

# BEING FIRST

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### ABSTRACT

*Being First* is a podcast for the modern first-generation college student—an exploration of first-gen life on campus and a how-to for surviving undergrad while simultaneously finding the stride conducive for thriving. *Being First* will be for those students who are trailblazers amongst their families and communities—the firsts to make their way to college. Resolute in its mission to share unexplored narratives of first-genness, *Being First* is refreshing in its ability to inspire the aspirant first-gens of tomorrow.

First-generation college students possess a nearly invisible identity, one that has incredibly salient meaning in elite academic environments. *Being First* is about exposing the invisible and revising the deficit-driven message of the status quo. By sharing student testimony, community expert opinion, faculty perspectives, and sage advice, *Being First* will help to flip the script in pursuit of a transformation.

### PROBLEM

The conversations that uplift and inform first-generation college student are not being had in abundance or en masse. Acknowledgement is at the heart of *Being First*. This close-knit community exists on this campus and on campuses around this country. Our unity is derived from our stories. There exists no extensive structure with the capability of equipping first-generation college students, wholly, for what they will experience, nor does structure exist to unpack the baggage the comes with being first-gen. Isolated efforts make their own respective differences, often, in ways known only to them—but are these efforts guided by the voices of students whose stories are central to understanding first-genness, inequity, and prevailing trends? The primary goal of *Being First* is to create a platform that centralizes the voices of first-generation college students, offers visibility and a soap box for the marginalized—to create a haven for first-generation students and their values, opinions, knowledge, and visions. A haven that is created, supported, molded, and defined by first-gens, themselves.

### METHODS

The research methods we used in our summer research included surveys, interviews, benchmarking, meeting with stakeholders, and a literature review:

1. *Survey*: two surveys were conducted with first-generation college students and other students at Michigan. The first survey was conducted with 17 first-gen students. This survey consisted of questions about the first-gen identity, struggles, etc. Survey two was used to gage the interests in a podcast; 19 respondents.
2. *Interviews*: consisted of informal email interviews, conversations with two classes of Bridge Scholars, and meeting with parents at summer orientation.
3. *Benchmarking*: looking at programs at Michigan and other institutions to look at what already exists and what works. Made contacts at Brown University.

### SCHEDULE

**PODCAST 1: BEING DISADVANTAGED  
W/ CARLOS H. AND LANCE B.L.**

**PODCAST 2: BEING PROFESSIONAL  
W/ DR. MATTHEW SULLIVAN**

**PODCAST 3: BEING INTERSECTIONAL  
W/ VICTORIA VILLEGAS**

**PODCAST 4: BEING BETTER  
W/ DR. SANDRA LEVITSKY**

**PODCAST 5: BEING UPWARDLY MOBILE  
W/ DR. DWIGHT LANG**

### PODCAST

Based on our summer research, a podcast became our best strategy for reaching first-gen students, faculty, and staff with our message. Based on interviews, surveys, and benchmarking, we recognized the potentials of the podcast platform. It had the advantages of the MOOC, with none of the drawbacks. Our *Being First* podcast, now, is about elevating the conversation, reimagining what it means to be first-gen, analyzing the intersections of existence on college campuses, and engendering the conditions for furthered first-gen success at the University of Michigan and beyond. Removing the veil of invisibility, shedding a light on the issues and information, *Being First* seeks to embolden first-generation college students so that they may seize these short years of opportunities—to parlay opp-ortunities into growth-filled futures.

### REFLECT

The *Being First* team has grown tremendously from the capstone process. We believe that we have the ability to do more good work in the future. This was an invaluable process and we grew from each step. Thanks to the dedication of the BLI staff, we were able to effectively speak to students, create a podcast from feedback, explore the first-gen identity with students and faculty, build a sustainable podcasting infrastructure that will live on into at least next semester, we were able to present at the first-gen symposium, and book and share the stories of our incredible guests. We are looking forward to see what comes next, but we are so fortunate to have had the Barger Leadership Institute to help us get to where we are today. We are excited to take the ball and run with it on our own.

### UP NEXT

In the coming week, we will be finishing our first season of podcasts, with our final recording with Dr. Dwight Lang. The *Being First* team has established all of the connections and infrastructure that will be needed to continue the podcast into the next semester. We are looking forward to another season of *Being First* to air after the new year in winter semester of 2019. Next season, we hope to book more incredible guests to share what they know with our audience. We would like to get more students involved in the podcast, so that we have a diverse and eclectic mix of people offering up their views on first-genness. We are looking forward, also, to expanding our podcast to incorporate Google Play as a streaming service in addition to Apple iTunes.

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