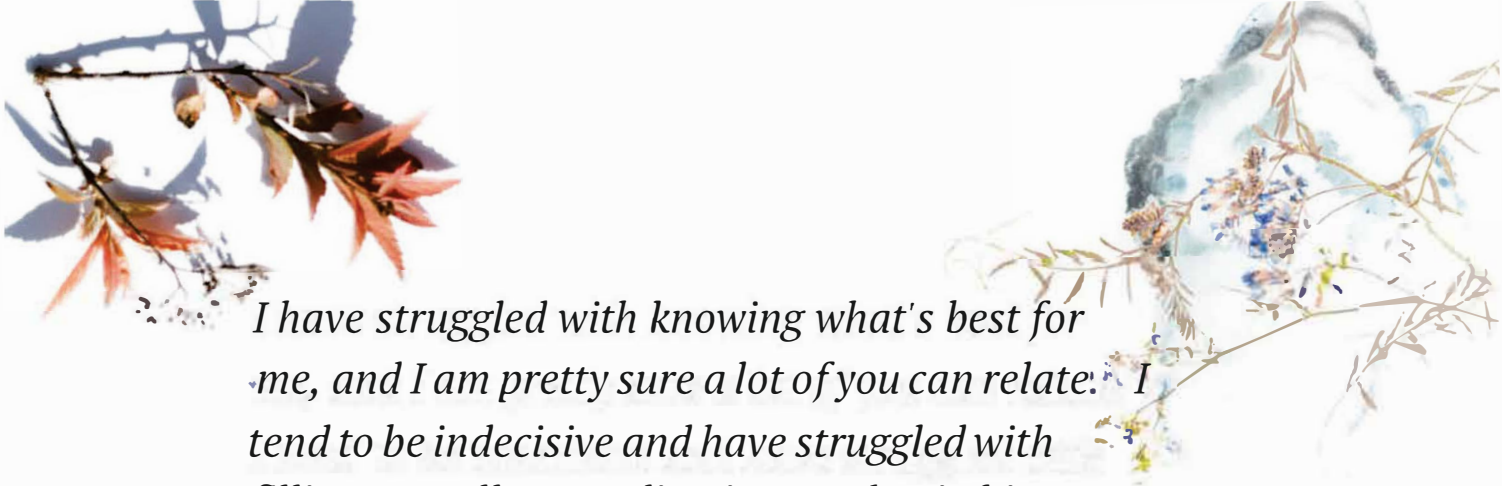
Denoting the first of a generation to become a citizen in a new country, or the first of a generation to be born in a country of parents who had immigrated.

What is a first-generation student?

A first-generation college student is someone whose parents did not complete a bachelor's degree. The definition also applies to students who live with and are supported by only one parent who did not complete a bachelor's degree.

And what is it like to be a first-generation student who is Latina?

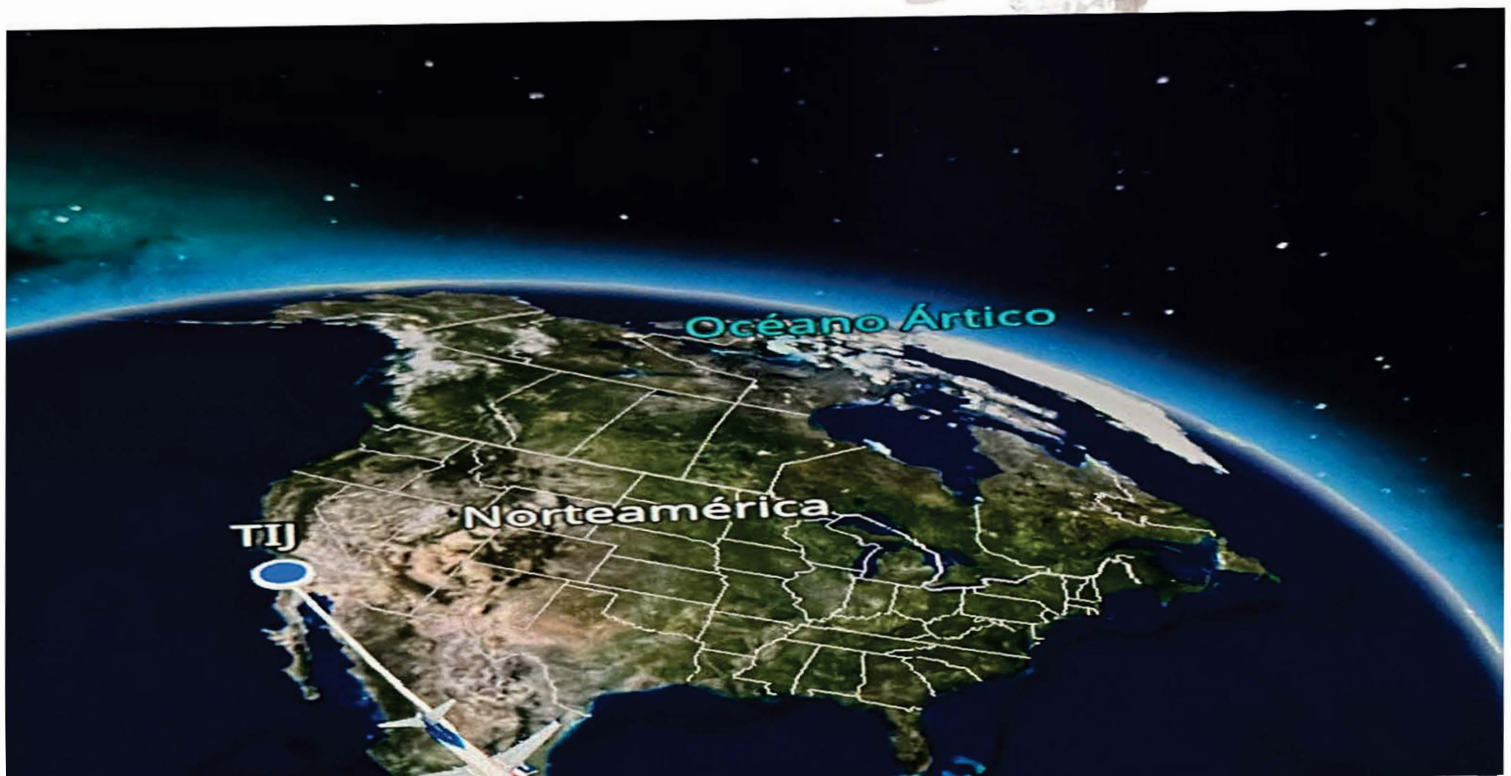
Many first-generation Latina students face feelings of isolation, imposter syndrome, and a lack of understanding of the college system.



I have struggled with knowing what's best for me, and I am pretty sure a lot of you can relate. I tend to be indecisive and have struggled with filling out college applications and switching between two languages. Furthermore, financial stability and support from family are some other struggles that many can relate to.



Struggles





The Inevitable

The inspiration came from my mother who is a single mother, as well as my aunt. Two worlds combined into one where my mother brings joy to every room she walks in. I applied to various colleges outside of town because I wanted to do something different. I did not continue to show interest in these campuses because I didn't know. Figuring everything out on my own was a challenge and when you finally find out, it can be a little too late BUT success doesn't stop there (Diaz 2024).



Conflicting Responsibilities

First-generation students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, may be more likely to experience a conflict between college life and their responsibilities to family members.



Rhetoric

Feeling Passionate

Communication

Navigate new academic language and social environment.



“The same qualities that might displace other markers of difference also create potential for organizing among students who might be marginalized by the ‘traditional’ college experience.”

Dreamt out of LBCC. only to end up at LBCC.

Viviana Diaz





Keep Dreaming

Being a first-generation builds initiative, self-awareness, risk-taking, focus, and rigidity; not only that, you are breaking barriers wherever you go. Due to the fact that it is possible.



Community Challenges

- surroundings
- environment
- distractions

Community Listening

It invites us to create presence
from absence and sound from
silence.



People who have inspired me

Andrea Miranda Diaz
Maria De Jesus Quiroz
Erica Alfaro
Alejandra Campoverdi
Cesar Quiroz
Isabella Quiroz
Danelle Dyckhoff Strelzriede
Oscar Mejia
Ninfa Quiroz



Alejandra Campoverde

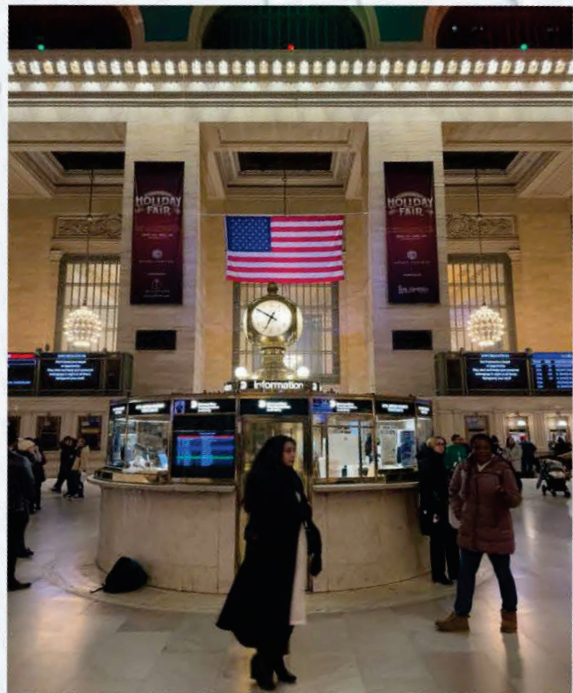
I met Alejandra Campoverde in an English class for First-Generation Students. She gave us her time and shared her experience of how she managed to cope with her own struggles.

"To be the first and only in America is a delicate balance of surviving where you come from while acting like you belong where you're going."





Travel Solo

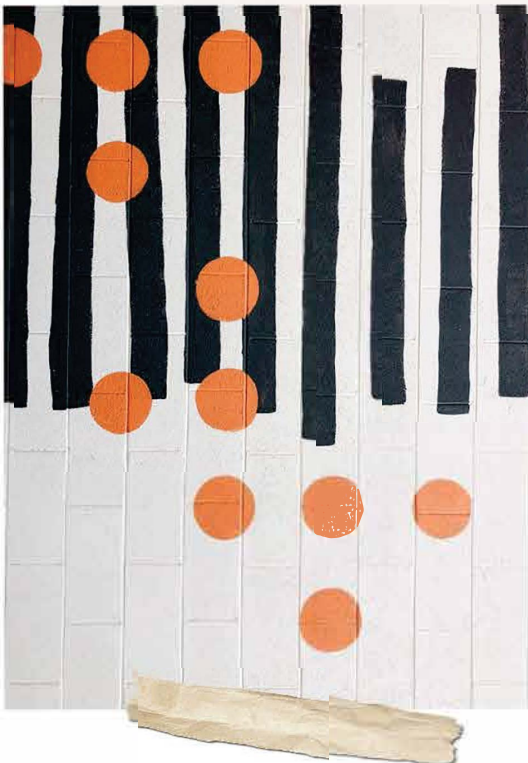


Feeling Precious



Activity

Write a piece of advice for our first-gen
fellows who come across this zine!



Bollig, C. (2019). *People like us: Theorizing first-generation college as a marker of difference*. *Literacy in Composition Studies*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.21623/1.7.1.3>

Campoverdi, A. (2023). *First gen: A memoir* (1st ed.).

Diaz, V. (2024a). *Farewell to the past and hello to the unknown*. *Text & Type*, 4(1). <https://journals.calstate.edu/textandtype/article/view/4599>

Garcia, R. (2018). *Creating presence from absence and sound from silence*. *Community Literacy Journal*, 13(1), 7–15. <https://doi.org/10.1353/clj.2018.0017>

League for Innovation in the Community College. (n.d.). *Breaking down barriers: First-generation college students and college success*. <https://www.league.org/innovation-showcase/breaking-down-barriers-first-generation-college-students-and-college-success>

Williams, B. M., & Martin, G. (2021). *Exploring the rhetoric of social class among first-generation, low-income college students in U.S. higher education*. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 41(6), 2094–2107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2021.1967885>

The End



First Generation Rules



CONTACT ME:

vdiaz54@calstatela.edu

diazviviana193@gmail.com

California State University, Los Angeles

Los Angeles, Ca