



# First-Gen Voices: Creative and Critical Narratives on the First-Generation College Experience

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## Applications for Dummies

Carla M. Sanchez  
*Loyola Marymount University*

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The paper demands evidence of my claim.  
Its paleness is assaulting, as alarming as its questions.  
Does it know that I cannot compete?  
Does it know of my inadequacy?

Long I struggle to find the words to explain my mediocrity  
while that immaculate mantel just sits there, asking:

Was I gracious enough to share my time with the poor?  
Did I spend my summer bathed in the glow of scholarship at a campus abroad?  
Was it Paris or Rome?

The charade continues,  
unknowingly excluding and cruel in its revelations.  
It teaches of meagerness.

The words that so often assist me  
come to my aid now, blooming in my arid lips,  
flowing inwardly to my fingers  
like a balm of shameful care.

Words embellish my answers,  
seductively curving the end of my sentences  
with promises of future remuneration  
in pride, in grand accomplishments.

“Heck, give us the chance and I’ll even end world hunger!”

I crack my fingers.  
I grow bold.  
My territory has expanded.  
It reaches all across that once clean sheet  
written in angry-black ink,  
in harsh and thick lines that resemble an Andean condor here,  
a violent Motherwell there.  
The patrons of my subjugation have taught me well, so I know what to say.

But I want to believe it too.  
I want to swallow them completely,  
all the words,  
each conspiring syllable,

each printed dream,  
I want to eat them feverishly and in a greedy gesture,  
to heal the hunger of silenced mouths, of empty pockets.

But the majesty of those lines  
(the solace of us illiterates of hope)  
is false and harmful.  
It justifies a crime of scarcity.  
It does not serve me.

My fingers pause as this knowledge corrupts my happy haze.  
Impositions of reality start to haunt, trap and punish  
with the ardor of a zealous whip.  
Still, I shrug, finish and seal my humble petition.

I get up and walk through the sunny gardens,  
dragging my wise boots,  
carrying a name that equates with servitude,  
moving slowly not to fall:  
a shadow in a crowd of luminous vibrancy.