

WASHINGTON, DC | SEPTEMBER 12

**FIRST
GENERATION
PROFESSIONALS
2019 SUMMIT**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

#CommerceFirstGen

FirstGen
PROFESSIONALS

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The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. (It is not) “... a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.

”

James Truslow Adams,
defining the American Dream
in *Epic of America*, 1931.



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Secretary's Welcome



Dear Colleagues:

Welcome to the Department of Commerce's inaugural First Generation Professionals (FGP) Summit -- a first-of-its-kind Federal diversity and inclusion event. We will highlight FGP challenges and triumphs, as well as the value of their contributions and start the conversation on how we can address potential barriers to ensure they reach their full potential.

The Department is dedicated to creating a diverse workforce and an inclusive environment that fosters the advancement of all individuals, including FGPs, many of whom hail from proud, working-class backgrounds and are the first in their immediate families to trailblaze into the professional work environment. This Summit is an opportunity to illuminate and optimize the engagement of FGPs, as we cultivate an environment in which they can thrive: when FGPs succeed, we all benefit from their contributions.

As a Department, we are charged with developing recruitment policies and practices that "endeavor to achieve a workforce from all segments of society." To ensure a fair and equitable work environment for our employees, we embrace the principles of EEO, diversity, and inclusion as we recruit, develop, and retain a high-performing workforce that truly reflects the face of our Nation.

While we work to make America more competitive, we greatly benefit from a workforce that includes employees who have the backgrounds, life experiences, and requisite qualifications that enable them to understand the social, cultural, and economic issues associated with our diverse public, including the spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds. FGPs add value to the Department and provide insight to improve the products and services we deliver to diverse public constituents.

Many thanks for joining us for this Summit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wilbur Ross". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wilbur Ross

U.S. Secretary of Commerce

Secretary's Support



To Attendees of the First Generation Professionals Summit:

I am honored to add my support to the Department of Commerce's inaugural First Generation Professionals Summit. The Summit honors the achievements of those who are the first in their immediate families to enter the professional workforce.

From Treasury, you will hear from two inspiring members of the Department's senior leadership whose life experiences, backgrounds, and talents are having a profound impact on our mission. Jovita Carranza, Treasurer of the United States, and Len Olijar, Director of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, both first generation professionals are a testament of the talent, tenacity, resourcefulness, and strong work ethic that first generation professionals can contribute to the federal workforce.

The Department of the Treasury's mission includes maintaining a strong economy and creating economic and job opportunities for all by promoting the conditions that enable economic growth and stability. That objective inspires us to create and maintain a work environment that encourages employees to grow professionally and reach their potential. Providing opportunities for upward mobility in the Treasury workforce supports our mission.

Congratulations on your extraordinary career achievements, and thank you for your commitment each day to serving the American people. I wish you a successful Summit and continued success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven T. Mnuchin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steven T. Mnuchin
U.S. Secretary of Treasury

First Generation Professionals Initiative



PROFESSIONALS

Four years ago, Tinisha Agramonte, the Director of the Department of Commerce's Office of Civil Rights and the architect of the First Generation Professionals Initiative, embarked on an exciting journey. She wanted to explore whether socioeconomic status (lower-income or working-class background) is a diversity characteristic that, in

addition to primary diversity dimensions, such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability, age, and national origin, may potentially impact an individual's recruitment, advancement, and career development opportunities.

To explore this concept, she solicited the assistance of other equal employment opportunity (EEO) and diversity and inclusion (D&I) practitioners across the federal government, as well as colleagues in other fields, and people who are one of the first in their families to enter a professional work environment. Recognizing the needs for this cutting-edge and mission-imperative EEO and D&I initiative, they quickly volunteered to help her shape and launch this ambitious project. At the core of this initiative is the principle that a qualified, diverse workforce drawn from all segments of society, including our socio-economic spectrum, is crucial to better understanding and meeting the needs of the diverse American public that we serve.

In the beginning, a core group of "FGP original contributors" met biweekly, searching various databases for articles and research that could inform the initiative. After a year of work, they realized little research existed in this area. Nonetheless, they forged forward and successfully established a solid framework for what they wanted to accomplish. They then set out to acquire relative research to ensure the initiative would be data-driven. Colleagues at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office provided the group with critical foundational documents needed to jumpstart the research.

Next, the Department of Commerce's Office of Civil Rights launched an interagency project with the U. S. Census Bureau's Center for Behavioral Science Methods (CBSM). CBSM conducted focus groups and qualitative interviews to investigate potential barriers to workplace inclusion for First Generation Professionals (FGPs) who are the first in their immediate families to hold a professional position. The purpose of this research was to investigate whether socio-economic status (SES) may also be a diversity characteristic for which there are barriers to inclusion for employees from low SES backgrounds.

Fast forward to today. The research has been successfully published, the FGP concept has been presented to over 20 federal agencies/entities, and we have developed critical reference materials. We have also raised awareness and collected more data on FGPs' work experiences. We are now more informed and aware of what policies and practices are needed to unleash FGPs' full potential and to ensure they are effectively welcomed, engaged and leveraged in our workforces to optimally accomplish our respective missions. It's been quite a journey...

Welcome aboard, join the journey, and stay tuned for what's next!

Agenda At-a-Glance

8:30 AM – 9:00 AM

WELCOME REMARKS

Karen Dunn Kelley, Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce
Tinisha Agramonte, Architect of the First Generation Professionals (FGP) Initiative,
Director, Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Commerce

9:00 AM – 9:30 AM

FEATURED SPEAKER

Rukayatu “Ruky” Tijani ESQ., Founder, The First Generation Purpose Project

9:30 AM – 9:40 AM

FIRST GEN STORIES

First Generation Professionals Initiative video presentation.

9:40 AM – 10:30 AM

FIRST GEN PROFESSIONALS’ LESSONS ON RISK, FEAR, & SUCCESS

Panelists will share their career journeys--how they navigated unwritten rules, managed self-doubt, gained a sense of belonging, and overcame “class” biases, as well as the lessons learned and tips for success.

10:30 AM – 11:15 AM

FIRESIDE CHAT INTRODUCTION

Thomas F. Gilman, Chief Financial Officer and Assistant Secretary for Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, will welcome Madam Treasurer **Jovita Carranza** and the Chairman of Securities and Exchange Commission, **Jay Clayton**.

FIRESIDE CHAT

A fireside chat with Madam Treasurer to learn about her powerful and inspirational career journey--how she rose through the ranks, challenges and triumphs experienced, starting from her humble beginnings to her current role. Also, the importance of including First Generation Professionals in our diverse workforce.

11:15 AM – 11:45 AM

RECOGNITION

Recognition of philanthropic, educational, and other organizations that provide resources and assistance to First Generation College students.

11:45 AM – NOON

WAY AHEAD & CLOSING REMARKS

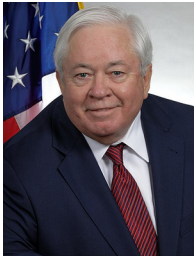
Commerce Leadership



KAREN DUNN KELLEY
DEPUTY SECRETARY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Karen Dunn Kelley was asked to serve in President Trump's Administration after a successful 35-year career in the financial management sector – as the Managing Director of Investments at Invesco, overseeing more than \$800 billion in worldwide assets. Deputy Secretary Kelley has taken her private sector experience and applied it to her service as the U.S. Department of Commerce's Chief

Operation Officer and day-to-day manager of a budget of \$11.4 billion dollars, 12 operating units, and 47,000 employees. As the principal deputy to Secretary Ross, she also plays an integral role in the policy development and execution of the Administration and Department's priorities – working on matters that range from economic development and international trade, to the expansion of broadband access and 5g, to weather predictions and commercial space enterprises. Prior to her confirmation as Deputy Secretary, Ms. Kelley served as the Undersecretary for Economic Affairs, overseeing the Department of Commerce's statistical programs through the Bureau of the Census and the Bureau of Economic Analysis.



THOMAS F. GILMAN
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER AND ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR ADMINISTRATION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Thomas F. Gilman was nominated by President Donald J. Trump to be the Chief Financial Officer and Assistant Secretary for Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce. He was confirmed by the U.S. Senate in January 2019. In that capacity, Mr. Gilman holds a dual role overseeing all financial and management functions for the multi-billion-dollar budget as well as the administrative and

personnel functions for its approximately 47,000 employees. Prior to joining the government, Mr. Gilman had a 40+ year career as a senior executive and entrepreneur within the global automotive industry. Mr. Gilman has unique experience having worked in automotive manufacturing, automotive retailing, automotive financial services and automotive supply. Mr. Gilman spent 22 years at Chrysler Corporation and 5 years at Chrysler Financial where he served as CFO. During that time, Chrysler Financial achieved four years of double-digit growth and 16 consecutive quarters of record profits. In 1998, Mr. Gilman helped lead the Daimler-Benz/Chrysler Corporation merger. Following the merger, Mr. Gilman joined the Asbury Automotive Group in 2001, where he oversaw their Initial Public Offering on the NYSE in 2002. In 2006, Mr. Gilman joined Cerberus Capital Management as a Senior Advisor, where he oversaw multiple deals and operations in the automotive finance industry, including the acquisitions of GMAC, Chrysler Financial and Chrysler. Upon completion of the Chrysler acquisition, Mr. Gilman returned to Chrysler Financial and became the Chairman and CEO. Mr. Gilman successfully navigated Chrysler Financial through the TARP government program, ultimately repaying its 1.5-billion-dollar obligation to the Treasury Department with interest and within six months. In 2011, Mr. Gilman helped manage the sale of Chrysler Financial to TD Bank Group. Mr. Gilman created a North American auto lending platform, TD Auto Finance, and became its President and CEO and an Executive Vice President of TD Bank Group in Toronto, Canada. In 2014, Mr. Gilman founded Automotive Capital Services, which financed automotive dealership inventories. ACS was sold in January 2018. Mr. Gilman speaks four languages, has lived in the US, Canada, Mexico, Brazil and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and has conducted business in 21 countries. He holds a B.S. Degree in Finance from Villanova University.

Commerce Leadership



TINISHA AGRAMONTE
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Tinisha Agramonte is a highly regarded Civil Rights Champion whose personal and professional mission is to advance equitable opportunities for all. She has 25 years of experience in the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), diversity, civil rights, and human relations arenas as a civil servant, consultant, university instructor, and trainer/facilitator. Agramonte was appointed to the Senior

Executive Service (SES) in 2013. She currently serves as the Director, Office of Civil Rights for the Department of Commerce (DOC). In this capacity, she serves as the principal advisor on equal employment opportunity (EEO) and civil rights. She provides leadership, direction and guidance on ensuring a Model EEO workplace that is well postured to successfully achieve DOC's mission. Throughout her 20-year federal career, she has led agencies through transformation efforts, strategically embedding and integrating innovative and forward thinking EEO, civil rights, and diversity programs into day-to-day agency operations. Agramonte led and implemented policies and programs that impacted workforces up to 300,000 employees and were recognized as best practices in the federal government.

Early in her life, Agramonte was identified as an at-risk youth. With the help of mentors and educators who saw potential in her, she was able to overcome significant challenges. Because of their guidance, she realized the potential they saw in her and was encouraged to reach unimaginable heights. For this reason, and as a First Generation Professional, Tinisha is compelled to "pay it forward" by ensuring ALL people have the access, opportunities, encouragement and support needed to realize their fullest potential.

She received her Bachelor's degree in Mass Communications from California State University, Hayward and her Master's degree in Human Relations from the University of Oklahoma.

Fireside Chat Speakers



KEYNOTE SPEAKER
JOVITA CARRANZA
44TH TREASURER OF THE UNITED STATES

Treasurer of the United States Jovita Carranza serves as a principal advisor to Secretary Mnuchin. Her focus is to increase participation in our vibrant economy by fostering financial capability and sustainability. Consistent with Treasury's mission to maintain a strong economy, foster economic growth, and promote prosperity and stability Treasurer Carranza oversees the Office of Consumer Policy

This Office provides policy leadership, research, and analysis in these areas, and coordinates the interagency Financial Literacy and Education Commission on behalf of the Secretary, who serves as its Chair. The Treasurer also serves as the Secretary's designee on the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund's Community Development Advisory Board. In addition to these functions, the Treasurer maintains the historic role of advising the Secretary on matters relating to coinage produced by the U.S. Mint. She has oversight responsibility for all operations of the U.S. Mint, including Fort Knox. She is also a key liaison with the Federal Reserve System.

Treasurer Carranza is a Chicago native and founder of the supply-chain management company JCR Group. She previously served as the Deputy Administrator for the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) under President George W. Bush, where she received a bi-partisan, unanimous confirmation by the U.S. Senate. At SBA, she managed more than 80 field offices across the country and a portfolio of direct and guaranteed business loans, venture capital investments, and disaster loans worth almost \$80 billion.

Prior to her SBA appointment, Carranza had a distinguished 20+ year career at United Parcel Service (UPS), where she was the highest-ranking Latina in the history of the company. She started as a part-time, night-shift box handler and worked her way up to President of Latin America and Caribbean operations. As Vice President of Air Operations at its facility in Louisville, KY, she led the cutting-edge automated package processing operation. Treasurer Carranza's prior philanthropic activities include serving on several boards and councils including: the American Cancer Society Corporate Advisory Board; Illinois Enterprise Zone Advisory Board; U.S. Global Leadership Council; U.S. Small Business Administration—Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE); and as a Trustee Chair at the School of Business Council at Alverno College.

Treasurer Carranza earned her MBA from the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida and received executive, management, and financial training at the INSEAD Business School in Paris, France; Michigan State University; and the University of Chicago.



FIRESIDE CHAT MODERATOR
JAY CLAYTON
CHAIRMAN OF THE SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

Jay Clayton was nominated to chair the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission on January 20, 2017 by President Donald Trump and sworn in on May 4, 2017. Chairman Clayton was born at Fort Eustis in Newport News, Virginia and was raised primarily in central and southeastern Pennsylvania. In his professional

career, he has lived in Philadelphia, New York, London, and Washington, D.C. A member of the New York and Washington, D.C. bars, Chairman Clayton earned a B.S. in Engineering from the University of Pennsylvania (summa cum laude), a B.A. and M.A. in Economics from the University of Cambridge (Thouron Scholar), and a J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania Law School (cum laude, Order of the Coif). Prior to joining the Commission, Chairman Clayton was a partner at Sullivan & Cromwell LLP, where he was a member of the firm's Management Committee and co-head of the firm's corporate practice. From 2009 to 2017, Chairman Clayton was a Lecturer in Law and Adjunct Professor at the University of Pennsylvania Law School. Prior to joining Sullivan & Cromwell, Chairman Clayton served as a law clerk for the Honorable Marvin Katz of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

Featured Speaker



FEATURED SPEAKER

RUKAYATU "RUKY" TIJANI

FOUNDER, THE FIRST GENERATION PURPOSE PROJECT

Rukayatu "Ruky" Tijani is an attorney, speaker, diversity consultant, and the Founder of the First Generation Purpose Project. The First Generation Purpose Project ("FGPP") is an initiative designed to help first generation professionals successfully navigate life and careers by utilizing the grit and tenacity already in them. Ruky founded the FGPP after undergoing difficult years of navigating the legal field as a first-generation attorney, which eventually made her want to quit. However, instead of quitting, she sought out to create the program she needed when graduating from law school--a program created by and specifically for first generation professionals.

Leveraging her educational and career-related experiences, Ruky creates FGPP programs and workshops designed to equip first generation professionals with the skills and "know-how" to step up and stand out in workplaces and purpose. FGPP's flagship program is entitled "The First-Gen Rockstar--Seven Ways to Invest in Yourself." Ruky has provided workshops to students and young professionals at New York University School of Law, Harvard Law School, Yale Law School, and Berkeley Law School.

Her workshops have been praised as candid, insightful, empowering, and practical. She has been recognized as a California Change Lawyer for Legal Diversity, been featured in XONecole and Above the Law, and taken part in several podcast interviews, including the Happy Lawyers Project and the First-Gen Lounge.

Ruky is a proud Nigerian-American first-generation professional from the projects of Brooklyn, New York, a graduate of UC Berkeley School of Law, and a member of the New York and California State Bars. She loves to cook, sing, and hike.

First Generation Professionals Panelists



LEONARD OLIJAR

DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF ENGRAVING AND PRINTING,
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY

My name is Len and I am a First Generation Professional. I grew up a truck driver's son in a Pennsylvania mill town. My high school had no college prep classes, but I attended Penn State and graduated with a degree in Forest Products. I inspected wood power poles for three years then returned home. The mills had closed and jobs were scarce. I went from busboy to cook then assistant manager; getting fired because I was a terrible supervisor. I got married, moved to Denver and worked as a furniture manufacturer and car salesman. With my wife's encouragement, I got a second Bachelor of Science degree in Accounting, graduating with honors. We moved to DC and I worked at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing (BEP) as a systems accountant, exceeding a lifetime goal of earning \$1,000 per month. Passing the Certified Public Accounting exam with the highest score in Virginia earned me the attention of our Chief Financial Officer. I was encouraged to apply for management, so I went to training to get the skills I knew I lacked. As my supervisor moved up, so did I, all the way to CFO. When asked to apply for the BEP Deputy Director position, I didn't want to, as it was outside my comfort zone. I applied out of loyalty to BEP. When the BEP Director retired early, the anxiety returned about potentially working as the BEP Director. However, I have been fortunate to work with people who had more confidence in me than I did. My family instilled in me a great work ethic, but I had to learn a lot about myself and the business world, the hard way. Throughout my career, and now as the BEP Director, I give back through mentoring, encouraging life-long learning, and helping employees like me successfully navigate their careers, so we can retain them and benefit from their talents.

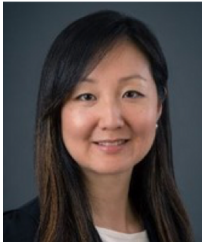


TARIQ HAFIZ

GROUP DIRECTOR, TECHNOLOGY CENTER 3600
U.S. PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

My name is Tariq and I am a first generation professional. I came to the United States of America at the age of 10 and immediately attended elementary school without knowing a word of English. I learned the English alphabet in the 4th grade. I was the only immigrant in the whole school. Thus, growing up being an immigrant and eventually being the first in my family to attend college was not an easy road, yet extremely fulfilling. Although my parents could not provide me with guidance on how to access and navigate college or give me career advice, they were supportive of my goals. My mother did not speak English and had not even completed grade school, while my father had only completed high school. One of the traits that I acquired from my father was hard work. Even though he had a non-professional job, he always went to work, and I rarely saw him take a sick day. In fact, I don't ever remember him taking a day off except for one week of vacation every August. So, when I landed my first professional job after graduation, I was extremely grateful to have a job. I knew that I had to work extra hard to show my gratitude and ensure that there was nothing that would jeopardize my job, due to a lack of effort. After a few years with a defense contractor, I came to work at the USPTO where I began my career as a Patent Examiner. As a Patent Examiner, my performance was based on objective goals, which was an environment in which I thrived. Thus, I moved up the ladder quickly. I worked my way up to management positions, and after successfully completing the DOC's Candidate Development Program, I became, and am now, a Senior Executive Service member at the USPTO. Throughout my career, I have mentored many employees-- both professional and non-professional staff-- helping them with their career development. Growing up without role models made me appreciate how important they are in a person's career development. I hope that I am a role model for others.

First Generation Professionals Panelists



LAURA SHIN

DEPUTY CHIEF, FEDERAL ASSISTANCE LAW DIVISION,
OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

My name is Laura and I have encountered many of the experiences of a first generation professional in the United States. Although my parents were college-educated in Seoul, South Korea, they immigrated to America in the 1970s and had to start their work lives all over again and in a new language. For example, my father, who had been in a professional job in South Korea working for a major

company, had to take blue collar and retail jobs in America that didn't reflect his level of education. My mother was fortunate to continue to be a nurse but faced the struggles of working in English. They faced these hardships because they wanted a better opportunity for their family in the United States. I was lucky to have parents that valued education but am also aware that they didn't have the cultural capital of growing up in the states. I may have not had the resources of American born parents, but at the same time I think that helped me to develop grit and persistence when it came to accomplishing my goals. I had to be resourceful, ask good questions, and read a lot to figure things out. Once I joined the workforce, I realized it was important to do a good job, but it was also important to get involved in professional networks and develop skills such as communication, leadership, and building coalitions. I have found opportunities to further develop these skills and was fortunate enough to participate in the SES Candidate Development Program at the DOC. Currently, I'm the Deputy Chief in the Office of the General Counsel in the Financial Assistance Law Division at the Department of Commerce.



GREGORY WHITE

DATA ANALYST, OFFICE OF HUMAN CAPITAL STRATEGY AND DIVERSITY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

As a first generation professional, my journey was particularly complicated by the lack of three things: a) a lighthouse, b) a sounding board, and c) a reference point for success. A lighthouse is a navigational beacon. It helps to orient you and warn you of danger. Early in my academic and professional careers I found

that no matter how hard I was willing to work, success was restricted by my ability to appropriately contextualize my efforts, while avoiding pitfalls. Second and third generation professionals tend to be more fluid and well-versed in these areas. Having a sounding board is akin to having a team of coaches. Coaches draw up plays and give insight, but players execute.

Success is dependent upon a safe space to socialize ideas and receive critical feedback prior to and during execution, with an eye to the future. Finally, you need a reference point to use as a bar to measure yourself against. When you are the first to do something, that bar does not exist. So, what helped me succeed? High emotional IQ, a spirit of resilience/resistance, and a sense of purpose. I see emotional intelligence as the art and science of successfully reading and responding to the interconnectivity of people, places, and situations. This contextual analysis and interpretation decrease risk and allows one to play to whatever strengths you have. Since neither opportunities nor obstacles are preceded by frequent announcements, this was key to my success. I am old enough to remember standing for the pledge of allegiance. The pledge of allegiance was coupled with the Black national anthem in my schools. This instilled the conviction that, "We cannot be stopped." Lastly, I was taught that I had a responsibility to do something important so those who came after me would benefit from my sacrifice.

First Generation Professionals Panelists



CARISSA ROCHELEAU

EPIDEMIOLOGIST, CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION,
NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

My name is Carissa, and I am a first-generation professional from a small town in Minnesota. Although I came from a low-income family, I benefitted from having a good public education: there was only one public middle and high school in my town, so the school bus picked me up from the trailer park where I lived and brought me to the same school as children of business owners, doctors, and

other professionals in town. I worked extremely hard in high school and college; I had multiple jobs and took as many college credits as I could in high school, so that when I got to college I could double major in three years (because I didn't have the finances to pay for a fourth year). After a couple of years working, I went back to school for my master's and doctorate in Epidemiology. Coming from my background, I found it was hard to ask for things— from job leads and recommendations to asking for promotions. I'm still learning how to speak up for myself; I find it much easier to speak up for others. I believe I bring cultural competence to my workplace. Many of the most vulnerable workers in the most dangerous jobs are in low income blue-collar jobs. Because I understand the social and economic pressures that these workers face -- and am often very familiar with the work -- I'm able to provide insight, catch unintentional biases, and improve the products and services we deliver to a diverse public. I also bring resourcefulness and a strong work ethic to my workplace, since I had to be self-motivated and a good problem-solver to get to where I am without the support that so many take for granted.



CATALINA MARTINEZ

REGIONAL PROGRAM MANAGER,
NOAA OFFICE OF OCEAN EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Growing up in a hardworking, traditional Cuban family of little means, I was pulled out of school often as a child to help care for my sick grandmother and to work to help the family in other ways. My grandparents believed that girls didn't need an education, and that only boys should go to school. Thankfully, I grew up in a very diverse community, so I knew there was more out there for

girls than what I could see within my own family. At 16, I dropped out of high school, moved into my own apartment, was completely self-supporting, and began to partially support my mother, which became a lifelong commitment. Working several low-wage jobs at a time, I was driven by the need to increase my earning potential, and I knew I had to educate myself to do that. I began to study and get better jobs, and through chipping away at my education, one course at a time for many years, completed my undergraduate degree at age 30. I continued to study until I was satisfied, and now have three graduate degrees. I was always determined to get an education of my choosing and not let my circumstances and family dictate that for me. Overcoming significant adversity to find success left me with particular challenges, but it also led to incredible Super Powers, such as viewing obstacles as detours instead of barriers; knowing the importance of surrounding myself with amazing people while championing others; high levels of emotional intelligence and cultural competency; courageous problem solving through unconventional ideas; and an intense drive to kick doors open for others, despite the consequences. A wise young woman once said to me, "It's not what's on you; it's what's in you," and I live by this mantra every day.

First Generation Professionals

Reflections on being the **FIRST**



KO BARRETT

DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR FOR RESEARCH
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

My name is Ko Barrett. I am a first-generation professional and the first person in my extended family to attend college. We were a working class family of six, living in the "inner city" where crime was rampant and civil unrest was a fact of life during the turbulent late 1960s. I was fortunate to receive financial assistance to attend parochial elementary school and gained a firm scholastic foundation and a love of sports. This carried me through high school with good grades and

outstanding scholastic athletic achievement. However, we did not understand the importance of a college education in my family. Had I not been recruited to play sports in college I likely would not have attended and the arc of my professional career would be quite different. Athletics were my ticket to advancement and, quite frankly, provided me with the self-confidence to consider throwing myself into this unknown world. Even still, I was thrown off track a few times by life events. It took over ten years to complete my B.S. in Environmental Studies. Life experience, academic training and luck have made me what I am and helped me to become a Senior Executive in a federal agency and a leader of an international climate science organization. Two years ago, I gave the commencement address and received an honorary Doctor of Science degree from my alma mater. Knowing it all could have gone differently helps me to recognize the diverse and valuable contributions made by others less fortunate than I.



SAM CARTER

MANAGEMENT ANALYST, FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

My name is Samuel and I am a first generation professional, one of seven siblings. Growing up, there were few minority children, teachers, or administrators. There was little to no support or guidance. As an athlete, I saw how my teammates lived, how they did things. My formative years helped me understand the necessity of aligning myself with people and information. I was the sole person mapping out my college experience, as the second oldest and first to go to college. Once in college

I focused on understanding the players and aligning myself to the internal workings of the institution to get needed resources (i.e. Pell grants, work study). I utilized the same approach in college that I did as a kid. I figured what got me here would get me through this next level. I navigated my way through college, adapting to the ever-changing landscape. It was like living paycheck to paycheck.

Being an FGP often means being in uncharted water. My first federal job required me to relocate to another state. I had no savings and no connections to facilitate the transition. I was torn between turning down the job (easy) and having to find a place to live and money to cover my day to day needs (hard). This was complicated by knowing I had to pass classes to get certified in my field. I immediately saw the difference between me and those whose parents could fund their moves, creating a clear path for them to be successful. Through all of this, I learned the value of exposure and resources. I developed a tried and true survival mentality and method. I am confident in my ability to navigate situations and personalities. I stay true to myself and know my worth. This allows me to weather storms and persevere.



CHARLES CLARK

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF HUMAN CAPITAL STRATEGY AND DIVERSITY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

My name is Charles and I am a first generation professional from Detroit, Michigan, the oldest of three boys raised by a single mother who never made more than \$6/hr her entire life. I am a product of a mother with a strong work ethic, dedication, determination, and love but also a beneficiary of numerous government programs for the poor: free school lunches, food stamps, government cheese, and housing programs, etc. The grit of my mother

was engrained in me and although I grew up navigating through very tough, and sometimes embarrassing times, I was always determined to figure out a way to succeed. At 17 years old, I left home to join the Air Force and find a better way of life. Over a 24-year career, I had leaders, supervisors and mentors who encouraged and guided me through professional and "polish" development which afforded me opportunities I would have never otherwise experienced. They encouraged me to go to school at night to earn my undergraduate and graduate degrees, join professional associations to enhance my skills and knowledge of my profession, and to volunteer for the tough assignments to develop my own tools for future success. I followed their guidance and it led to a long and distinguished career. I was by-name-requested to serve on the Secretary of Defense's immediate staff at the Pentagon following 9/11. I also served as the DoD Presidential Support Program Manager, making final suitability determinations of personnel requiring access to the President, Vice President and other senior government officials. At first I felt I was beyond my abilities, but I had to learn to operate in this circle. This poor kid from Detroit, was now in meeting rooms with the President of the United States, or shooting the breeze with the Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan, or at a Holiday Party with Condoleezza Rice, the Secretary of State.

First Generation Professionals

Reflections on being the **FIRST**



LAURA COLÓN-MARRERO

EEO DIRECTOR
OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

My name is Laura, and I am a first generation professional (FGP) from Brooklyn, New York. I come from a Puerto-Rican migrant family. My father attended school through the third grade and my mother didn't graduate from high school. In my area, Puerto-Rican women typically left the house to get married and graduating with a high school diploma was a feat. Although I come from a blue-collar family, I benefited from a good education and the strong social networks that I formed growing up in a very diverse city. I had the privilege of attending an all-girls school, where I learned that the possibilities were endless. My school taught me that I didn't have to pursue the "traditional" paths of being a teacher, secretary, or nurse. I learned that I could pursue any career, if I put my mind to it. I was on my own at the age of 17, without the support most people had. I stood up for myself, while working part-time when possible. Most importantly, I created my own village. The social networks I made helped me navigate my high school and college experiences. The "Upward Bound" program helped me apply to college. My family and friend connections helped me get work experience. After college graduation, my experience with social work led me to get the following jobs: a sexual abuse investigator, a consultant for the Kettering foundation, and an ESL coordinator at the DC Department of Corrections via UDC. I transferred to work in EEO 12 years ago and I still feel like I am at the "infancy" stage in my career. Attending trainings help me sharpen my skills and ask questions when I need to. As an FGP, I'm still learning, but I have been successful in my career because of the support I received. I am fortunate to have mentors that helped me see my potential.



TAKERA GHOLSON

DEPUTY DIRECTOR
OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS AND DIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

My name is Takerá, and I am the first in my immediate family to attend college. Working hard to graduate high school with honors, I was accepted to all colleges where I applied. However, coming from a low-income family, I had no money to attend and no idea how the loan process worked. Fortunately, I was awarded a full scholarship to fund my education. The Honors College at Claflin University exposed me to leadership development courses each year, including etiquette and professional skills like interviewing and resume writing. Being a First Generation Professional, I had to learn many lessons and unwritten rules on my own as I progressed in my career. As I transitioned from a Big 4 into the Government space, I quickly learned that, like the private sector, career mobility for some was dependent upon non-merit-based factors. I thought that 'who you know' did not apply within a Government environment. However, that perspective changed as I noticed people leave, move on to other organizations, and take others along with them. So, it appears that social capital and networking, which many FGPs may not enter the workforce with, are an important factor for career advancement. Working through various professional environments, up to the management level, taught me to take control of my career, advocate for myself, obtain sponsorship, and take an interest in the success of others to achieve my own. I am now able to pass on my insight to others through mentorship.



WILLIAM HINMAN

DIRECTOR
DIVISION OF CORPORATE FINANCE
SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION

William Hinman, was named the Director of the Securities and Exchange Commission Division of Corporation Finance in May 2017. The Division seeks to ensure that investors are provided with material information in order to make informed investment decisions, provides interpretive assistance to companies with respect to SEC rules, and makes recommendations to the Commission regarding new and existing rules. Before serving at the Commission, Mr. Hinman was a partner in the Silicon Valley office of Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP, where he practiced in the corporate finance group. He has advised issuers and underwriters in capital raising transactions and corporate acquisitions in a wide range of industries, including technology, e-commerce, and the life-sciences. Before joining Simpson Thacher in 2000, Mr. Hinman was the managing partner of Shearman & Sterling's San Francisco and Menlo Park offices. He received his B.A. from Michigan State University with honors in 1977 and his J.D. in 1980 from Cornell University Law School, where he was a member of the Editorial Board of the Cornell Law Review. His parents could not provide a model of a professional career, but they worked extra jobs so that he could attend law school. After law school, Mr. Hinman's background motivated him to focus closely on the examples of a few law partners who served as his mentors. He valued mentorship so highly that he chose to relocate across the country early in his career to work in a small office lead by a partner with the reputation of being an excellent lawyer and strong mentor.

First Generation Professionals

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SAHIL LAUJI

HARVARD UNIVERSITY STUDENT,
2019 SUMMER INTERN, OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

My name is Sahil. I am a first-generation, low-income college student from Atlanta, Georgia, and a Junior at Harvard studying Government with a secondary in Comparative Religion. I also help run Harvard's first, first-generation, low-income preorientation program. My mother worked in the Real Estate industry until the market crash of 2008, but without formal education, she had challenges

finding jobs afterwards. My father worked at a convenience store/gas station and was shot and paralyzed in an armed robbery during my sophomore year of high school. After my father was shot, I moved in with him and took up a part-time job to help pay expenses at home. When applying for colleges, I came across the program QuestBridge that exposed low-income students, like myself, to top-tier institutions across the country. People from my background often do not think about applying to schools outside their state, so without outreach programs and the support of mentors I would not be at Harvard today. While my time at Harvard has been enriching, there are institutional challenges I need to overcome as a first-generation student. In academic settings and the extracurriculars I am involved with, it can be hard to relate to many of my peers who have the connections and networks that I just don't have. Although I excel in my academics, I face challenges navigating school resources, feeling supported, and adjusting to social life, unlike my wealthier peers who went to prep school and had college educated parents. Despite this, I have learned to not have shame in asking for help or support and instead am able to take initiative in doing so. Although I carry myself with confidence, not having the financial backing or social networks that many of my peers take for granted, it is challenging at times to succeed on my will and tenacity alone.



STEPHANIE MENDEZ

SENIOR MANAGEMENT ANALYST
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

My name is Stephanie Mendez, and I am a first-generation professional. I work as a Senior Management Analyst in the Office of the Secretary and am currently finishing a dual MBA from Johns Hopkins University. My family circumstances led me to call home to more than two-dozen cities along the east coast; from homelessness and shelters, to big city apartments, and small-town

homes. My mother, a high school graduate, worked as a bartender. She was also a drug addict. As a result, my siblings and I learned quickly how to care for ourselves and one another. This greatly influenced a sense of courage, strength and maturity, at very young ages. It is thanks to my upbringing that I enlisted in the United States Marine Corps, where I found family, belonging, standards, structure and a deep sense of drive and pride. My mentor, CySgt (Ret.) Donald Praska, consistently challenged me to be better than the life I was accustomed to. He entrusted me with great responsibility and pushed me to always strive for more. His molding and mentoring allowed me to earn several distinguished awards and led me to become a Drill Instructor, where it was my honor to influence and mentor hundreds of young women. Transitioning to a professional environment from my upbringing was an enormous adjustment. I often feel that regardless of my accomplishments or successes, that I will never really belong. But, I also feel that my upbringing has provided me with unparalleled drive, determination and natural competency. I have learned to persevere under the most extreme circumstances no matter what and more importantly, to influence others to do the same. My upbringing has given me the ability to interact with any audience, to have grit when necessary and to always treat others with humanity in mind.



SNIDER PAGE, MSM, JD, GSL

DEPUTY DIRECTOR
OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS AND DIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

My name is Snider "Page." I am a first generation professional (FGP) from a large family. Several of my siblings and I were First Gen college students. Coming from the inner city of Fort Wayne, Indiana, I knew my only way out was through education. The inspiration, encouragement, and

foundation I received from my family doctor and my parents helped me realize that my dreams were achievable, if I worked hard, went to school, and believed in myself. I joined the U.S. Army and served actively as a Combat Military Police Officer. As a result of my military service, I was able to obtain an Associate degree in 1998, Bachelor's degree in 1999, Master's degree in 2001, Doctor of Jurisprudence with honors in 2004, and complete the graduate certificate program in Government Strategic Leadership from the National Defense University in 2012, which were all obtained while holding a fulltime and/or part-time job(s). My education, along with my passion for civil rights and resolving conflict, helped me transition from a Litigation Attorney to an EEO Program Manager to currently serving as the Deputy Director for the Office of Civil Rights and Diversity at the Department of the Treasury. As an FGP, I can interpret situations through various diversity lenses with an "I can do more with less type of attitude," which allows me to bring cultural competency to the workplace and be more empathic to people's personal situations. However, I was raised to not count on others and I still find it hard to ask for help from others, especially in the area of job recommendations. As I move to next phase of my career, I realize that hard work alone is not enough. Mentorship and coaching are a necessary requirement to be a successful leader.

First Generation Professionals

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DOUGLAS PERRY

DEPUTY CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

My name is Doug and I am a first-generation professional. I grew up in West Virginia and my parents, a State Police officer (father) and homemaker (mother), instilled a strong work ethic in my brother and me. Attending college would not have been possible for me without student aid, part-time jobs, and cooperative education opportunities. During my high school years, I

mowed lawns, bagged groceries, and worked as a janitorial assistant. After graduating, I earned money for college by digging ditches, operating jackhammers, and other labor-intensive tasks for rural water system infrastructure projects in central West Virginia – dynamite was required to clear the way in rocky areas and I remember the pounding headaches caused by handling it. Fortunately, I was accepted into my college's cooperative education program during my sophomore year, and the program enabled me to gain valuable work experience and earn enough money to offset the rest of my college costs until graduation. I am thrilled to have been able to sponsor the creation of an IT intern program at NOAA that offers similar opportunities for students today. At age 58, I decided to pursue a bucket list item by enrolling in a Master's degree program and I will be the first in my family to obtain an advanced degree when I complete the coursework later this year. I have been blessed with parents that loved and challenged me, mentors that took an interest in me throughout high school and college, and a loving wife.



SEEMA RAO

TC 2100 GROUP DIRECTOR
U.S. PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

My name is Seema and I am a First Generation Professional (FGP). I grew up in India, the youngest of six children. My parents worked as farmers. My parents did not have formal education beyond elementary school, but they insisted that their children would be educated –that was their hope and vision for us. My mother went against cultural, conservative norms of the time and insisted her daughters would go to college. However, they couldn't provide any financial support or guidance

on how to achieve those educational goals. Fortunately for me, I had a great math teacher in elementary school who exposed me to math and encouraged me to excel, which led me being the first in my family to attain a STEM degree and become an engineer. Growing up with financial hardships taught me valuable skills-- independence, self-motivation, and self-reliance, all which helped me succeed in public schools, college, and work. I joined PTO in 1994 and am very committed to the organization. I have had amazing supervisors and mentors who recognized my strength and talent which helped me build my career through the ranks to Senior Executive Service (SES). Even with that, I struggled at times as an FGP. Once, I was nominated for a DOC executive-level fellowship assignment. I struggled to meet all the criteria for the assignment because I did not clearly understand the expectations of the assignment. I didn't want people to think I wasn't smart enough, that I didn't belong, or that I wasn't worthy of the positions I had, so I always tried to achieve goals on my own. That lesson taught me that it is okay to get clarification on expectations, and if needed, to find a resource to ensure I perform well. There is no shame in that and it doesn't make me less capable. Now as a SES member for the past seven years, those challenges and triumphs as an FGP have made me a better leader, strengthening my emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and ability to work with people from different socio-economic, cultural, and occupational backgrounds.



MICHELLE ROMANISHAN RICE, PH. D.

PHYSICAL SCIENTIST - PROJECT MANAGER
OFFICE OF TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT
BUREAU OF ENGRAVING AND PRINTING

I am a first generation professional from a small rural town in eastern Pennsylvania. I was raised by a traditional, blue-collar family in which my father was a successful, self-employed metal fabricator for over 30 years and my mother stayed home to raise me and my siblings and handled the books for the business. I took college prep and AP courses in high school to better prepare me for college and between my parents' financial backing, student loans, and earning the Valedictorian Award Scholarship my first year, I was able to attend a private, all women's college in Pennsylvania. I went on to attend graduate school at Colorado State University for Chemistry and was the first in my family to earn a doctorate. Graduate school was where I learned just how much grit, resiliency, and adaptability you must have to succeed in an environment that is full of landmines of unwritten rules. In addition to navigating the spider web of responsibilities that graduate school requires, my health was failing and during my 3rd year of my PhD program, I underwent a lateral craniotomy to remove a pineal tumor from my brain. Had I not developed the confidence to advocate for myself and be persistent, I might not be here today. My roots and spirituality, that never give up mentality, and believing in the woman my parents raised me to be, helped me demonstrate just how strong, capable, intelligent and resilient I am, especially when I faced and overcame numerous obstacles to successfully re-enter my doctoral program and finish my PhD after 10 years. Initially, negative perceptions about the prolonged timeframe to complete my PhD studies hindered my job search efforts, but thankfully, one hiring official at BEP was willing to hear my story and give me an opportunity. Today, I continue to draw upon the qualities I've developed from my life experiences to navigate and persevere in the professional world.

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ANA VALENTIN

ENTERPRISE SERVICE PROGRAM MANAGER
NOAA OCIO SERVICE DELIVERY DIVISION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

My name is Ana Valentín. I am a first generation professional and I inspired 50% of my family's next generation to complete a degree, and soon to be 90% by 2021. I did not have an easy ride going to college and entering the professional workplace. Living on a rural area required me to take two public transportation buses for a three-hour round-trip ride every day. I used the commute time to read or complete assignments, since mobile technologies did not exist at that time. In public schools, I completed advanced placement courses which provided me the academic tools to complete a Bachelor's degree in Secondary Math Education and a Master's degree in Public Health - Biostatistics. Once I completed my college degrees, I worked six years as a clinical researcher and adjunct instructor at a school of medicine and as a part-time adjunct statistics professor at various universities. While I was an adjunct professor, I inspired young working professionals, who worked full-time while attending evening classes to complete their college degrees, despite their adversities. After six years in academia, inspired by my parents who retired from the Puerto Rico Health Public Government, I joined the Federal government to become a civilian servant. I currently serve as an Enterprise Service Program Manager, leading various technology projects for the Agency. My new role motivated me to pursue a Doctorate in Science degree in Cybersecurity. As a full-time doctorate student, and soon to be an adjunct professor in the Fall semester, I will continue to inspire, mentor, and coach young women and minority students to pursue STEM careers and Federal government professional careers. In summary, I never will give up; I will continue to demonstrate resilience needed to complete my professional, academic, and personal goals; and I will continue to learn from everyone who has invested in my personal and professional growth. My motivator slogan is from the Marine Corps-- "Earned. Never Given".



VERONICA "RONNIE" VENTURE

DEPUTY OFFICER FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES/DIRECTOR FOR EEO AND DIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

My name is Veronica "Ronnie" Venture and I am a first generation professional (FGP) from Guyana. I moved to the United States when I was 5 to live with my dad, an employee at Eastern Airlines, and stepmom, a nurse's aide. My parents were educated in Guyana and although they instilled in me the will to do better, study harder, and get better grades, they didn't know how to help me navigate through college. Fortunately, I was able to attend a liberal arts college and subsequently law school on a scholarship. I distinctly remember how unprepared I was for college when I showed up to my dorm with only 2 suitcases and none of the dorm essentials like sheets. College was difficult as I battled with imposter syndrome, very little money and often feeling out of place. I was embarrassed to bring friends home on break. Law school taught and prepared me for a lot of the unwritten rules in my career, such as judge's expectations, etiquette, dress and appearance standards, and communication skills. This preparation was essential for when I started my career as a law clerk and became a trial attorney. I was much better prepared than I had been for college. I hope this initiative will lead to programs and workshops that give other FGPs a similar experience that I had in regards to my support system, whether that be a mentor or a colleague who will help FGPs navigate 'right off the bat' and enable them to fully leverage the qualifications they bring, as well as the grit and tenacity from overcoming obstacles and challenges. It is important for FGPs to remember: you are worthy, you are capable, and you do have the qualifications; now draw on your background as a strength and leverage that grit, loyalty and flexibility instilled in you by your parents and empower yourself to realize your full potential.

First Generation Professionals

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TSGT PAUL WITT

NCOIC, HONOR GUARD
KIRTLAND AIR FORCE BASE, NEW MEXICO
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

My name is Paul Witt and I am a first generation professional, who currently serves in the U.S. Air Force as the Non-Commissioned Officer In Charge of the Base Honor Guard, and formerly as an Equal Opportunity Counselor for both military and civilian complaint processes. I come from a background of manual labor and public service. My father is a tradesman in the automotive body repair and paint fields, and my mother was a Corrections Officer for over 25 years. Before working in a white-collar environment, I worked in car dealerships, auto production and assembly factories, auto repair shops, and a paint production facility. Coming from a “blue-collar” background, I acquired skills and lessons that have carried me far. My mechanical ability and curiosity have allowed me to become adaptable in new workplaces. I am able to take a step back and observe my surroundings, see how things work in my environment, and then integrate myself into the processes at hand. However, my background did not expose me to many of the unstated “unwritten rules” that govern how things operate and workplace expectations in an office environment. I quickly learned that understanding “unwritten rules,” along with mentorship for FGPs, are critical for success when switching to a “white collar” or new work environment. Understanding simple unwritten rules may inform employees where to sit in a conference room or which coffee mugs are used at each level. For example, when my first assignment I received was working on a Lieutenant General’s command staff, mugs that had a blue or gold ring were intended for high levels of leadership during VIP visits; not for casual use during the day, as I quickly learned. More complex unwritten rules govern how to address someone formally or informally. It took a little bit of time to understand why direct leadership would refer to me by my first name, but I was expected to refer to them by their rank and title. I quickly realized that mentorship is the key. The most influential moment in my career was finding a mentor to show me the ropes. Much of the leadership in the military were patient and took time to educate me on what was expected. I noticed this wasn’t the case in all workplaces, and unfortunately, not all career fields have the benefit of having an emphasis on mentorship. I am proud to be a First Generation Professional. Skills I have learned from overcoming adversity, coupled with my formal education, “blue collar” experiences, and innate abilities, enable me to analyze processes that are inefficient and think outside the box on how to make them better, and I don’t settle for mediocrity in my work.



DAVID ZIAYA

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

My name is David Ziaya and I am currently the Chief Administrative Officer of the U.S. Census Bureau. I’m a first generation professional from a small, rural-based community in Michigan of roughly 1,400 people. Going to college was always the plan for me although we couldn’t afford it. I earned some scholarships as the Salutatorian of my class and the scholarships covered about half of my room and board and tuition, so I supplemented my financial aid with a work study program. Having to balance work and school helped me develop a strong work ethic and a determination to succeed. I learned time management skills and how to develop my social networks. I was provided job training and leadership experience that I’ve used throughout my career in the Federal government. I was hired under the Outstanding Scholars program after numerous unsuccessful interviews for the HUD Intern Program. When I wasn’t hired under the intern program, at times, I felt inadequate and inferior to the HUD Interns since I didn’t graduate from an Ivy League school or have previous Federal government or private sector experience like most others in the program. However, I made it my job to get to know the interns and learn from them as well as make myself visible to the people they were working with. There were many ways I was unprepared for my first job in the city, but my lack of financial literacy was the most daunting. I chose a place to live based on my annual salary, but I wasn’t aware of all the deductions that would be processed, and my first paycheck barely covered half of my rent. I wish there would have been programs or classes to help think about this and felt foolish for not thinking about it when deciding where to live. I believe that my parent’s work ethic and sacrifices were massive influencing factors on who I am today, and that influence contributed to how I successfully navigated the workplace culture through observation, commitment and being genuine to my colleagues and the mission at hand.

Personal "Thank You" from Tinisha Agramonte

Many thanks to all the FGP original and key contributors who provided content to frame the FGP initiative and develop critical reference materials. I can't thank you enough for being with me on this journey and supporting me with your time, insights, creativity, and equally important, your nudges and encouragement to maintain momentum! I really appreciate you!

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Personal "Thank You" from Tinisha Agramonte

Thanks to all the federal agencies, educational institutions, and organizations that invited me to present on the FGP initiative:

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- U.S. Department of Labor
- U.S. Office of Personnel Management
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- U.S. Department of Homeland Security (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and U.S. Immigration Customs Enforcement)
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It takes a lot to start and execute an initiative of this magnitude. If I missed anyone who contributed to this this initiative, please blame the omission on my head, and not my heart. Thank You!

“

You are not
judged by the
height you have
risen, but from
the depth you
have climbed.

”

Frederick Douglass

The logo for First Gen Professionals. It features the words "First Gen" in a blue sans-serif font, with a blue briefcase icon positioned behind the letter "G" in "Gen". Below "First Gen" is the word "PROFESSIONALS" in a smaller, black, all-caps sans-serif font.

First Gen
PROFESSIONALS



**To access the FGP
Initiative website, scan
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