



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

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## A Worthwhile Perspective

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### A Worthwhile Perspective

*Author's Note: Starting this reflection was rather difficult for me due to the range of emotions I felt throughout this trip that came from listening to the stories we heard, learning about the vast and unforgettable history of Costa Rica, and also being surrounded by indeed the most incredible people that created such a safe space for me to feel and love freely. To each of you and Costa Rica, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. "Look at everything as though you were seeing it either for the first or last time. Then your time on earth will be filled with glory." -Betty Smith*

The word perspective is defined as a particular attitude towards something or how one chooses to regard it. One's point of view. Beyond the surface of this specific photo I took of a path leading to the shore of the Caribbean Sea where it met the sands of Cahuita, Costa Rica, I felt as though it resonated with my perspective as well as a perspective of not only Costa Rica's future but the world's. The path points towards the intended destination of the viewer. The viewer can see the light and warmth in the distance, but the ocean takes up less than fifty percent of the image. Most of the photo shows an untamed nature that blocks out the desired end goal in one way or another. Some of it lies within the path, creating a natural reaction if the viewer were to picture themselves walking through. Any person would want to avoid obstacles and make the journey easy. That isn't always the case; things could happen along the way that one wouldn't expect. These unanticipated obstacles are often unavoidable, and one is expected to keep moving forward to reach their desired destination.

Of course, I don't fully believe that a single picture from this impactful trip could completely capture the knowledge, understanding, and newfound love I gained. A love not only for a beautiful country and its people who taught me more about their culture than any document or class could but also a love for an identity of mine that I hardly understood how to define for myself. Throughout the stories shared with our group, intimate stories of death, pain, and sorrow, all that could be heard through each individual's storytelling was love. Love for their country, families, and passions. It was genuinely admirable how, each person our group met with, whether they were a lawyer, professor, musician, or community leader, they advocated for what they believed in. The passion that fuels them to continue pursuing evolution, whether within the education system, government, societal practices, or traditions amongst their native communities, sparked inspiration with me. Many of the rights here in the U.S. are often taken for granted, and many of the leaders we spoke with fight every day just to try for a slight chance of change.

Before this trip, I didn't fully understand my identity as a First-Generation student. I had yet to see the power it gives me. The power to view the world around me through a different lens. To connect and relate to others. To voice what is often ignored or overlooked. Being surrounded by incredible individuals who shared this identity with me gave me a safe feeling I had never felt before. Feelings that I could never place about the obligations to my family and the pressure to not fail within the opportunities of higher education were shared and understood within the group. I felt seen and heard in ways I hadn't expected.

Behind the beauty and tourism image of Costa Rica, there is struggle and hardship. Yet, there is also so much light that citizens find daily. Advocating for what they believe in and sharing what they think is essential—being grateful for what is around them and what the Earth provides. Standard practices that sound so out of the ordinary for the overconsumption and greed of the U.S. Being a first-generation student may be seen as a weakness here, but through this trip, I've learned that I have more power than I think and much I can do with the path before me.

