
Finding Your Place

College Podcast Series Educator's Guide



This companion guide includes producer bios, episode descriptions, discussion questions, sample student assignments, suggestions for further reading, and complete transcripts of all episodes.

Contents

Welcome	3-5
Our Student Producer Team	6-7
Episode Descriptions and Sample Discussion Questions	8-19
Sample Finding Your Place Assignments	20-28
Self-Interviewing Assignment	22-23
Audio Introduction Assignment	24
Journal Response Assignment	25-26
Making Connections Assignment	27-28
Recommended Resources for Educators.....	29-30
References	31
Finding Your Place Episode Transcripts.....	32-78
Ep. 1: Welcome to the Podcast	32-33
Ep. 2: Why are You in College?	34-36
Ep. 3: Choosing a Major	36-40
Ep. 4: Getting Help	40-43
Ep. 5: Managing Fear in College	43-47
Ep. 6: Seeking Financial Aid	48-51
Ep. 7: Exploring the Value of Gen Eds	51-57
Ep. 8: Going Back Home	57-62
Ep. 9: Getting Involved Outside the Classroom	62-66
Ep. 10: Creating Your Place on Campus	66-70
Ep. 11: Connecting with Mentors	70-74
Ep. 12: Communicating with Your Professors	75-78
Acknowledgements.....	79
Creative Commons Licensing	80

"The first year of college has emerged as the critical barrier to college success, the point at which colleges experience the greatest loss of students."

-American Association of State Colleges and Universities

Hello and Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in the Finding Your Place Podcast.

We present this podcast series at a time when colleges across the country are grappling with issues related to student success and retention - a time when too many of our students are not reaching their potential and not *finding their place* in college. Can a podcast fix these problems? Certainly not. But we strongly believe that the student-led episodes of this podcast can help students make more sense of college and of themselves ... and ultimately increase their chances for success in college.

The Finding Your Place Podcast features compelling audio storytelling by six outstanding student producers from two Minnesota State institutions: Century College (a community and technical college) and Minnesota State University, Mankato.

In addition to sharing their own stories about the college experience, the producers have conducted recorded interviews with experts in higher education as well as created immersive storytelling moments where the microphone is taken into places on campus such as student organization spaces and faculty offices.

There are twelve core episodes in the series and, to date, ten supplementary episodes, each designed to shed light on the most important and challenging issues of the college experience. The podcast is one additional way we can support our students--all students, but especially first-generation students and those students experiencing struggles in college.

"Some students leave school because of money woes, and others realize that college isn't right for them. But many depart because the institution hasn't given the we-have-your-back support they need. The fact that 40 percent of college freshmen never make it to commencement is higher education's dirty little secret, a dereliction of duty that has gotten too little public attention"

-The Chronicle of Higher Education

Why Was This Podcast Created?

Above all, we wanted to create a sort of virtual mentoring experience where students could support other students in their journey through college. College is an unfamiliar and anxiety-producing experience for so many first-generation and first-year students. Our student production team represents a wide range of college experiences and stories, and they know what it's like to struggle in college and the ways those struggles can be overcome. In short, we created this podcast to make a difference in the lives of students, especially those struggling to find a place in college.

Why Storytelling?

In their study of a first-generation storytelling series at their regional comprehensive state university, King, Griffith, and Murphy (2017) found that ...

“[s]haring stories of these struggles and normalizing these experiences can be a profound first step toward improving awareness of these issues throughout institutions and among all students. Offering students a variety of means by which to improve their social, cultural, and psychological capital, while they manage the challenges of higher education, can support student success both on campus and after graduation” (p. 15).

The Finding Your Place Podcast uses the stories and voices of student producers with complex college stories to help new students realize they are not alone and to build their capital to make the most out of college.

Why Audio Storytelling and Podcasting?

Simply put, podcasts are accessible, engaging and relatively affordable to produce. The popularity of podcasts is exploding, and many current students are already accustomed to building playlists and listening to episodes during commutes and while relaxing or exercising. But the most important reason why we selected podcasting relates to the intimacy of audio. As Ong (2007) explains, “whereas sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sound pours into the hearer” (as cited in McHugh, 2014, p. 143). Audio storytelling, then, is intimate and portable, and we believe that an audio podcast educational supplement is an effective tool to help students make sense of college and find an increased sense of belonging on their campuses.

“Because U.S. colleges and universities seldom acknowledge how social class can affect students’ educational experiences, many first-generation students lack insight about why they are struggling and do not understand how students ‘like them’ can improve.”

-From the article, “Closing the Social-Class Achievement Gap”

How Should I Use This Resource with New or Returning Students?

Of course, how you use it is up to you. The podcast is meant to promote deeper exploration into a variety of important college topics. We assume that, in some way, you and your students will take the episode content further and make it local—exploring support and resources at your college or university through discussion and activities in whatever ways you see fit. This Educator’s Guide provides a few tools for faculty and staff, including a discussion guide for each episode and sample assignments that build on the strategies of mentoring, disclosure and dialogue found in the podcast. Build suggested playlists and customize as you see fit, though we do hope that all twelve episodes will be heard by your

students, as doing so may give your students a chance to build a stronger mentoring connection with the student producers and their journeys.

With the brilliance and generosity of the student producers who created this podcast, we now offer the podcast to you. We only ask that you consider sending us some feedback on the project so that we can understand the impact this work is having and then determine how the podcast could be reshaped and expanded in the years to come.

With great appreciation for all you do for students. This project is dedicated to their journeys.

Dave Engen

david.engen@mnsu.edu

Robert Jersak

robert.jersak@century.edu

Our Student Producer Team



Emily Albright (Minnesota State University, Mankato)

Emily majored in Communication Studies and minored in Mass Media. Emily is a known mentor and was heavily involved on campus as a Student Ambassador and a Community Advisor in the Residence Halls at Minnesota State. She graduated in Spring, 2019.



Sontiana (Sonti) Brandts (Minnesota State University, Mankato)

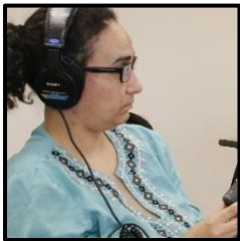
Sonti majored in Communication Studies and minored in Psychology. As she states in an early episode, Sonti was “navigating college from a wheelchair” after an automobile accident left her paralyzed. Sonti’s journey to college involved many ups and downs, starts and stops, and

uncertainty in her chosen field of study. Ultimately, however, she found her way and graduated in Spring, 2019.



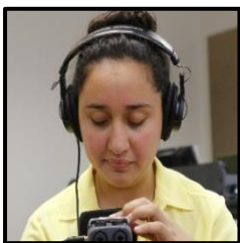
Monte Brown (Minnesota State University, Mankato)

Monte majored in Education with an emphasis in Health Education. He was student- teaching at the time this podcast was made. A significant part of Monte's educational story involved finding his place and his identity in college as an African-American man on a predominately white campus. He graduated in Spring 2019 and is ready to begin graduate school.



Tanita Cronk (Century College)

Tanita is completing her Liberal Arts transfer pathway with an emphasis in Creative Writing and Communication Studies. She served as the editor of The Century Times, and has been employed at Century College as a much-in-demand in-class and Peer Tutor. She is the mother of two children, and she's prepared to transfer to Metro State University during the 2019-20 year.



Ana Leyva (Minnesota State University, Mankato)

Ana is majoring in music education. She describes herself in the introductory episode as "just another first-generation Hispanic student," but she has gained much recognition and acclaim as an Honors student and in her role as a Learning Community Coordinator. She will graduate in 2020.



Marko Milosevic (Century College)

Marko is completing his Liberal Arts transfer pathway with an emphasis in Communication Studies and a direction towards public policy and advocacy. Marko has earned multiple Bronze Stars for his tours of duty in the US Army. He's a tireless voice for veterans in the classroom and in the community, a mentor and in-class tutor, and he continues to work with the Veteran's Defense Project to promote restorative justice for returning veterans.

Episode Descriptions and Sample Discussion Questions

Episode #1: Welcome to the Podcast (4.5 Minutes)

In this opening episode, we consider what college means in the 21st Century, we meet the student producers who will serve as our guides for this series, and we preview important college-related issues to be explored in later episodes.

Producer Narrators: Ana Leyva and Marko Milosevic

Listener Outcomes for this Episode:

- ☐ Meet and identify with the series student producers/mentors
- ☐ Preview the issues that will be explored in the podcast series

Potential Questions for Discussion:

1. This episode begins with a student comparing college to “crossing the whole Amazon river.” What are your reactions to this way of describing college? Does it connect with your experience so far?
2. Please name the six student producers and say one or two specific things you learned about each one.
3. Create a brief (15-30) second introduction for yourself as a college student, similar to what the producers have done in Episode 1. Please share something important about who you are and what brings you to college.
4. Which of the college issues that are previewed in this episode seem most important to you at this point? Why?

5. What's your reaction to the idea of an educational podcast? Do you enjoy listening to this kind of audio storytelling, or would you rather watch or read an educational supplement?

Episode #2: Why Are You in College? (7.5 Minutes)

What in the world are you doing here in college? In our second episode, we explore the motivating factors that can push us into and pull us through college. We'll also sit down with Dr. Brenda Flannery, Dean of the College of Business at Minnesota State University, Mankato, to learn more about what college means to those who have returned to campus and devote their life's work to higher education.

Producer Narrators: Emily Albright and Monte Brown

Guest(s): Dr. Brenda Flannery, Dean of the College of Business at Minnesota State University, Mankato

Listener Outcomes for this Episode:

- ☐ Reflect on their motivations for attending college
- ☐ Expand their understanding of college (from a packaged set of classes to a place for life-long professional, civic and personal growth)

Potential Questions for Discussion:

1. In what ways do you identify with the comments that Ana makes about college during her drive home?
2. Ultimately Ana comes to see college as an exciting “center of knowledge.” How does that view of college compare with your current view of college?
3. What one or two observations about college does Dr. Flannery make that you find meaningful or of value?
4. If your instructor or advisor hasn't already done so, ask them to share something about their personal story about college: why they went, how it changed them, etc.
5. Imagine you are recording yourself commuting home from college. Let yourself freely reflect about why you are in college.
6. Ana talks with Dr. Flannery about how college allows for older individuals and younger individuals to have meaningful connections and conversations. Why is this valuable? What could you do to have more of these kinds of interactions?

Episode #3: Choosing a Major (9.5 minutes)

How are you supposed to decide what to do with the rest of your life? In this episode, we dive into one of the most confusing aspects of the college experience: choosing a major. To figure this out, we'll spend some time with Gina Maahs-Zurbey, Academic Advisor and Student Relations Coordinator at Minnesota State University, Mankato. We'll also follow producer Sonti Brandts in her multi-semester struggle to find the major that fit her skills ... and her interests.

Producer Narrators: Ana Leyva and Marko Milosevic

Guest: Gina Maahs-Zurbey, Academic Advisor and Student Relations Coordinator at Minnesota State University, Mankato

Listener Outcomes for this Episode:

- ☐ Think critically about the process of selecting a major program/field of study
- ☐ Understand the complexity and common pitfalls of selecting a major

Potential Questions for Discussion:

1. What have you been told by friends and family about selecting your major in college?
2. How, if at all, do you identify with Sonti's story about selecting her major? What parts of her story are similar to yours? Different than yours?
3. In her interview, Gina Maahs-Zurbey talks about the importance of focusing on *what you like to do*, rather than just trying to choose a major or please those around you. What does this mean to you? Why might it be important?
4. Related to Question 3, what kinds of things do *you* like to do? How does this relate to your planned major or program of study?
5. Describe two concerns or questions you have about your planned major (or a program or major field of study that you think may become your major)? What will you do to get these questions answered?

Episode #4: Getting Help (11.5 minutes)

No one can survive college completely on their own, but what happens when we don't ask for the help we need? In our fourth episode, we return to Gina Maahs-Zurbey, the MSU Mankato Academic Advisor we met back in Episode 3. Gina's got an important story to tell about getting the help you need in college, and she recently performed this story at a Finding Your Place live storytelling event. As always, our producers provide some additional context and support along the way.

Producer Narrators: Emily Albright and Monte Brown

Guest: Gina Maahs-Zurbey, Academic Advisor and Student Relations Coordinator at Minnesota State University, Mankato

Listener Outcomes for this Episode:

- ☐ Examine the choices students make when facing challenges to their success
- ☐ Consider the resources that are available for support, and the positive impact of those resources
- ☐ Build confidence in asking for help when help is needed

Potential Questions for Discussion:

1. Gina's story is quite complex and covers several different important moments and issues in her college journey. Describe at least three issues that Gina's story seems to raise about college success.
2. What one topic or theme in Gina's story did you most identify with? Why
3. Getting to the overall theme of the episode, what does Gina's story teach us about getting help in college? What choices does she make, and what impact do these choices have on her outcomes?
4. What specific action(s) might Gina's story inspire you to take for your well-being and success in college?

Episode #5: Managing Fear in College (11 minutes)

Fear is such a common and powerful emotion in college, and if you're feeling anxious, you're certainly not alone. In this episode, Producers Tanita Cronk and Ana Leyva walk us through their social and personal anxieties in college, examining the ways they've been able to build relationships as well as get the counseling/advising support they've needed to feel more comfortable at college and to keep their fears to manageable proportions.

Producer Narrator: Tanita Cronk

Guest: Frank Schultz, Counselor at Century College

Listener Outcomes for this Episode:

- ☐ Understand that fear is an entirely normal, common and natural emotion that students routinely experience in their college journey
- ☐ Describe the positive impact that personal counseling resources on campus can have
- ☐ Locate and consider using those counseling resources as needed

Potential Questions for Discussion:

1. This episode features a sequence in which students on campus talk about their fears as they started college. Which of these fears did you have, or do you also have currently? What other fears or concerns do you have about college that weren't mentioned?
2. Can you share a story about a time when you experienced a fear, and then overcame that fear in an educational setting (college or high school)?
3. Visit the webpage for the Counseling/Advising Center at this college/university. How do the services provided there match up with what Tanita and Frank discussed in their conversation?
4. How did this episode make you feel or think about fear in college?
5. What would you like to see done on campus to help you and/or other students better manage severe anxiety or excessive fear while in college?

Episode #6: Seeking Financial Aid (10 minutes)

Money is always a challenge, but college expenses make earning, borrowing and managing money even that much more challenging. In this episode, Faculty Producer Dave Engen joins a first-year student on campus as the student meets with a financial aid expert for the first time. After that, Producer Tanita Cronk seeks out wisdom from a resources advocate who has experienced college while living in the crisis of poverty.

Producer Narrators: Emily Albright and Monte Brown

Guests: Mareese Brown, MSU Mankato student, Rachel Tanquist, Financial Aid Advisor at Minnesota State University, Mankato and An Garagiola-Bernier, graduate student at Hamline University and public policy advocate.

Listener Outcomes for this Episode:

- ☐ Define the various types of tuition support that are considered a part of “financial aid”
- ☐ Locate and consider using financial aid support resources as questions arise
- ☐ Understand the additional challenges that students living in the crisis of poverty face as they pursue their degrees, and consider mindset strategies for continued persistence and resilience

Potential Questions for Discussion:

1. What questions do you have about financial aid?
2. According to the financial aid advisor, what types of tuition support are included in the definition of “financial aid”?
3. In Tanita’s interview, An Garagiola-Bernier mentions that it’s sometimes hard for marginalized to approach a person in authority in college. Why do you think this can be hard, and what advice does she offer to overcome this barrier?
4. Tanita and An also talk about the way that individuals who are living in poverty sometimes feel stigmatized or out-of-place in college. What’s your reaction to this part of their discussion?

Episode #7: Exploring the Value of Gen Eds (11.5 minutes)

In this episode, we dare to ask a question that many of you are wondering about: *why do you have to take all of these general education courses?* Our producer team sits down for a roundtable discussion about the give and take of their gen ed experiences, and then Producer Monte Brown looks back on a general education course that ended up having a powerful impact on the way he saw himself as an African-American man and a scholar.

Producer Narrators: Ana Leyva and Marko Milosevic

Listener Outcomes for this Episode:

- ☐ Understand the purpose and potential long-term educational value of general ed courses
- ☐ Consider the ways that general education curriculum can deepen our sense of self and cultural identity.

Potential Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do you think general education classes are required for most college programs and degrees?
2. Several of the student producers talk about unexpected things they gained for general education courses. Can you talk about a class you've taken in college or high school that surprised you, maybe one you didn't necessarily want to take but that positively impacted you in some way?
3. What is your reaction to Monte's story about his African-American literature course?
4. What one specific action related to general education courses might this episode help you take?
5. Visit the college's/university's webpage and explore the general education curriculum (transfer goals, common graduation objectives, etc.). Come back to class and be able to explain the main categories and the college's rationale for their general education curriculum.

Episode #8: Going Back Home (12.5 minutes)

College changes who you are, and that can mean that “going home” can take on a different meaning after you've started college. In the eighth episode, our FYP producers take their audio recorders home, giving us a few of the sights and sounds of the places and people in their lives. But the focus of this episode is a story told by Faculty Producer Dave Engen. Engen reflects on the tensions of being caught between two worlds in college: the world of the professional middle class that college was preparing him to join and the working-class community in which he was raised.

Producer Narrator: Tanita Cronk

Guest(s): Dave Engen, Minnesota State University Mankato faculty, Communication Studies

Listener Outcomes for this Episode:

- ☐ Reflect on the potential challenges to family and community life caused by the college experience
- ☐ Describe the experience of *cultural disjunction*, in which the culture of college for some students is potentially in conflict with religious, ethnic and socioeconomic/class cultural practices and beliefs

Potential Questions for Discussion:

1. The producers recorded sounds of loved ones and family routines at home. Describe one of your favorite sounds from the place you call home.
2. How has your decision to attend college impacted the relationships you have with your friends and family back home?
3. Dave Engen's story relates directly to being a first-generation college student from a working-class community. If you're the first in your family to attend college, reflect on some of the positive aspects of being first as well as some of the challenges you've experienced in college that you believe connect to being first-generation.
4. As stated in the conclusion of this episode, Engen's story is about a white male who went to college in the late 1980s. His story is likely different than yours, but try to identify 1-2 ways that his story possibly connects to your experiences.

Episode #9: Getting Involved Outside the Classroom (11 minutes)

In our ninth episode, we explore the important learning experiences that happen when we leave the college classroom and get involved with student life. Producer Emily Albright reflects on her first shaky steps into on-campus clubs and activities, and then later playfully crashes a celebration for a student-run newspaper, getting the staff members' thoughts on what getting involved on campus means to their college education.

Producer Narrators: Emily Albright and Monte Brown

Listener Outcomes for this Episode:

- ☐ Identify the common barriers to on-campus involvement in student life activities
- ☐ Describe the likely positive outcomes of getting involved on campus
- ☐ Locate centers for student life activities and consider getting involved

Potential Questions for Discussion:

1. What advice have you already been given about getting involved on campus? How has that advice maybe been hard to follow?
2. What, if anything, has prevented you from getting involved in outside the classroom activities—either in college or high school?
3. What parts of Emily's story connected most with your own experiences with getting involved in college?
4. If you had to create a metaphor for what seems to be happening to the students featured in this episode who are involved with the newspaper, what metaphor would you create?
5. What benefits have you already received or do you believe you will receive from getting involved in outside-of-the-classroom activities?
6. What kinds of out-of-class activities seem most interesting to you? How can you find out if your college/university offers these activities?

Episode #10: Creating Your Place on Campus (10.5 minutes)

How do you turn college space into your space? In this episode, we bring the title of our series into focus. Producers Ana, Marko and Monte share sounds from their favorite places on campus, while Producer Marko sits down with Maxwell Poessnecker, Associate Director of Student Life and the Director of the first U.S. community college LGBTQ Center. Together, they examine the specific challenges that LGBTQ+ students can face as they try to find security and visibility, as well as the general challenges that all students face as they seek a space where they truly belong.

Producer Narrators: Emily Albright and Monte Brown

Guest: Maxwell Poessnecker, Associate Director of Student Life and the Director at Century College

Listener Outcomes for this Episode:

- ☐ Shift perceptions of campus: from an impersonal institution to a community of belonging
- ☐ Identify and locate spaces on campus that inspire a sense of belonging
- ☐ Understand the challenges that LGBTQ+ students can face as they enter college

Potential Questions for Discussion:

1. Have you found a place on campus where you feel like you can be yourself, where you feel at home? If so, please talk about where and why.
2. Imagine that you were required to spend an hour in a place on campus where you don't normally go, but feel like you would probably benefit if you went there. Where would you go first, and why?
3. As Marko and Maxwell discuss, part of finding your place on campus is about feeling welcome, safe and included. Do you feel welcome, safe and included here? And what can you do to help others feel this way?

Episode #11: Connecting with Mentors (10.5 minutes)

We've said it before, but no one really succeeds in college on their own. In this episode, our FYP producers get together to share their thoughts on being mentored in college and how it can make all the difference in achieving your goals. Producer Monte Brown then goes back to interview a vitally important mentor he met on his journey to becoming an education major and teacher.

Producer Narrators: Ana Leyva and Marko Milosevic

Guest: Dr. Mymique Baxter, Student Relations Coordinator at Minnesota State University, Mankato

Listener Outcomes for this Episode:

- ☐ Highlight the importance of mentors in college success and persistence
- ☐ Identify possible personal mentors and consider ways to signal a desire for being mentored

Potential Questions for Discussion:

1. In your own words, what is a mentor? Do you currently have a mentor like Mymique to support your college experience?
2. What comments from the student producer roundtable discussion on mentoring stuck out to you the most? Why?
3. What do you believe are the barriers to finding a mentor on this college/university campus? How could those barriers be overcome?
4. Imagine that you're going to set up an appointment for a conversation with a faculty or staff member on campus that you respect. You tell them you're trying to learn more about mentoring and would like to ask them about their lives and their approach to mentoring. Share at least five questions you would ask this person.

Episode #12: Communicating with Your Professors (9.5 minutes)

Depending on how you're raised, interacting with people in authority can be frightening, frustrating and something you'd rather avoid. In our final core episode, Producer Tanita Cronk bravely seeks out one of her professors during office hours to learn more about office visits, while other college and university faculty offer their advice for making the most out of your in-class and out-of-class interactions with your professors.

Producer Narrators: Ana Leyva and Marko Milosevic

Guest: Dr. Amanda Olson, Communication Faculty at Century College

Listener Outcomes for this Episode:

- ☐ Describe the importance of communication with instructors/professors
- ☐ Identify possible strategies for successful and mutually-beneficial interactions with instructors/professors

Potential Questions for Discussion:

1. Generally speaking, why is it difficult for you or other students you know to communicate with a professor or teacher?
2. But what are the benefits to communicating with professors or teachers? List and discuss as many benefits as you can.
3. Can you tell a story about an interaction with a professor that went well, maybe even surprisingly well?
4. Based on what you heard in this episode, what are 2-3 things you could do to build or strengthen supportive relationships with your professors/instructors?
5. Put yourself in the shoes of a professor/instructor who really wants their students to succeed. How would you want your students to interact with you? How could you get them to visit your office hours more often?

Sample Finding Your Place Assignments

In the pages that follow, you will find four potential assignments for use with the Finding Your Place Podcast Series. Feel free to use any of these however you see fit, or to create modified versions of the assignments to better suit your students.

The Self-Interviewing Assignment:

One of the powerful features of the Finding Your Place podcast is hearing how student producers responded in their own voices to questions about the college experience. Much of what you hear from the student producers comes from them holding a microphone in front of them in a quiet room and answering questions about college. The assignment here can be used at the beginning of your semester to give your students the opportunity to participate in something like the process used by the student producers. The assignment features writing rather than recording but other than that it is very similar to the kinds of reflective work done by the student producers in the podcast.

The Audio Introduction Assignment:

Audio recordings like those found in the podcast offer a powerful point-of-entry into the lives of our students. This assignment taps into that power. Basically, students call your office and record a message about themselves. You listen to these recordings to learn more about who your students are and what they need from the course. Some instructors elect to play these in class (with permission of course). Instructors with audio editing experience may wish to pull out, for example, one powerful comment per student in the class and play a collection of sounds (again with permission). The most common use of this assignment, however, is for you to simply listen to your students as they share some of their thoughts about college. Students could be given credit for participation but should not be graded on the content. The assignment is best used by instructors whose campus phones make recordings that come to email and can be easily downloaded. *This assignment probably wouldn't be used with the Self-Interviewing Assignment, as those assignments are quite similar.*

The Journal Response Assignment:

If you are looking for an assignment to keep students active with some or all of the episodes of the podcast, this writing assignment may be of value. Students can be asked to turn these in electronically or to bring hard copies to class and put into small groups to discuss the content. In some way, however, the assignment should produce both connection to the podcast episode and some kind of class dialogue.

The Making Connections Assignment:

Student producers in this series really benefited from their connections and interviews with faculty and staff. Having your students go out and interview others on campus can expand their support networks and the comfort zones while bringing the lessons of the series full circle. You probably already know this, but it can be helpful to let support staff and center directors know in advance that students may be soon approaching them to complete this assignment. We've included three potential options with this assignment for students to share the result of their visits - use or revise these options to suit your needs.

We also just include a reminder here that students may be discussing confidential issues with staff, and that they certainly have the right to privacy when it comes to the content of these visits when personal matters are discussed.

Potential Simplified Grading Rubric for these Assignments:

Check Plus: You've done all the parts of the assignment. You make specific connections to the podcast episodes when requested. Your responses, descriptions and/or explanations are very clear and insightful.

Check: These are just fine. Not exceptional, but fine. Clear, understandable responses. Adequate reflection, and your insights are likely to be useful for classroom conversation.

Check Minus: Responses are unclear or have several minor problems (typos, surface-level discussion, etc.). Activities or questions have been missed, or you've done the very minimum to pass the assignment. Let's talk about your work here.

Finding Your Place Self-Interviewing Assignment

The Finding Your Place Podcast Series is built on the belief that student stories and perspectives matter. For this series, many students have been interviewed ... and now it's your turn. In this assignment, you will write an *imagined* interview with yourself. Your goal is to help me (your instructor) understand who

you are as a person, student, and future professional. This may even help you clarify your goals for this semester as well.

Your interview should look something like this sample...

The Participants:

Sheila Newby, a first year college student.

Dante Davis, a local journalist and podcaster for Finding Your Place.

The Setting:

Dante and I sat down to talk in the cafeteria, located in the center of West Campus.

Your setting can be anywhere and your interviewer can be anyone you like - it can be one of the FYP student producers or anyone you choose. You will then have the person ask you questions, like the interview below ...

The Interview/Conversation:

Dante: Thanks so much for meeting with me. I've got a few notes about you, and I see that you're in your first of college. Is that right?

Sheila: Yes, that's right.

Dante: And I see you plan to major in Marketing. Can you say why?

Shelia: Well, Dante, I'm glad you asked. My mom works for small trucking company and runs their social media. She seems to like her job so I thought maybe a degree in Marketing would be a good fit for me.

Dante: I see. Do you have any other interests you thought about exploring in college?

Shelia: Well, I did choir in high school and I thought about majoring in music but I just didn't think that was so realistic. I mean I know I cannot make a living as a musician, but maybe I can minor in that. I don't know just yet.

Dante: I should probably step back, and start a little earlier. Can you tell our readers a little about yourself? Paint a fuller picture of who you are?

Shelia: Well, I grew up North St. Paul. I was a track-and-field athlete and also active in the martial arts. But I hated high school, you know, I just did. I did love choir, like I mentioned, but mostly I disliked school.

(this would continue).

Dante: Ok, that gives me some idea of your background. Interesting. Let's fast forward to your life in college. How would you describe college for you so far? What's it like?

The paper should be structured and formatted like the sample above. The finished paper should be approximately 5-6 pages.

Your interview should have roughly 15 questions (with some follow-up questions). The seven questions below are required - you must get the answers to these questions into your interview in some way. The other 7-10 questions will come from you.

1. Why did you choose college? And what brings you to this particular college/university?
2. What's your experience with college so far? Are you just starting, returning for another degree, or something else?
3. What excites you about being in college?
4. What fears or concerns do you have about this semester?
5. Can you share a story about when you felt really good in a school setting? Maybe a great class or time with a teacher you really liked...anything you'd like to discuss.
6. Can you share a story about a time when you felt not so good in a school setting?
7. What are your hopes and dreams for life after graduating college?

A Few Additional Guidelines:

Be sure your interviewer asks follow-up questions and pushes for specific examples and elaboration. In other words, imagine that your interviewer is a fairly good interviewer. Follow-up questions might be "Can you tell me more about that?" or "Can you give me an example of that?" or "I'm a bit confused...can you clarify?" These are just a few potential follow-ups--the key is that sometimes the person doing the interview with you pushes for more information and detail.

- Create a flow to the interview. You need not organize this in a linear manner, but be sure there is some logic to the pattern of the interview. Don't make it just a series of random questions. Don't feel like you have to answer the mandatory questions in order--how you organize is up to you.
- Make the interview conversational. Don't create answers that are too long (you don't want one answer to be more than a quarter page or so). Let there be a pattern of interaction between you and the imagined person doing the interview with you.
- Have fun and be creative, while at the same time help me learn more about you.

Finding Your Place Audio Introduction Assignment

*"Think of the kind of world you'd like to live and work in.
What will you need to know to build that world?"*

Demand your teachers teach you that."

- Colman McCarthy

The purpose of this first assignment is to get you to communicate with your instructor and to open an important channel of interaction, which will encourage feedback and support for your learning.

Look over the seven questions below and respond to any three or four of them. Leave me a voicemail message at (_____).

Please start your message with your name and the class you're in, and re-read the questions you're answering. Be yourself. There is no way to do this assignment wrong. Don't worry if you lose a thought or struggle to say something - just share with me what you are comfortable sharing. There is no time limit on these, but most often they are between 3 and 5 minutes in length (3-5 minutes for the entire recording, not 3-5 minutes per question). Let yourself talk as you feel comfortable, etc.

1. What brings you to this college? What are your hopes and dreams for life after graduating college?
2. What's your experience with college so far? Are you just starting, returning for another degree, or something else?
3. What excites you about being in college?
4. What fears or concerns do you have about this semester?
5. Can you share a story about when you felt really good in a school setting? Maybe a great class or time with a teacher you really liked...anything you'd like to discuss.
6. Can you share a story about a time when you felt not so good in a school setting?
7. Are there any skills you really want/need to build to be successful in college? What do you "demand" you learn in this First Year Seminar class?

Finding Your Place Journal Response Assignment

This assignment asks you to listen to and critically interact with assigned episodes of the Finding Your Place Podcast. You will complete one three-part journal entry for each episode of the podcast that you've been assigned by your instructor.

Episodes that Your Instructor Has Assigned:

- ☐ **Episode 1:** Welcome to the Podcast
- ☐ **Episode 2:** Why are You in College?
- ☐ **Episode 3:** Choosing a Major
- ☐ **Episode 4:** Getting Help
- ☐ **Episode 5:** Managing Fear in College
- ☐ **Episode 6:** Seeking Financial Aid
- ☐ **Episode 7:** Exploring Gen Eds
- ☐ **Episode 8:** Going Back Home

- ☐ **Episode 9:** Getting Involved Outside the Classroom
- ☐ **Episode 10:** Creating Your Place on Campus
- ☐ **Episode 11:** Connecting w/ Mentors
- ☐ **Episode 12:** Communicating w/ Your Professors
- ☐ **Supplementary:** _____
- ☐ **Supplementary:** _____

Each journal on a podcast episode should include the following heading and all three sections below ...

Your Name: **Sample:** David Roberts
Episode# and Title: **Sample:** Episode #2 Why Are You in College?
Date of Listening: **Sample:** September 25th, 2019

Part 1: Personal Connections to Favorite Moments

Part one asks you to select two (2) interesting and specific observations for each episode of the podcast that you've been assigned. Each of your two selections should include **1)** a specific moment from the podcast (if it's something someone said, quote the observation and indicate who said it) and **2)** 100-150 words about why you found this idea of interest and/or how it connects to your life as a college student.

Sample:
(1) *Originally college mattered to me because, well, I saw my parents struggle a lot growing up. So initially that was why college was the point. To go and it assured me a job...but now that it's my fourth year in college I've realized it's just a center for knowledge...it's such a great place to go if you want to expand your horizons"—Ana Leyva*

(2) I really identify with this passage. Like Ana's parents, I've watched my parents struggle a fair amount financially. My dad was laid off two years ago and, while he got a new job, it's not as good as his other one. So I've come to college to make sure I get a good job. That's really important. But I also agree with this "expand your horizons" idea. I want to learn new things about myself and about our world, I really do. In my junior year I hope to study abroad, though I'm not sure about the money. I'm only in my first year, but I'm going to be interested in how college is going to change me. I can already tell it's going to be quite a ride.

Or, highlight a moment of sound from the episode that really moved you or connected with your life.
Like this:

Samples:

(1) Ana starting her car and driving home - (2) I really enjoyed this sound and it made me think of my own drive home. I'm liking college so far, but when I get into my car and begin driving home I feel a certain kind of freedom. I miss home. And college takes me away from home in ways I don't always like. Being in the car, I can really feel that push-pull between my reasons for going to college and why the people at home want me to go to college.

Dr. Brenda Flannery's voice was great. I've never met Dr. Flannery. Maybe I never will. But I loved the passion I heard in her voice when she talked about college. It was so clear she had been moved by her experience. I also liked hearing her laugh with Ana and have what seemed like a really equal conversation with a student. This makes me think about the kinds of connections I want to make on campus.

Part 2: Good Advice

In episode 2-12 (and the supplemental episodes), student producers interview people who can offer good advice, or the producers offer good advice themselves. In this second portion of your journal entry, list one piece of advice offered in this episode. Restate the advice, and then write a few sentences on why this advice is good for you to take, even if it seems hard to do right now.

Sample:

In the "Managing Fear in College" episode, I really appreciated the advice that Tanita's counselor Frank gave. He said that we should think about trying a counselor visit on a trial basis - just go in, meet the counselor, talk just a little bit about how I'm doing, and then think about coming back if it went well. I think I would benefit from visiting a counselor, but that's just not something men really do in my family. I like the idea of not spilling all my guts out, but just trying a short trial conversation. I guess I didn't know I could do that.

Part 3: My Question(s)

In this final part, please come up with one question you have after listening to the episode. Feel free to have more than one. Offer a few sentences of explanation for why you wrote this question.

Sample:

Question: Why is it that when people talk about college they so often talk about getting a job?

The whole episode just got me thinking about how almost everything I've heard about college is about getting a job. I liked how Ana and Dr. Flannery talked about so many other things. It got me thinking about college, but it also got me wondering why so much emphasis is placed on jobs.

Finding Your Place Making Connections Assignment

One of the central ideas of the Finding Your Place Podcast Series is that nobody really succeeds in college entirely on their own. Professors, staff, student tutors, counselors, advisors and alumni are all people who can provide support and guidance along the way in college. In a way, you get the chance to build a team of people who can cover your back and answer your questions. You may have already started making these connections, but this assignment will push you to strengthen and expand those connections, too.

For this assignment, you will choose any three (3) of the seven connection activities below. Each activity relates directly to a FYP episode, and you'll want to listen to that specific episode before completing its associated activity. Take notes during your visit; your instructor will explain how you will report back and share what you learned.

Meet the Staff of the Disability Services Office

Episode 4: Getting Help (and Supplementary Episode: Disability Visibility)

Make a short appointment to meet with the director of the disability services office (or another support staff member there) at your campus. Find out about the services available to students, and learn how the staff there help students succeed. If you have specific questions or concerns about your needs, be sure to ask (you do not need to disclose any of these details to the instructor or to the class).

Meet a Counselor or Advisor on Campus

Episode 5: Managing Fear in College

Visit the counseling / advising center at your campus. Find out about the hours, ability to drop-in or schedule appointments, and the resources available for degree planning and/or mental health. If you have a pre-arranged advisor or counselor, be sure to try and meet with that specific person. If you have specific questions or concerns about your personal needs or degree pathway, be sure to ask (you do not need to disclose any of these details to the instructor or to the class).

Meet a Financial Aid Advisor on Campus

Episode 6: Seeking Financial Aid

Schedule a meeting with a financial aid advisor or support staff member at your campus. Find out about the types of financial aid available to you. Consider how the services provided there match up with what Mareese and Dave were able to discover. If you have specific questions or concerns about your financial needs, be sure to ask (you do not need to disclose any of these details to the instructor or to the class).

Meet a Member of the Curriculum Committee or Council

Episode 7: Exploring the Value of Gen Eds

Ask any of your professors if they can direct you to someone involved with setting the college curriculum (the outcomes of the courses your institution offers). Meet with a member of that committee or council, and ask questions about the general education curriculum (transfer goals, common graduation objectives, etc.). Ask them if they'd be willing to explain the main categories and

the rationale for the general education curriculum. Ask how students can be involved in promoting and revising college curriculum.

Meet the Director of Student Life, or any Student Life Staff Member

Episode 10: Finding Your Place (and Supplementary Ep.: Crossing Cultural Boundaries)

Seek out a place on campus where you don't normally go but feel like you would enjoy. Maybe it's visiting the multicultural center on campus, the veterans' center, LGBTQ center, or general student life or student clubs area. Take notes on what you see and how you feel there. Ask to have a brief conversation with a director or staff member to chat about the opportunities and resources available for students there.

Meet with Someone You Respect at College

Episode 11: Connecting with Mentors

Set up an appointment to have a conversation with a faculty or staff member on campus for whom you have a good deal of respect. Tell them you are trying to learn more about mentoring and would like to ask them about their lives and their approach to mentoring. You should have at least five good questions to keep the conversation going.

Meet with a Professor During Office Hours

Episode 12: Communicating with Your Professors

Schedule a 15-minute office appointment with one of your professors. You can tell them this is for an assignment and use this opportunity to learn more about who they are personally and professionally. Sample questions could include, "Can you tell me a little more about yourself?" or "Why do you love what you teach?" If you have specific questions or concerns about your needs in that class, be sure to ask those questions as well (you do not need to disclose any of these details to the instructor or to the class).

How to Earn Credit for These Visits:

Your instructor will likely choose one of these methods for sharing what you learned in these visits ...

Paragraph Option: Write 2-3 short paragraphs about each visit. Be sure to describe what you experienced in each visit, what you learned from the other person, and also how you felt during the visit. Be sure to include any crucial words of advice that you learned so that you can remember this advice later on.

"Thank You" Option: Write a "thank you" message to each person you met with for this assignment. Be sure to include when you met, what you remembered from the visit and an appreciation for this person's time and energy. Before you deliver or send these messages, you'll show them to your instructor for this class so that you can receive credit for your work.

Oral Report Option: Using your notes, and maybe just a short outline, talk about your visits with the class. Summarize the highlights of your experiences in 2-3 minutes and be sure to share any important words of advice or tips that may benefit your classmates.

Recommended Resources for Educators

Throughout our work with audio storytelling and documentary, we've found a number of important resources -articles, scholars and places – that helped us make sense of what we were doing, what we were observing, and what this work might mean for our colleagues in higher education ...

Robert Coles's book, *The Call of Stories* provided a model for empathy and interest in the lives of those around us. Of course, **David Isay's** book *Listening is an Act of Love* and **StoryCorps.org** gave us a clear model for audio recording and engagement with the lives of others.

No one academic article has been more important to our work than **"Closing the Social Class Achievement Gap: A Difference-Education Intervention Improves First-Generation Academic Performance and All Students' College Transition"** by Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin. The article examines how first-generation students benefit when messages about college are infused with realistic discussions of the way social class backgrounds impact the college experience. The research uses a sophisticated methodology and, we believe, makes a strong case for mentoring interventions like the Finding Your Place Podcast as we work to provide this "difference-education" through the stories of our student producers.

Cultural disconnects are certainly at play in college. One of the strongest voices for critical theory in higher education, **Gloria Ladson-Billings** conceptualizes culturally-responsive teaching as a deep exploration into the lives of students, seeking out the moments of disconnection between them and their learning.

There are important, intersectional social class issues as well. **Jennifer Silva's** book, *Coming Up Short: Working-Class Adulthood in an Age of Uncertainty* challenged us to see how an intense focus on self-esteem and personal development might push students towards a confessional "therapy narrative" and away from skill-building activities that might help them compete for 21st century jobs.

Facing Social Class: How Societal Rank Influences Interaction promoted important thinking about class-based differences. Editors **Susan Fiske** and **Hazel Rose Marcus** have chosen an array of academic articles to challenge standard practices in higher education. We referred frequently to **"It's Your Choice: How the Middle-Class Model of Independence Disadvantages Working-Class Americans."** In one of that chapter's cited studies, exposure to the mere defining framework of college as a place to pursue individual goals was enough to impair working-class students' ability to process instructions and complete cognitive activities. As you can hear in many of our episodes, college is often seen as a place to better the lives of their families and those around them, not merely as a means to set themselves apart.

And there's a growing body of evidence to support the idea that seemingly unlimited choices in their education are not serving our students well. One of the central arguments in ***Redesigning America's Community Colleges***, by **Thomas Bailey, Shanna Smith Jaggars and Davis Jenkins**, is that students in the greatest need of support and guidance in the process of building schedules and choosing educational

pathways are the least likely to seek them out. As a result, the community college “cafeteria” of choices leaves students with either too much, too little or the wrong stuff on their plates.

Wing Young Huie’s *The University Avenue Project* continues to inspire us to approach this work with curiosity, wonder and skill.

We have completed several courses at the **Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University** in Durham, NC. They offer a wide range of classes for building documentary skills,, including one-week intensive courses in the summers, which are ideal for educators.

For online resources, **Transom.org** offers a wide variety of helpful guides, equipment reviews and blog posts to help get you started.

There are more, of course. Please see the cited references page in this guide for additional resources.



References

- American Association of State College and Universities--Re-Imagining the First Year of College Initiative [website] Retrieved July 30, 2019 from <https://aascu.org/RFY/>
- Bailey, T.R., Jaggars, S.S., & Jenkins, D. (2015). *Redesigning America's community colleges: A clearer path to student success*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Coles, R. (1989). *The call of stories: Teaching and the moral imagination*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Complete College America. (2012). Remediation: Higher education's bridge to nowhere. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server_files/files/CCA%20Remediation%20ES%20FINAL.pdf
- Fiske, S.T. & Markus, H.R. (Eds.) (2012). *Facing social class: How societal rank influences interaction*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Huie, W.Y. (2010). *The University Avenue project* (vols. 1 & 2). St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press.
- Isay, D. (2006). *Listening is an act of love: A celebration of American life from the Storycorps project*. New York: Penguin Press.
- King, C., Griffith, J., & Murphy, M. (2017). Story sharing for first-generation college students attending a regional comprehensive university: Campus outreach to validate students and develop forms of capital. *Teacher-Scholar: The Journal of the State Comprehensive University*, 8(1), 1-23.
- Kirp, D. (2019, July 26). The college dropout scandal. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/20190726-dropout-scandal>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2012, July 9). Interest convergence and campus diversity. [Recorded lecture]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jzknQCBnwc>.
- McHugh, S. (2014). Audio storytelling: Unlocking the power of audio to inform, empower, and connect. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*. 24(2), 141-156.
- Silva, J.M. (2015). *Coming up short: Working-class adulthood in an age of uncertainty*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stephens, N. M., Hamedani, M. Y. G., & Destin, M. (2014). Closing the social-class achievement gap: A difference-education intervention improves first-generation students' academic performance and all students' college transition. *Psychological Science*, 25(4), 943-953. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613518349>
- Yosso, T.J. (2005). *Critical race counterstories along the Chicana/Chicano educational pipeline*. New York: Routledge

Finding Your Place Episode Transcripts

Finding Your Place Episode 1: Welcome to the Podcast

(Marco) All right. Ready?

(President Obama) College graduation has never been more valuable than it is today.

(Student voice) I would say it's like crossing the whole Amazon River. You know? You are going on this beautiful river. The nature is beautiful. You see every animal. You see the sun, you see night, the sounds. The scent is amazing. So going to school is just like that. But you also have to know there's snakes, there's bugs, and there's poisons. You could drown, or there's all these things that could happen to you. So you have to be prepared for that.

(President Obama) College is not the only path to success, but more than ever, a college degree is the surest path to a stable, middle class life.

(Marco) Hi, everybody. Welcome to the first episode of Finding Your Place Podcast.

(Ana L.) A podcast for college students by college students.

(Marco) Throughout this podcast series, current college students are going to be sharing their journey with you, serving as mentors and guides to help you make your way.

(Ana) In the first episode, we're going to introduce the student producers who will be offering their insights on college throughout the episodes. Thanks for tuning in and welcome.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Hey, you. guys. My name is Sontiana Brandts. I go by Sonti for short. And I'm conquering campus life from a wheelchair. I'm the first person in my family to go to university.

All right. Hello, everyone. My name is Ana Leyva, and I'm just another first-generation Hispanic student who didn't know what she was getting herself into when I decided to go to college. However, I'm glad to say that four years later, it turned out to be the adventure of a lifetime.

Hey, everyone? What's up? My name is Marco Milosevic. I spent 14 years active duty in the United States Army and was honorably discharged under medical conditions. And I'm really eager to participate in this podcast project.

Hey, everyone. My name is Emily Albright. I came from a small town and went a large college not really knowing my place or who I was going to be. But along the way, I found people and opportunities that helped the transition and really shaped my college experience.

Yo, yo, yo. Hey, everybody. My name is Monte Brown. I'm an African-American male studying to be a teacher right now.

Hello. My name is Tanita Cronk. I want to show my kids that you can do anything. Anything is possible. I'm not going to give up on life. I'm not going to give up on learning. I'm going to keep going.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(President Obama) The premise that we're all created equal is the opening line in our American story. And we don't promise equal outcomes. We strive to deliver equal opportunity, the idea that success does not depend on being born into wealth or privilege. It depends on effort and merit. You can be born into nothing and work your way into something extraordinary. And to a kid that goes to college, that means everything.

(Marco) You've probably heard a lot about college, but you might not know a lot about college or how to make the most of it.

(Ana) So we're going to take you into our lives.

(Ana) We arrived home officially.

(Ana) Yeah. Let's go say hi to the pups.

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

(Marco) We're going to offer you our best advice.

(Monte) My first year starting college, I really had to learn how to be the book instead of just read the book.

(Ana) And we're going to explore with you some of the challenges we faced in college so that you might be better able to manage your own challenges.

(Sonti) For some reason, when I get to school and I'm in the classroom, I become quiet and reserved, and my personality shies away.

(Marco) If you're a professor, college counselor, or academic advisor, or anyone in higher ed interested in resources for new students, we've heard from you about what you want from this, series and we intend every episode to be something you'll want to use in your work with students.

(Ana) So please click Subscribe on iTunes or follow us on SoundCloud.

(Marco) Share us with friends and family and other students.

(Ana) And join us for the next episode, where we'll explore the big question-- why does college matter, and why are you here?

(Marco) Keep listening. It's going to be good.

Finding Your Place Episode 2: Why Are You in College?

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Monte) What's good, everyone? Welcome back to the Finding Your Place podcast series.

(Emily) We thought we'd start with a big question, a question you probably get asked a lot already, or one that maybe you're asking yourself too-- what in the world are you doing here in college?

(Monte) Producer Ana Leyva gave this some thought on a recent drive home.

(Ana) All right. Hello, world. It is Saturday, September 1st, the first of the month. And today we're going to head back home.

(Ana) I think originally, college mattered to me because I saw my parents struggle a lot growing up. And so initially, that was kind of like college was the point for me to go, and it just assured me a job. But I think now that I'm already in it, and it's already my fourth year-- I'm about to start my fourth year in college-- I've realized that it's just such a center for knowledge. It sounds super cheesy, but it's kind of the truth.

(Ana) College is a place where you have all these scholars who have such an amount of information about literally anything-- and not only knowledge about it, but they have practice in these places, and they have experience working in these areas. And then they have other people they know. It's just such-- it's just such a great place to go if you want to learn, if you want to expand your horizons, like some people say, and just grow as a person. So I think that's why college matters to me.

(Ana) All right. We arrived home officially. Yeah. Let's go say hi to the pups.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[SPEAKING SPANISH]

(Monte) The student producers you're hearing in this podcast have all been surviving, even thriving in college for several years now. Most of us have gone from being scared or confused about college to a stronger sense of why we're here.

(Emily) Here are a few thoughts from our producer team on why college matters.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Marco) Coming from the military, there's this thought that you need to know yourself and always seek self-improvement. And that's something I used to tell my guys a lot. There's no such thing as staying the same. You're either getting better or you're getting worse. Stagnancy is not a thing. It doesn't exist. So college for me is the answer to knowing myself and seeking self-improvement at this point in my life.

(Tanita) I'm in college because, well, I was-- to be honest, I was tired of not being able to do anything besides say would you like fries with that.

(Sonti) I'm in college because I strive to push and challenge myself to become the best version of me.

(Monte) The first year, you will be-- you will have lot anxiety. But that's normal. That means-- one of the best things I ever heard was when you're in a situation that makes you feel uncomfortable, that's a growing lesson. You're about to grow. And me personally, I think life is all about growth.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Emily) Now we want to dig a little deeper into these big reasons for college.

(Monte) Producer Ana Leyva sat down with Dr. Brenda Flannery.

(Emily) Dr. Flannery has served as the assistant vice president for undergraduate studies and international education at Minnesota State University Mankato and is currently the dean of the College of Business at MSU.

(Monte) Listen in on their conversation.

(Ana) Work more directly with students. Why do you think students should attend college?

(Dr. Flannery) One of the great things about colleges is it introduces you to new ideas, new people, and new places. And I was blown away when I was a freshman my first year in college, and I took a psychology course, or I took a sociology course. And it was just like--

(Ana) Right, mind-blowing.

(Dr. Flannery) It was mind-blowing. It was so exciting. I just think for so many students, college is an opportunity for firsts. It's the first time to have a conversation, maybe, with someone from Nepal. You know? It's the first time to go hear an acapella concert, what you're doing tonight. It's the first time to go to a pan-African conference, which we have on campus today. You know? It is such a robust, amazing community where it's all about the expansion of one's mind.

(Ana) Exactly.

(Ana) Well, and now that I'm also talking to you, it kind of makes me reflect too about how it also connects-- I don't know-- at least personally, I don't think it's very often for, I guess, people to connect with people of different ages as much. And that's not only with students. But also, for example, I'm even thinking about this conversation right now, faculty with the student. Our age is different. But I feel like you wouldn't really have these conversations outside of college as much, maybe, with another adult. You know what I'm saying?

(Brenda) I hope that's the case. And sometimes I wish students would take more advantage of that, because we do-- I can tell you, the faculty and the staff, they want to. We want it. And also,

many of us choose this work because we love being around the students. We love the energy and the youthfulness and the-- yeah. We all know it's a privilege to also be in this journey with you.

(Ana) What do you think is something that students overlook the most about college?

(Brenda) I think many of them think of college as the courses that they take. And so they'll go into a classroom, and they'll be quiet. They'll go sit.

(Ana) Take it all in.

(Brenda) They'll take it in. They'll think their role is to come in and be that passive sponge to the information. And I think that's like 25% of college.

(Ana) I agree fully.

(Brenda) I mean, there is so much to learn that it is-- it's just like-- it is so exciting, the curiosity that is embedded in every fiber. Be curious. And the university has so many ways for you to grow and develop and learn.

(Ana) Right. Well, thank you, Dr. Flannery, once again, for your time with us. I appreciate it so much.

(Brenda) My pleasure. Best wishes with your project.

(Ana) Yes, thank you. I appreciate it.

(Monte) That's it for this episode. Thanks for listening, everybody. Don't forget to subscribe to Finding Your Place on iTunes or to follow us on SoundCloud.

(Emily) What topic are we getting into next episode?

(Monte) We're going to talk about finding your major.

(Emily) Just one major?

(Monte) We'll see. Stick with us, and we'll get you there.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Finding Your Place Episode 3: Choosing a Major

(student on campus) I find it confusing whether or not I'm supposed to be deciding my future right now, because a lot of people say, it's OK if you don't know yet. But I just feel like it's a waste of time if I don't make a decision. So that gets confusing.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Ana) Look at this list-- communication studies, music education, chemistry, pre-law, political science, agricultural sciences.

(Marco) Yeah, I mean, it goes on and on-- PE and health, nursing, sports management, business marketing, or interdisciplinary studies.

(Ana) So how are you supposed to know which major is right for you?

(Marco) Absolutely it's hard to choose. And it seems like everyone wants you to know right away.

(Ana) On this episode of the Finding Your Place podcast, we explore the challenging process of finding your major. We'll begin with a story from producer Sonti Brandts. It's a tough story and one that probably resonates with many starting out in college.

(Sonti) What am I going to go to school for? And I had my dad talking to me in my ear, always just in my head, like, what are you going to do with your life? What are you going to do with your life? Because that seems to be the main question, especially at your graduation.

(Sonti) What are you going to do next? What are you going to do with your life? And I feel like most people expect the answer of I'm going to college to be-- fill in the blank. But I had no idea.

(Sonti) I knew it liked computers, so I was like, I'll go for IT. So then also, I finally just had an answer to give to people. To be honest, I had to Google what IT even stood for-- information technology. And I was like, OK.

(Sonti) So orientation came. It was time to break apart into our areas of what we're going for. So I followed all of the IT people to this back room, back classroom, and I sat there for maybe three minutes. And the teacher made a joke referring to IT and computers.

(Sonti) And everyone else laughed. But I didn't, because I didn't understand the joke. And that is when I was like, this is not where I'm supposed to be, because I don't even understand the joke that is happening right now.

(Sonti) So me and my dad snuck out of the classroom. And my dad's like, what are we doing? I'm like, I'm not going for IT. And he's like, well, what are you going for? You need to know. You need to figure it out.

(Marco) Many of us are just like Sonti. We need some guidance.

(Ana) One of our producers, Emily Albright, found somebody who can offer that guidance-- Gina Maahs-Zurbey. Gina is an academic advisor at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and she completely understands the struggles of finding a major.

(Marco) Let's hear what Gina had to say about finding your major and your path through college.

(Emily) So this is the studio we'll be in.

(Gina) OK. Awesome.

(Emily) Pretty cool.

(Gina) Check that out.

(Emily) And I think we'll be over here. So when students come to you and are absolutely unsure of what major would be right for them, what advice would you give to them?

(Gina) Something that I like to talk to students a lot about is what do you enjoy doing? It's more about skills and less about a particular major.

(Gina) Do you like to create? Do you like to analyze things? Do you like to research?

(Emily) After hearing Sonti's story, what is your reaction?

(Gina) My heart breaks a little bit. It oftentimes does happen at the point of orientation. But whether students are so overwhelmed or scared, don't necessarily act in the way she did. So then it becomes after the first semester or the first year.

(Emily) Yeah, I agree. I had a friend who recently, actually, second year as an engineering major, which he was getting through. But really he had this passion for music. And so finally, after having some conversations with his parents, he took that step and is now a music industry major.

(Emily) And he just loves it. And I can tell he's happier. And maybe his parents felt a little, like, OK. This is not going to be what we wanted it to be. But in the end, I think that's what he needed to do. And that's what's going to be best for him in the end.

(Gina) Yeah.

(Emily) And there is this pressure to choose a major. And so I'm curious, do you ever come across students who are feeling pressure from home, maybe from their parents, to be in a major even though they don't enjoy it?

(Gina) Yes, I see a lot of this. And I think particularly in the area that I work in, we see this when students are transitioning away from the major that maybe they started in.

(Gina) And so talking with them about, well, first of all, what is it that you want? I fully understand that your support network is an important piece of your academic success, but at the end of the day, you're in the classroom.

(Gina) Let's talk about how we can make this a good transition for not only you, but then your external support network to help support you in that decision. And sometimes it's helping students approach those conversations with family members to help explain those pressures. And that's where I think it comes into helping explain the career piece.

(Gina) That's oftentimes, I think, where those external pressures, they come from a concern of, what are you going to do when you graduate? What is that major going to lead to? And so being able to help the student articulate for that support network what the possibilities are-- does that help?

(Emily) Yeah.

(Marco) Can I just add, don't go it alone. Talk to your academic advisors and your counselors. These people are here to help. It's their job, and they're good at it.

(Ana) Agreed. But what about the story we started with? What about Sonti Well, let's finish listening to her story.

(Sonti) I realize that I'm running late for graduation.

[BAND MUSIC PLAYING]

(Sonti) I started with IT. We all know how that worked out. It didn't. It didn't work out. And then I think I went into administrative assisting. That didn't pan out. I failed almost all of my classes.

(Sonti) Finally, I was talking to my mom, and she's like, well, what do you want to do, Santi I was like, I don't know. And she's like, well, you're good at talking to people, interacting with people. And I was like, OK. Well, let's see what I can do and what degrees there are that have to do with interacting with people.

(Sonti) I fell under the communication studies area. So I was like, OK, I'll check it out. I looked at the classes, and I was like, I could definitely do this. And the classes looked interesting.

(Sonti) And it went fantastic. It was the first time in a classroom that I felt like I belonged, which I hadn't had in any of the majors that I had previously wanted to be in.

(Sonti) So I'm sitting here, and I'm just like, oh. my gosh. You're done with school. You'll have your bachelor's degree in communication studies with a minor in psychology. Don't forget that.

But how I got to my degree choice was a crazy ride.

[BAND MUSIC PLAYING]

[name called out at graduation ceremony] Sontiana Brandts.

[CHEERING]

(Marco) Thanks for tuning in, everyone. Remember to subscribe to Finding Your Place on iTunes or to follow us on SoundCloud.

(Ana) Join us again on the next episode, where we'll face one of the hardest realities about college.

(Marco) Sometimes, you don't want to ask for help.

(Ana) But sometimes, you just really, really need it.

(Sonti) Until next time, guys.

[DRUMLINE MUSIC PLAYING]

Finding Your Place Episode 4: Getting Help

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Emily) Hey, everybody. Welcome back to the Finding Your Place podcast, a podcast series produced for college students by college students.

(Monte) You know, too often, new college students look at the people around them-- students, faculty, staff-- and they think those people always had it figured out. But most of them didn't. Most of them faced struggles and challenges along the way.

(Emily) Things like self-doubt, frustration, fear, and confusion are all a part of college. But the resources and experiences in college can help you through.

(Monte) Today's episode is a little different. We already met Gina Maahs-Zurbey in the last episode.

(Emily) She was the professional academic advisor who shared some good advice about the challenge of selecting a major or degree program. But Gina also had some challenges of her own in college. And she knows firsthand how it can be hard to ask for help when you need it.

(Monte) Gina's got a story to tell. And recently, she told it at a Finding Your Place storytelling event held on campus of Minnesota State University. This is going to sound a bit different, because we brought the microphone into the audience to record Gina's story.

(Emily) Imagine you're in the audience watching Gina take the stage.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Gina) I hated school. I always did. So when it came to college, well, to be honest, it never even occurred to me. It certainly was not something that came up around my family dinner table. And I most definitely never thought that I would be smart enough. The only reason that I learned about the college process was as my high school boyfriend was applying to schools and was visiting colleges, his family would ask me what my plans were after college as though it was the next logical step. And I felt like I had to have an answer.

(Gina) I would be the first of my family to go to college. So although my family was very supportive, this was all brand new territory. Paying for college was a huge stressor for us. Along with this hefty bill, preparing to move away from home also came with a variety of other fears and anxieties, mainly surrounding my disability.

(Gina) I had a porencephalic cyst in my brain which ruptured when I was born, which is kind of like having suffered a stroke. As a result, I have cerebral palsy. This means I have a great deal of pain and spasticity on the right side of my body, leaving me with little use of my right arm, hand, and a weak right leg.

(Gina) So basically, things that most people do with two hands, I do with one-- like tying your shoes, zipping your jacket, cooking a meal, or styling your hair. Thank god for short hairstyles. But some things are still just really hard. And at home, I had people to help me with those kind of things. But what was I going to do when I was by myself at college?

(Gina) I was so hell bent on being normal that when I arrived on the University of Wisconsin Whitewater campus, I refused to work with disability services, because someone might notice that I had a note taker or that I took my test in a different location. Instead, I thought it would be better to muddle through this on my own.

(Gina) So, for example, trying to fill out a Scantron exam with one hand. I would run out of time just trying to fill in those frickin' little bubbles. Or during a science class, trying to complete a lab assignment while trying to hold two test tubes and measure. Instead of just asking for help, I'd lose points on the assignment.

(Gina) Also, every 10 weeks, I'd have to miss two days of class to receive Botox injections to help deal with the pain and spasticity that I have. And yes, I am referring to the same Botox that people put in their face. However, I receive about 25 to 35 individual injections starting in my neck, working down my arm, in my hand, my calf, and my foot. The difference is, I never talked to my instructors about this. So to them, I'm sure they thought, Gina is just flaking out.

(Gina) So looking back, it should have been no shock when my first year sucked. So there I was, having less than a stellar first year at college, thinking I had made the biggest mistake. This is when I decided I needed to transfer. By the following fall semester, I transferred to the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire. I was closer to home, paired with roommates who were also transfer students.

(Gina) And one of the very first things I did was I connected with disability services. I finally realized, after my horrible first year, to say [BLEEP] it. It wasn't worth sacrificing my grades if someone knew that I had a note taker or that I needed extended time on my tests. I was paying way too much for this. And let me tell you what a difference it made. I mean, OK. Let's not get carried away. I didn't go to being a 4.0 student or anything. But disability services helped me navigate conversations with my instructors about accommodations I might need or developing plans for when I needed to be out of class for Botox injections.

(Gina) But then came my CJ 202 Fundamentals of Speech course with Dr. Judy Sims. Like many people, I was terrified of taking this class. I didn't want to get up in front of the course and give

one speech, let alone a series of speeches throughout the semester. I went to Dr. Sims, and I begged and I pleaded not to have to give speeches, asking if I could tape them or if I could give them individually, because when I get nervous, my disability becomes much more noticeable, distracting, and quite honestly very painful.

(Gina) Dr. Sims was very empathetic, but given that this was a speech class, she explained I must give my speeches in order to meet the requirements of the course. She was willing to allow me accommodations such as a podium or note cards if it would help to have something to hold. As my first speech approached, I remember crying, losing sleep, calling my mom and saying, how am I ever going to do this? Everyone is going to stare at me. And if I use a podium, which no one else had the option to do, everyone is going to judge me. I worried day in and day out, practicing, thinking that there is no way I'm ever going to get through this class. This class would keep me from graduating from college.

(Gina) The day came. I got up to give my speech. And I freaking rocked it. It was amazing. I mean, yeah. I was nervous as hell. My arm was tweaking out. But I knew my stuff. And not only did I have the attention of the room, but they were actually engaged in what I had say. I remember walking back to my room that day thinking, holy shit. This is pretty cool. And I think I'm actually pretty good at this.

(Gina) As the semester went on, I realized, heck yeah. And I changed my major to organizational communication-- major number three, I might add. And I applied to be a campus ambassador. And I got it. Wait. What? Me? The girl who cried and begged, pleading with my instructor not to give speeches was now electing to lead prospective students and families around campus, all while walking backwards. All I have to say is thank you, Dr. Sims.

(Gina) Being a campus ambassador was just the start for me. It led to an internship in the admissions office where I found my passion for higher education. I loved talking to prospective students and families about college and all of the possibilities it has to offer-- but remember, not necessarily because I loved school, but because things finally just clicked, and I had found my place.

(Gina) I graduated from the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire and started working in the admissions office here at MSU and completed my master's degree while working in admissions. Now, I serve as the student relations coordinator for the College of Arts and Humanities.

(Gina) Looking back, had someone told me I would go to college, I would have laughed. And had they said I would go on to get my master's degree, I would have told them that they were crazy. But it goes to show-- the people that you meet and the experiences that you have all matter. And I guess it's true what they say-- everything happens for a reason. But really, who would have ever thought? Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Emily) The lesson there was simple but kind of profound. There are lots of people, thoughtful people, whose job it is to help you at college. And often, they really like doing it. And it helps to have good people on your side. But you have to allow yourself to be helped. Whether it's with a disability or with a struggle in class, it matters if you can help people help you.

(Monte) And that's it for this episode. What's next?

(Emily) We're talking about fear-- fear of starting college, fear of failing college, fear in college, and what to do with it.

(Monte) That sounds awesome. So join us next time. And do not forget to subscribe to Finding Your Place on iTunes or to follow us on SoundCloud. Don't try to do college alone. Take us with you.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Finding Your Place Episode 5: Managing Fear in College

(Tanita) Hey, mom. What do you think took me so long to go to college?

(Tanita's mom) I think fear. I really think that. Because it wasn't the ability. You certainly have the abilities. You certainly are competent enough to succeed at anything you choose to do. So it's not that. I really think it was fear, just fear of-- of the unknown, I guess. I don't know.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Tanita) This is the Finding Your Place podcast. I'm producer Tanita Cronk, the daughter in that clip. And my mom was right. I really was afraid. Maybe I shouldn't have been, but I was.

(Tanita) There are a lot of unknowns about college. How will people see me? How will they treat me? Am I too old? Am I behind on what's going on now? What will happen when I get there? I know I'm not the only one who has these fears about starting college.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(student on campus) I didn't think that I was mentally prepared for this. I hadn't taken math in, like, four years, so I was really nervous about that.

(student on campus) I guess my biggest fear was that I was-- it was going to take me-- I was just going to be studying every single day, every single moment.

(student on campus) Like I said before, a lot of my family members didn't go to college. And going to college by myself was kind of scary because I didn't know what to do, who to talk to, if I'm going for the right thing.

(student on campus) You go from high school where-- especially your senior year, the senior slide, you didn't really do much your last semester, and then jumping right into full-blown college courses.

(student on campus) I didn't have very good study habits in high school.

(student on campus) Do I have to go every day was probably my only fear.

(student on campus) I didn't have the greatest work ethic, except for sports. So I was not really knowing what to expect.

(student on campus) Honestly, I didn't reach out to any support or reach out to my professors.

(student on campus) I didn't really talk to anyone. I didn't know anyone here. So I was very quiet.

(student on campus) After about halfway through that semester, definitely realized that it's something that you have to take serious.

(student on campus) I think I had some fears that I would fail the first time, and I did.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Tanita) We all have these fears, and they don't just stop. Throughout college, there is anxiety over exams, assignments, internships. It all adds up. And we've got to figure out what to do with it. Producer Ana Leyva reflected on these fears recently and how she learned to work with them, and in the process, to overcome them.

(Ana) One of the biggest fears that I had coming into college was leaving home. I mean, I had traveled before. I had been before outside of my house for long periods of time. But maybe the most that I've ever been away from my house was probably two months. So coming into this, I feared that, oh, my god, everybody is going to know each other, or everybody is going to become friends with each other, and I'm just going to be the loner.

(Ana) In my case, I know that was big for me. Because when I'm new to a setting, the first few days-- or first few weeks, I guess-- I become shy. I become introverted. And I don't share anything, absolutely nothing, because I don't know how things work. So I'd rather stay in my cocoon and just not come out.

(Ana) So knowing myself being this way, I thought when I go to college, everybody who was super out there, and not scared of trying new things, and just talking to people out of the blue is going to make friends automatically. And I'm going to be shy, and people are not going to like me, and they're going to hate me. And oh, my god, this is scary. But as it turns out, in every single situation, there comes a point in which you become comfortable.

(Ana and friends walking on campus) Incredible.

(Ana and friends walking on campus) Yeah.

(Ana and friends walking on campus) She shook it.

(Ana and friends walking on campus) She shook it.

(Ana) All right. So we're currently walking on our campus. It's 8:00 AM or 9:00.

(Ana) In a way, you really can't explain. I ended up meeting the people that I had to meet. I ended up making friends in the most random, weird ways. But now they turn out to be my strongest friends. Now they turn out to be those people that I really wouldn't be able to live without them here in college.

(Ana and friends walking on campus) About that, Randy?

(Ana and friends walking on campus) About the acorns?

(Ana and friends walking on campus) Yes.

(Ana and friends walking on campus) Why?

(Ana) And it's just so crazy to trace back the dots and think about how we met in the first place. And sometimes, it's like-- sometimes you meet people in such a cool, creative way. But some other times, really, a friendship happens through just sitting next to someone in a classroom, and then after times of sharing experiences together in that classroom, crying together through homework and assignments, a friendship and a bond starts creating itself.

(Ana and friends walking on campus) We're all green.

(Ana) true that. See? We should be-- the motto of this story is we need to be more like acorns. Bam.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Tanita) Thank you, Anna, for sharing your story with us. But let's acknowledge this. Sometimes fear is more than just about meeting new people or being in new spaces. Anxiety and depression are on the rise in college students, and sometimes it's more than we can handle on our own. So this why I sat down with Frank Schultz. Frank has always given me the permission to not be perfect, and he's helped me in a lot of sticky situations where my anxiety was just too high for me to manage. So I wanted to get his thoughts about anxiety in college and what kinds of help is available to students when we need it.

(Frank) My name is Frank Schultz. I've been working at Century College for 35 years, 22 years as a teacher and 13 years of being in the Counseling Department.

(Tanita) Thank you for being here with us today. In this episode, we're talking about fear. Can you maybe let us in on some of the fears that first-year students commonly have?

(Frank) From my experience, first-year students may have a lot of stress and anxiety. They might be the first generation in their family to come to school, so they don't have any people that have done this before them. So I've always taken the approach not to overwhelm them with all the details, but then keep a rapport going with the student to give them the information they need.

(Tanita) I like that. Take it one step at a time, one semester at a time.

(Frank) Right. And the biggest thing is just let them know you're there for them if they want to call, email, or make an appointment.

(Tanita) One of the main aspects to my story is fear. And I remember having so much fear about being a parent and coming to school, being gone for so long. I hadn't been in school in 20 years. And one of the things I'm trying to impress is letting students know that they're not the only ones. Is there a way that counselors can help students process fear?

(Frank) Well, obviously, we try to find out what the source of the fear is and then respond with how to deal with it. But yeah, fear is usually brought on by the unknown. And if we can help students financially, academically, personally with those fears, reduce them, and try to eliminate them.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Tanita) In my family, especially in my culture, it's not OK to talk to counselors. It's especially not OK to talk to somebody about your family business, especially men. They're taught not to talk to anybody about their troubles. If you have-- it's a sign of weakness. So for students who feel this way, feel this pressure-- and maybe they're standing outside the counseling center, and they're like, I shouldn't go in, because that's a bad thing. It's a negative thing. What would you say to those students?

(Frank) I'd say it's completely confidential. And just go in and see a counselor, let them get to know you, maybe build a little bit of trust there. And you don't have to pour out everything the first time you meet, but you might bring up some of the things that are bothering you or that you're concerned about, and start with little steps, and go that direction.

(Tanita) What would you say that you think students-- after meeting a counselor, what do you think they'll get from it?

(Frank) Well, typically, I'll end the session with how do you feel now. Are you more comfortable with whatever the situation is? Is the flag to the top of the pole, or is it halfway, or it's laid on the ground? And if they need more, either academically or personally or career-wise, we'll make another appointment.

(Tanita) Well, I would like to say that even though I did have all of that fear and anxiety, and it was so overwhelming, you did help relieve that for me. And I wanted to say thank you for that. And I wanted to say thank you for sitting down and talking with us today. And I also wanted to

ask if you had anything else, or advice, or just anything that you would like to say to our first-year students.

(Frank) Well, my mantra has always been when in doubt, seek us out. We're here to help. That's our job. We want to help you. We want to make it as comfortable and as good an experience coming into college as possible.

(Tanita) All right. Thank you.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Tanita) If you need help, get the help you need. We'll probably say that a lot in this series. It's not always easy. I get it. It's not easy for any of us.

We have fears every semester. And when we transition, when we transfer, when we graduate, all of those fears come back. But it gets better.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Tanita) So what's ahead for the podcast, you ask? Next time, it's all about the money-- financial aid and how to handle the costs of college. Thanks for listening to Finding Your Place. We'll see you here next time.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Tanita's mom) You know, sometimes that can be a little overwhelming. But never give up, and never doubt your ability, and never question why you're there.

(Tanita) A lot of our podcast listeners are first-time students. Do you have any advice for first-timers?

(Tanita's mom) The exact same thing. Never doubt your ability. Never doubt while you're there. You have a right to be there. You deserve to be there. And it definitely will be worthwhile. Hang in there.

(Tanita) Awesome. Thanks, Mom.

(Tanita's mom) All right.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Finding Your Place Episode 6: Seeking Financial Aid

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Dave Engen, faculty supervisor of podcast) If you were to come up with three words about financial aid right now, what would those three words be?

(Mareese Bown, student helping with this episode) Complicated, mystery, and for the last word I'll say horror.

(Emily) Of all the confusing things about college--

(Monte) And there are a lot of confusing things, trust me.

(Emily) perhaps nothing is quite as confusing as financial aid.

(Monte) In this episode of the Finding Your Place podcast, we're going to look more closely at money and financial aid.

(Emily) You've probably already heard a lot about financial aid in orientations or letters or emails.

(Monte) But it doesn't always make sense, right? Sometimes, we just need someone to explain it.

(Emily) Not long ago, Dave Engen, one of our faculty members helping us with this series, met a first year student who expressed some confusion and concern about financial aid.

(Monte) And together, they decided to walk on over to the financial aid office to get some answers.

(Mareese) Hello.

(Rachel Tanquist, Financial Aid Advisor) Hey, I'm Rachel. Nice to meet you.

(Dave) Hey, how's it going?

(Rachel) Nice to meet you.

(Dave) Thank you so much.

(Rachel) Yeah, come on back.

(Mareese) Well, my name is Mareese Brown. I'm a first year student. And in my first semester, I was running into a lot of financial aid problems. So this podcast right here is perfect for new students next year. So they don't run into the same problems that I did.

(Rachel) A lot of times, people misunderstand the word financial aid, because it's a really broad term. We've got grants, scholarships, work study program, and even student loans.

(Mareese) What are some good pieces of advice you could give to first year students on financial aid?

(Rachel) Yeah, so I'd say I've got three big pieces of advice. The first one is to apply for scholarships. So make sure that you're out there at your university applying to whatever they have available as well as searching for outside scholarships as well, so searching out in the community, parents' employers, really anywhere that you can look. Because obviously, anytime you can pull in free money, it's less loans that you have to borrow.

(Rachel) The second piece of advice I have is to really set a budget and live within that budget. Because the more that you can be frugal during college, the better your life after college is going to be. Because it sets up so much more disposable income then after college and less that you have to worry about paying back student loans if you're only borrowing to what you need.

(Rachel) And then the third piece of advice is to always reach out. Because financial aid is so complicated and there's so much going on. We want to make sure that every student knows where they're at, how much they're borrowing, and really has a good grasp on what's going on financially.

(Mareese) Why would somebody take out a private loan instead of a federal loan?

(Rachel) I always recommend borrowing federal loans first, partially because they tend to be at a lower interest rate. And federal loans tend to have better repayment terms. So if you were to take an unpaid internship after graduation or run into economic hardship, your federal loan servicer is likely to be a lot more flexible with you. Another thing to keep in mind is that financial aid is something that you need to apply for and to apply every year.

(Rachel) How you apply for financial aid is filling out the FAFSA application. So that's the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, and it opens every year on October 1st. And we do recommend completing it as soon as possible. Because that way, you'll get reviewed for the most possible need based aid. So we'll review you for those grants. We'll review you for the work study. We'll review you for loans to see what your specific financial situation is.

(Mareese) Right. A lot of those things you just said are the reasons why I had problems when I first came here, like the not filling out the form in time. I filled out my FAFSA in March last year, which I didn't get enough money for my loans. So I had a bill that I had to pay that I didn't know.

(Rachel) With financial aid, it's really, really important to get things done early, like the FAFSA, but then also to keep tabs on your email. Because a lot of times, we have to ask for follow up documentation. And hopefully, students get the email right away and send it back to us. But sometimes emails get missed. So just know that you can always reach out to us with questions, concerns at any time.

(Mareese) Thank you. I appreciate you for letting me interview you for this podcast.

(Rachel) That's why I am so excited that you're here and we were able to meet. And I just hope any students out there that are in similar situations or confused at all will want to hopefully reach out to us, schedule appointments. We always love talking about this. So I'm so excited that you're here and that we were able to talk through all these questions.

(Dave) How would you describe how you feel after the interview?

(Mareese) Wonderful. More knowledge than before.

(Emily) Sometimes, it seems like college is really just for people who already come from some money and who just want to make more money.

(Monte) But what about the students who start college with very little?

(Emily) Producer Tanita Cronk caught up with An Bernier, a community college graduate and public policy advocate for college students who are living in the crisis of poverty.

(Tanita) Can you tell us your name and what you're up to these days?

(An) My name is An Garagiola-Bernier. I am a student at Hamline University. I am also a policy assistant through the Capital Pathways internship program. And I'm working with Second Harvest right now on some food legislation.

(Tanita) Can you talk a little bit about your college journey and how you got started in college?

(An) My partner had just been injured at work. And he said, I never wanted to go to college, but I know you did. And so, I'm only going to go if you go. And so, I started back part time. I had no idea what I was doing. Nobody in either of our families had graduated from college. Really as first generation students, we had no idea.

(An) So I just took some classes. And I guess at that point, I had thought that my family's experience in poverty while in college was unique, right? Like we had messed up. We had not gone from high school to college. So we were supposed to be poor, right, while we were in college. We were supposed to be struggling. And it's that same story, right? You work really hard and you struggle while you're in college for the hopes of a better future.

(Tanita) Tell me some of the things you've learned that can help students navigate the murky waters that is known as money in college.

(An) So one, it's important for students to know that there is support out there, help with food. Housing is kind of tough, right? We're in a tight housing market. People are trying to change that. But there might be something, gas cards, bus cards, food cards, scholarship help, daycare help. There's programs out there. It's just finding them.

(An) So I think the number one thing is, one, the resources exist. Number two, there's people out there who will help you find them. Yeah, they might not look like you. And it's hard, right, especially for students of color, for indigenous students who have dealt with racism their whole lives to approach a white person and be like, I need help, and trust that that person is going to be

able to help you. It's faith. You know, you have to have faith in your fellow humans and just believe that people in helping places at your school are there because they want to help you.

(Tanita) Do you have any advice that you can offer to students who are struggling financially in college?

(An) Yeah. Look for food pantries on your campus, apply for scholarships, try to get your cost of living adjusted, especially if you have kids, look for daycare grants. You know, there's different programs out there. So if we step out of the shadow of that stigma and that shame, poverty is not your fault. And so, we need to stay in school, get to that finish point, so we can change the systems going forward and send that elevator back down to the people who are still waiting to get on.

(Emily) It's important to remember that when we make it through college, other people benefit too.

(Monte) That's right. And it's in the interest of your college or university to help navigate the money side of things. There are a lot of different kinds of support.

(Emily) Scholarships, grants, on campus work, deferred interest loans, all of these things are potential ways to help handle the costs of tuition.

(Monte) Because college is expensive, a little too expensive.

(Emily) But how much does it cost to subscribe to Finding Your Place on iTunes or to follow us on SoundCloud?

(Monte) Nothing. That's free at least.

(Emily) So check in with us next time when we try to find some good in all of the Gen Ed classes that they require us to take.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Finding Your Place Episode 7: Exploring the Value of Gen Eds

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Student on campus) A lot of the generals that we have to take are generally useless.

(Student on campus) Yeah, I think they're really dumb. I don't really get the point of them. I don't think I ever needed to take Art 100. And I think they're expensive, too.

(Student on campus) I'm, like, spending a ton of money on something that's not going towards my degree.

(Student on campus) It literally cost me half of my tuition fund that I had just because I had to take pop music and urban studies. It was a waste of money and also technically a waste of time as well.

(Student on campus) I think they can be useful if you put your time into it and pick the right classes. That could be helpful towards your major.

(Emily) And if you don't pick the right classes?

(Student on campus) Well, they're kind of stupid.

(Emily) Thank you.

(Marco) This is Finding Your Place, the podcast series made for college students by college students.

(Ana) Our topic in this episode is general education.

(Marco) Yes, you have to take them.

(Ana) And no, not every general education course is perfect.

(Marco) But the idea is that general education courses provide a broad-based education.

(Ana) There's many things like critical thinking, civic responsibility, and appreciation of the arts, ability to write professionally.

(Marco) Yeah, Ana, you and I and some of the other producers we're talking about this, how these courses can change us, why they can matter. Here, let's listen in.

(Ana) All right, is it recording now?

(Dave) It is recording now.

(Marco) Sonti, you're too quiet over there.

(Sonti) Yeah, sorry. I was going to say, one class that I took, it was Weather and Climate. And I was not excited to take it because honestly I don't care about the weather unless it's nice outside.

(Marco) Did you take it for like goal area, like the science?

(Sonti) Yeah.

(Marco) I did the same thing.

(Sonti) And I ended up really liking it. Now whenever I'm driving in the car and I'm like, oh, these clouds are nimbostratus. And I talked about it. All my friends were like, Santi, leave the clouds alone. We don't care about the clouds. I'm like, you will. Someday you will care about the clouds.

(Ana) That's exactly how I feel about my geology class. Every time I see a rock or a mountain I'm like, oh, well this is from the-- you know?

(Ana) Well does anybody have an experience with a gen ed you didn't like or weren't looking forward to?

(Marco) I think gen eds are like, nobody likes them, everybody's gotta do them. If you want your four year-- with some of them. Some of them are really cool.

(Marco) I took a public speaking course. And the reason I took it is because I do a lot of public speaking as it is. And I wanted to go to develop myself professionally. But after that class and the feedback I got, I though, you know, I really kind of have a knack for this whole standing on a soapbox and sharing my opinion on everything. So public speaking seemed like a natural fit for me. I'm very opinionated, I can string a sentence together. And I like to tell people what I think about them and their whole operation.

(Ana) If I could give advice to someone, it would be to really look into the gen ed options that you have. Sometimes I feel like people don't realize that there's so many options within one goal area. They were just like, oh, I can only take this class.

(Ana) But sometimes a class, like, I don't know, fishing. I don't know, we had skiing class that made of the general area requirements. I'm like, if I would've known, that sounds like so much fun. So that's what I'm saying. Look for stuff that, if you know it's going to be gen ed and you're not so excited about it then look for something that is going to make you more engaged and look forward to it.

(Marco) If you go into it with the attitude of well, I'm never going to use this. This is all BS, nonsense, whatever, then that's what you're going to get out of it. You know, it's going to be nonsense. And you're going to fail or you're going to waste your money or whatever.

(Ana) I think it plays a huge key going into gen eds with a learning mindset. Because if you go with a learning mindset and you're like, OK, how is this going to make me better as a human being? Because like you're saying, yes.

(Ana) Okay, for example, I'm a music teacher trying to become a music teacher. And I will work a majority of my time on that. But that's not the only thing that I am. I'm also a daughter, I'm also a citizen, an American. There are so many facets to myself that so many of these classes apply to that.

(Monte) We're growing now, we're growing now.

(Ana) And that's the thing, I don't feel like anybody really regrets learning something. Again, I know I'm repeating myself. But it goes back to that, yes, it was a struggle learning something new. But do you really feel bad, oh, I wish I didn't know this? Not really.

(Monte) Not really.

(Ana) It's always applicable.

[BEAT BOXING]

(Marco) All right, so maybe you need a little more convincing that gen ed courses can be good for you.

(Ana) Yeah, sometimes it helps to hear a story about a gen ed class that turned out to be way more than we thought at first.

(Marco) Producer Monte Brown has one of those stories. And it goes something like this.

(Monte) So right now I just pulled up to my house.

(Monte's brother) My brother's home.

(Monte) Hello, hello.

(Monte's mom) Look at that haircut, OK, OK.

(Narrator) Monte Brown's family sounds a lot like the definition of support.

(Monte) It's me, Ma.

(Monte's mom) Hey, Monty! Hey!

(Monte) My mom's a very noble woman. She knew how important education was. She knew what education does to our brain. It unlocks it, and allows us to critically think. And that's something I will never forget that she instilled in me.

(Monte's mom) Guess what I'm making?

(Monte) What?

(Monte's mom) Some collard greens, baked macaroni and cheese, some ribs, some chicken, and some brats, and cornbread, and sweet potatoes, baby!

(Monte) That sounds good.

(Monte) I remember my first day of college vividly. I walked in and sat in the front because my mom said, you ever go to college you better sit in front. I remember thinking, like, I hope we don't have a lot of homework today. Or I hope we don't have to talk a lot to each other, or what may have you.

(Monte) A lot of thoughts was going through my head because I was just so nervous. And plus, it was a lot of self-doubt in there as well. Teacher walks in, pretty cool guy. And I just thought to myself, like, man, this is a wonderful place to be.

(Narrator) Partly because of his family, and partly because of his outlook on education, Monty's first year of college went about as well as that first day. In year two though, he began to deal with a more abstract issue.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Monte) I was struggling with who I really was. It was tough because I wasn't, quote unquote, "the hookest dude in the world". I wasn't the smartest dude in the world. I'm not the most athletic dude in the world. So I was really trying to find my niche.

(Monte) I had stereotypes about my own people. I had stereotypes about myself. Even when I go in a store I had to question, like, am I going to steal something? Like, what am I talking about? Only I know if I'm going to steal something. It's either a yes or no. But I pin myself in a box that I believe this country puts me in. And I was letting that box consume me.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Monte) I remember opening up the e-services and going to the website and registering for it. And I remember as soon as I hit the Register button, there's this sense of I don't want to read. When you say literature, all I think about is books. I don't want to read.

[PAGES TURNING]

(Monte) This thing is huge. It has about-- yep, 2,757 pages. So it's a lengthy book. And it has so, so many things in here.

(Narrator) Monte is showing me the textbook for the African-American Literature course he took his second year of college. The course he credits with changing everything.

(Monte) I just opened out to one of my favorite parts, Langston Hughes. And I see I got all of these highlights. So I must have been really going at it with this one. I don't want to offend nobody but I wrote on it the holy book. Because this is kind of like my holy book. And to my defense, there is gospel in here.

(Narrator) Who were some of the writers that really had an impact on you?

(Monte) I really like Ralph Ellison, that "Invisible Man" was a really vivid story that-- at one point I was invisible to the general population. I feel like this country tries to make us seem like we're invisible. And that was kind of like the whole spiel of the story.

(Monte) (reading from *Invisible Man*) It took me a long time and much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with, that I am nobody but myself. But first, I had to discover that I am an invisible man.

(Monte) Even though I don't agree with everything he says, Booker T. Washington was pretty good. Sojourner Truth, she's awesome. Musicians, Duke Ellington, I thought he was cool.

(Narrator) Had you heard of these people before the class?

(Monte) No, I never heard of these people before the class. That's why I was in awe because I didn't know all these people exist.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Monte) For me, before taking this class, I was lost. I was searching. I was-- oof. I lacked confidence, I lacked guidance. I lacked self-efficacy. I really lacked a lot of things.

(Monte) But after the class, I became more confident. I became more self-aware. Before that class I didn't really have an opinion on things because I'm like, it doesn't matter. My voice doesn't matter.

(Monte) But after the class I found out my voice does matter. I have power. I feel like I have power to change as well, change lives as well. So yeah.

(Monte's mom) See you Monty, I love you.

(Monte) I love you too.

(Monte) Bye, Desire.

(Desire) Bye, love you.

(Monte) Love you too.

(Monte's mom) Drive carefully now.

(Monte) I will.

(Monte's mom) Take your time, Monte.

(Monte) I will.

(Monte's mom) Love you.

(Monte) Love you too, Ma. All right, see y'all later.

(Monte's mom) All right.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Marco) The classes we have to take are not all perfect. But they're usually there for a reason. So give them a chance.

(Ana) And give the next episode a chance too. We're taking the microphones home and we're going to explore the way college can put us right in the middle of two worlds. The world of our credits and our studies--

(Marco) And the world of our friends and families back home.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Finding Your Place Episode 8: Going Back Home

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Ana at home) All right. Good morning, everyone. It's 6:30 in the morning and I have to get ready for school.

(Tanita with kids) We're supposed to have been gone by now already. Here we go. Jakob, you got socks on?

(Tanita's son) No.

(Marco) All right, baby. Well, I love you.

(Marco's wife) I love you, too. I'll let you know when we're getting close.

(Marco) All right. I'm going to stop off at the American Legion then and have a beer since you guys won't be home.

[KNOCKING]

(Monte) It's me, mom.

[DOOR OPENING]

(Monte's mom) Hey, Monty! [LAUGHING]

(Emily) But It is a really empty feeling. I used to have things on the walls when I lived here. So it's a little weird coming back and having an empty room. Huh.

(Marco) And I'll blow your house down, said the pig. Good night, son. I love you.

(Marco's son) I love you, too.

(Tanita) And will you go to college when you're done with high school?

(Tanita's son) I don't know. I was mainly just thinking of doing something like animating so I can make my own video games and movies.

(Tanita) Do you think it's OK that mom went to college even though she's old?

(Tanita's son) I think it's OK. You're trying to get a better job so you can help your family more.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Tanita) This episode of the Finding Your Place podcast is not really about college. It's about the intersection of our home lives and our college lives. For some students, there's an easy relationship between home and college. But for many students, going to college creates challenges at home.

(Tanita) Sometimes those challenges relate to time and money. Usually there's not enough of either. And sometimes those challenges are cultural. College changes us and those at home don't always support or understand those changes.

(Tanita) Unlike nearly every episode in this podcast, this episode is going to focus on the story of a faculty member. That faculty member is Dave Engen, who, along with Robert Jersak, works behind the scenes to help us create this podcast.

(Tanita) We hope Dave's story might help you reflect on your own college story, especially if for some reason the college experience pulls you away from home or challenges your family identity.

(Dave) My most vivid memories of school are as follows. Being sent home from elementary school for repeatedly and defiantly saying the F word. My high school Spanish teacher informing me that she would pass me for first trimester if I agreed to not take the class second trimester. And lastly, loving the heavy metal band AC/DC so much that I would take my multiple choice tests by simply filling out A-C-D-C, A-C-D-C, A-C-D-C, all the way down the answer sheet.

(Dave) School was like sitting and listening for hours and hours to someone speaking a language I did not know. I hated it.

[MUSIC - AC/DC, "HELLS BELLS"]

I'm rolling thunder, pouring rain. I'm coming on like a hurricane. My lightning's flashing across the sky.

(Dave talking to students in class) So one quick announcement before we get started. The midterm exam is one week from today. The midterm exam is in this room. We'll all convene here at the time of your lecture. The study guides for the midterm exam.

(Dave) I grew up in a blue collar suburb of Minneapolis-- Fridley, also known as Friendly Fridley. My dad was a truck driver and my mom was a homemaker. My dad dropped out of school in the 8th grade and my mom dropped out in the 12th.

[STRIKING POOL BALLS]

(Dave) I believe it was 1993 when my father and I had our first conversation about what I was studying in college. We were playing pool in our basement. I was working on my PhD and I'd been in college for seven years or so. As I recall, the conversation took place between shots and went like this.

(Dave) Dad. So what are you majoring in anyway? Me. Communication. Dad, chucking his stick. Hm. Seems to me like you communicate just fine.

[STRIKING POOL BALLS]

(Dave) All right. So we're just going to have some fun here, but I need to know who I'm talking to. Can you introduce yourself to me?

(Dave's mom) Introduce myself to you? I'm your mother. [LAUGHING] How does that work?

(Dave) I kind of thought that's who you were.

(Dave's mom) Oh, good. [LAUGHING]

(Dave) Hey, well, I'm going to ask you a few questions about education and about college and things like that.

(Dave's mom) First couple of years, you really liked school. But then by about third grade, you didn't like it anymore. And no, I mean, I'd say, Dave, did you do your homework? Yeah. Of course, I'd get a call or a note from the teacher that you didn't have your homework done.

(Dave's mom) Yeah, I think I should have clamped down harder on you. Yeah. But it didn't, so. I do think that Tom McCarthy at Anoka-Ramsey and your speech class-- I really think that that's when you came alive and interested in learning, was when you were doing your speech classes at Anoka-Ramsey.

(Dave) I'm on my way to Anoka-Ramsey Community College. I haven't been back for probably 20-plus years. About to go into the left turn lane that I used to go in all the time on my way to school.

[CHATTER]

(Dave) Tom McCarthy. How are you, sir?

(Tom) Good, good. How are you?

(Tom) Good to see you.

(Dave) You too. You too. It's been fun wandering around.

(Dave) I once heard someone define professors as books with a mouth. Tom McCarthy was no book with a mouth.

[LAUGHTER]

(Tom) (teaching class) So how many of you got more nervous when I pushed the table back in the lectern and you realized you couldn't use it?

(Tom) I feel very jazzed up what I am teaching, and I want them to think that I care about that. That I care about them and what I'm doing. I care about what we're doing and why we're there.

(Dave) Tom was the first person I met who was both book smart and street smart. Intellectual and funny. And he let us get to know him as a human being.

(Tom) I grew up with six older brothers, right? Who beat the crap out of me every day. And not that I didn't deserve it. But I learned the best way to get away from them was to go through the--

(Dave) Testing, testing, testing, testing. On my way out of Tom's office, I decided to stop by the classroom where I took his public speaking course some 25 years ago. I'm standing in that room right now and I can see Tom teaching our class. I can hear him joking with us. I can see him taking a shoe on and off as he gives me feedback on my speech in a gentle, mocking gesture of my own nervous tics.

(Dave) And I can see myself in that room. A green, ocean Pacific shirt. Some acid wash jeans. Looking up at Tom and thinking, you know what? I want to be like that guy. And I'm so thankful that he brought himself into that classroom. That he brought his persona into that classroom. That brought his humor into that classroom.

(Dave) Because had he not done those things, I don't think that I would have continued in education the way that I did. And I don't think I would have been able to live as full of a life as I've been able to live, albeit a life full of tensions and contradictions.

[POOL BALLS STRIKING]

(Dave) Do you remember what you told me about small talk?

(Dave's mom) I really don't, but it sounds familiar. Do you remember?

(Dave) Yeah.

(Dave's mom) Oh.

(Dave) Yeah, I do remember.

(Dave's mom) What did I tell you?

(Dave) Well, you told me that I was getting-- this was pretty much--

(Dave's mom) That you were getting to think you were too important for small talk? Something like that?

(Dave) Yeah, I think what you said is that I was getting too smart to make small talk.

(Dave's mom) Yeah, I think that is what I said.

(Dave) Well, in general, what did it seem like I was doing?

(Dave's mom) I don't know. I suppose you were talking about school and stuff that was kind of above our heads. I think you were showing off that you were getting an education.

(Dave) My mother was right. I wasn't getting too smart for small talk or anything else, but there was a time when I found it difficult to bridge my two worlds. The working class world in which I grew up and the professional middle class world into which I unknowingly entered. The world where my parents' neighbor Paul calls my Sam Adams Democrat beer and the world where my first boss had dogs named Plato and Aristotle.

(Dave) I'd be lying if I said I had it all figured out. Often I feel like an imposter in both worlds. But I did learn a few things along the way. Lesson 1, it was as important for me to understand my parents as it was for them to understand me.

(Dave) Lesson 2, I got lucky. Before meeting Tom McCarthy, I was turning college into a job. And it's easy to do this, especially for working class kids. Get the content delivered to you. Do the assignments. Get the grades.

(Dave) This may be OK for some, but it limits the possibility of transformation. Tom inspired me. He also got me on the speech team. Had my education taken place only through course content, I don't think I would have been so fundamentally changed by it.

(Dave) And lesson 3, it's good to have a foot in both worlds. Tough at times, sure, but good. I'm kind of a mess, if you want to know the truth. I feel out of place in college faculty meetings and I feel out of place at the American Legion. But I'm OK in both worlds, too. And for that, I'm thankful.

(Dave) I used to think my possibilities were limited by my upbringing. And in some ways, I suppose they were. But my possibilities were expanded, too. My dual identity, if you will, let's me see things that others miss, and I value that. And my kids-- well, my hope for them is that they become anything they want to become without ever looking too far up and never looking down.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Tanita) Sure, Dave's story is particular to him-- a white male first generation college student from a working class background. But we hope Dave's story might help you reflect on the ways that college has changed in your experience of going home and maybe help you reflect on how you might deal with those changes.

(Tanita) We also want to encourage you to go to the Finding Your Place podcast on SoundCloud or iTunes and look for what we call our supplementary episodes. These additional episodes are a bit more focused on cultural experiences.

(Tanita) And in these episodes, students explore such topics as being a Muslim woman in college, returning to college from military service, navigating a degree as a single mom. That's just to name a few.

(Tanita) That's it for this episode. Please tune in to our next episode in the main Finding Your Place series where we'll explore ways to make college more meaningful by getting involved outside the classroom. Stay tuned.

Finding Your Place Episode 9: Getting Involved Outside the Classroom

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Monte) During your college years, you will find yourself faced with a lot of change and a lot of challenges.

(Emily) We've covered some of these already in previous episodes, like trying to pick a major, balancing home and school, or managing your fears.

(Monte) But there's also opportunities at college that can make you realize just how awesome college life can be, especially if you get involved with all college has to offer.

(Emily) On this episode of the Finding Your Place podcast, we explore one of the most important aspects of the college experience, getting involved outside of the classroom.

(Monte) Outside-the-classroom activities can help you build a resume and build a professional life.

(Emily) And they're often fun and stress relieving.

(Monte) We'll start this episode with an audio essay from producer Emily Albright.

(Emily) That's me.

(Monte) Emily's path might be quite different from yours, but we hope all of you can find some of your story in her story.

[AUDIO PLAYBACK]

(Emily) The car ride college was a long one. I sat in the back, quiet, thinking too much. My anxiety was at an all-time high. But still, I think there was some positive anticipation inside of me, an underlying feeling of excitement to start something new-- college. Once I got there, everywhere I went I heard things like, get involved on campus, meet new friends, find your passion. Good advice, I suppose, but how was I actually supposed to do those things?

(Emily) I spent hours by myself in my room. I would sit on my phone, scrolling through Facebook and Instagram, seeing photos of students having fun on campus. But I felt too afraid to try to become a part of it. Those lonely hours turned into days of either feeling hollow or full of self-doubt. I made a lot of excuses. I would say, oh, I'm just trying to figure out my schoolwork first, or yeah, I thought about joining, but maybe next semester.

(Emily) In my second semester, I finally grew tired of feeling so empty and alone. There was this one group on campus that advertised itself a lot. I'd see their flashy posters inviting everyone to come to their weekly meetings on Tuesdays at 4:00. It seemed like a fun club, so I decided I'd try to get involved with them. I woke up that next Tuesday, and I felt excited. Sure, I was a little nervous, but I'd finally mustered up some courage, and I was ready to go.

(Emily) I walked in about 10 minutes early. I walked up to one of the people that looked like they were leading the group, and I introduced myself. I received a simple greeting back and was instructed to sign my name on a sheet of paper and take a seat. So I sat, nervous but eager to finally start making connections. As more people came into the room, I watched as they filled tables and carried conversations as if they were all best friends. The meeting started, and still no one had sat by me.

(Emily) I spent most of the meeting confused about what they were talking about and feeling awkward, wanting to leave as soon as I could. My mind flooded with these toxic thoughts. Should I have sat at a different table? Did I do something wrong? Maybe someone else will walk in late and sit by me. Why did I even come? This was worse than being alone in my room. I left the meeting that day feeling more hopeless than ever. I tried. I had finally done what I needed to do, and it didn't work. For a while, I even thought maybe I chose the wrong school, and I considered my options for transferring.

(Emily) I decided I need to give myself one more chance. There are over 200 clubs at my school. Maybe that first one just wasn't for me. One day, after a few hours of self encouragement and drafting, I hit the Send button on an email to the president of the Student Ambassadors Organization at my college campus. After only a few minutes, I heard my email chime go off, and I read the response. "Emily, it's awesome to hear that you're interested in Student Ambassadors. You should definitely come check us out at our next meeting."

(Emily) I could tell you about how anxious I was, thinking about having to find the room the meeting was in, or how fast my heart was beating when I finally found it and had to walk into a room full of strangers, or how my hands were shaking when I had to introduce myself in front of everyone as a potential new member. But the more important thing for you all to hear is that when I walked out of the meeting that day, I felt better than ever. This time, I made instant connections with the other students. It felt so good. It felt good to be around people who had similar interests as me, to be welcomed with smiling faces, to be excited about what an

organization was doing, and to have taken a forward-looking step towards finding my place at college.

(Emily) And it didn't stop there. In the next few weeks, I'll actually be graduating and leaving the campus that I've come to love so much. As I look back on my time, the greatest memories I had did not happen in the classroom or in the library, and they definitely did not happen when I was hiding in my room that first semester. The greatest memories came from getting involved beyond the classroom.

(Emily) While I started college feeling too timid to step too far out of my room, I graduate college having served one year as the vice president for our chapter of the National Residence Hall Honorary, one year as the senator for student government, two years as a community advisor in the residence halls, and three years as a member and secretary of Student Ambassadors. I'm leaving college proud that I stepped out of my comfort zone and got through the fear and self-doubt. I'm leaving college knowing that I'm a stronger and different person than when I was when I started. I hope the same happens for you.

[END STORY]

(Monte) Wow, Emily, that story was really amazing.

(Emily) Thanks, Monte. OK, if you're not yet convinced about getting involved, we're going to do one last thing in this episode.

(Monte) Recently, some of our producers spent an evening with the students who run the campus newspaper at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

(Emily) It's just one example of what's probably happening in organizations all around your campus, from your multicultural center to your student event planning team.

(Monte) Let's go inside and see what's happening.

[AUDIO PLAYBACK]

[PHONE RINGING]

(Student at newspaper) Try that one.

(Student at newspaper) This one?

(Student at newspaper) There you go. Perfect. "Poi-fect"

(Student at newspaper) MSU Reporter, how can I help you?

(Student at newspaper) My role is the sports editor here.

(Student at newspaper) I'm the photo editor.

(Student at newspaper) I'm a staff writer for the news section.

(Student at newspaper) I am the arts and entertainment editor.

(Student at newspaper) Currently, I am the news editor. Next year, I will be the editor in chief.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Student at newspaper) In my first two years of being in college, I didn't really have a lot of friends. I had friends back home who I'd go home every weekend to see, but I didn't have friends in school. I just had a boyfriend and then his friends, and that was it.

(Student at newspaper) I was just focusing, I think, too much on trying to live that traditional college life. But I felt like I wasn't growing at all.

(Student at newspaper) So after my freshman year, I decided, I want to write for something. So I decided this would be the place that I'd write for, and I hated it at first because I didn't know how to write for a newspaper, and I don't know. I'm pretty awkward around people when I first meet them, so it was a little scary.

(Student at newspaper) Classes are important. They teach you the tools you need. But I think the Reporter gave me an opportunity to use those tools.

(Emily) I was going to ask, if they do end up using the photos that you've worked with, how does it feel to see your work in the paper?

(Student at newspaper) One day, like that, I just saw my pictures on the front page. I was like, whoa. And I still have that newspaper today. And I'm definitely keeping it for years to come.

(Student at newspaper) It's made me feel like I have a family. I come in, and I know that I get the support that I need. The other editors and staff writers-- we can all sit in here and banter. We can help each other with homework. Some of us are taking the same classes. And we can chill and hang out. And I don't know. It's really fulfilling to know that I have people here for me.

(Student at newspaper) It's, in a sense, like being a part of something bigger than yourself and just cooperating with a group of people to create something big or something that can impact people.

(Emily) It sounds like you've found your place on campus and in the community. What advice would you give to a student who maybe hasn't found their place yet?

(Student at newspaper) Oh my gosh, try. Even if you don't know what you like, try to go to organizations and see what they offer. And if it sounds, maybe, like you want to do that, try to get involved. Ask them. Read the newspaper and see what events are going on. We write a lot of previews of things that will be happening, just trying those things out. Maybe you don't like all of them, and maybe you don't like any of them. But I would say if you still really don't know where you belong, you just have to keep trying. Because it's hard, and it might seem grueling, and you could give up, but it's there for you somewhere.

[END PLAYBACK]

(Monte) Sure, not everyone has the time to get involved in the campus, but even if it's just attending a campus speaker event, a play, a club meeting, you're turning the college experience into something more.

(Emily) More of what college can be and maybe even what it should be.

(Monte) So what's next?

(Emily) We're going to build on this topic and start thinking about how you turn college spaces into your spaces, making college a place for you, where you belong.

(Monte) And remember to subscribe to us on iTunes or follow us on SoundCloud.

(Emily) Agreed. We'll see you all here next time.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Finding Your Place Episode 10: Creating Your Place on Campus

(Marco) So we're in the common area outside the little coffee shop here. And it's usually a pretty popular area. A lot of students mingle here, hang out, drink coffee, do homework. And every now and then, you get somebody here doing some music. And we've got a guy here playing guitar. What's your name?

(Evan, student on campus) I'm Evan.

(Marco) Evan? Right on. What do you got here?

(Evan) Just kind of riffing around, trying to play some jazz.

(Marco) Right on. Well, I'll shut up and stop talking. Go ahead.

[PLAYING GUITAR]

(Emily) You're listening to the Finding Your Place podcast series.

(Monte) A college podcast series produced by college students for college students.

(Emily) Speaking of place, do you ever feel out of place at college?

(Monte) It's hard not to, right? I mean, there are rooms clearly just for faculty, offices for all the deans and administrators.

(Emily) Yeah. And then there's student places to study or hang out. But when you're just starting, it seems like there's no place just for you.

(Monte) So how do you turn college space into your space?

(Emily) Our producer team set out to answer that question by doing some recording right in the spaces and places on campus that are like a home away from home for them.

(Marco) It's pretty good, man. Thanks for playing for a little bit for me, man. I appreciate it.

(Evan) Yeah, no problem.

(Marco) Yeah, man.

(Ana) Record, record. I'm currently sitting down in one of the practice rooms from the performing arts building of my university. This is one of the places that I definitely feel like I belong the most to because I've poured so much of myself in this room. This room has definitely seen me grow. This place has seen me cry, as dramatic as that sounds. So I think at the end of the day, that's kind of the essence of home that I feel in here.

(Ana) But right now, I'm practicing a Sing Unto God song from Judas Maccabaeus. I don't even know if that's how you say it, but it's an oratorio written by Handel.

[PLAYING PIANO]

(Monte) A place I felt like I could really be myself was down in the-- I want to call it the relaxing room. It's this room where they have video games. You can buy food, ping pong tables. It's just a fun place to be at. I found myself after a stressful day of classes going there, play video games with some friends for an hour or so, and then get back to work.

[PIANO MUSIC PLAYING]

(Marco) So I'm taking the opportunity to walk around campus and describe some of my favorite places. That will bring me into the vet center. For those of you who don't know, essentially, in the state of Minnesota, there's a law that mandates veterans centers on college campuses. And it's kind of a communal place that veterans can gather and do homework, study, BS, talk without the watching eye of other students.

[PLAYING PIANO]

(Ana) So that was the tricky part that I'm trying to learn well.

(Monte) A place I will consider where I can be myself at Mankato-- it's going to sound crazy, but the library. It's just-- something just felt magical about knocking out a big assignment three days before it was done. That's the feeling I yearned for, being done early.

[PLAYING PIANO]

(Ana) I guess when I first came into college, I didn't really think that I needed a place for myself or a place where I felt comfortable, but it definitely is a big deal. One of the biggest circle of friends that I had that first year of college, they happened to be my friends because of a French class that I was taking that first year of college. Then it turns out that we had similar schedules, so we would always see each other at 6:00 PM for dinner in the dining center. It was those big, round tables where it's, like, 10 people sitting, and you can literally see everybody around you. So that was amazing because then it would be our six core friends, a mix of international students with a mix of Minnesota friends.

(Ana) I had a friend-- one of them, who was also my tutor student, was from Japan. Another friend of mine, who actually now turns out to be my roommate, is from South Korea. I have another friend who was from Bangladesh. But then usually, it happened that they would see somebody on the hallway who was like, oh, I know them, because they didn't have anybody else to sit with. And I would be like, hey, come on over. Stay with us. So then that person would bring another person. And then at the end, we would have, like, 15 people sitting at a table.

(Ana) It was just also a great place to just be myself once again. That first year specifically, they put on so many new responsibilities on you and expectations that sometimes can feel overwhelming. But being surrounded by people who are in the same position as you just makes you see that it's a little bit more bearable and that you're not the only one who's going through that as well. So it encourages you a lot.

(Ana) So you see, finding your place on campus is more than just about the right chair or the best study spot. It's about a place to feel safe or brave or a powerful, a place to become yourself or to be yourself.

(Emily) Producer Marco Milosevic recently sat down with Maxwell Poessnecker, Associate Director of Student Life and Director of LGBTQ Services at Century College. They talked about all kinds of places on campus where students from all kinds of backgrounds, identities, and experiences can feel like they belong.

(Monte) Let's listen in on their conversation.

(Marco) Yeah. I'm Marco. I'm glad you came. I'm glad to have you here.

(Maxwell) Yeah, thanks.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Marco) Let's just get right to it. Why don't you just tell us your name, and what's your role here at the college?

(Maxwell) OK. So my name is Maxwell Poessnecker, and I serve as the associate director of student life and the director of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer student services. So it's probably one of the longest titles on campus.

(Marco) Yeah, I would agree that is.

(Maxwell) I went to a small state school in Nebraska. I came out, I think, as bisexual. And then eventually I was like, well, lesbian. And then I was like, no, I'm gay. And then I identify as queer.

(Marco) That sounds like quite a personal journey.

(Maxwell) Yeah. And that's the thing, is identity and orientation are all very fluid, just like by my example in that. So I think about my college experience, and I think about the fact that I didn't really have language. I didn't have role models. I didn't have anybody who looked like me and who was experiencing what I was experiencing to be able to come out. So I didn't actually come out as trans until I was in grad school.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Marco) What advice would you give to students who are facing barriers or obstacles in maybe finding a safe space or feeling comfortable to maybe take the same journey, personal journey like you went through?

(Maxwell) Well, it's tough because there's no one right answer. Being at a community college, we are working with students who are oftentimes at the front lines of having marginalized experiences because they're experiencing homelessness or hunger. They're a first-generation college student, whatever it might be. So oftentimes, I'm finding students who are telling me that they've been outed by a family member, and they're no longer feeling safe with their family.

(Maxwell) So I'm having to ask basic questions like, do you feel safe at home? Do you feel like if you needed to leave that you have enough financial money to be able to support yourself? But I think I've kind of avoided your initial question. I think really, the best thing that I can tell young people or students is you are valid. You matter. Your experiences are real, and there's people out there who are like you. And when they say it gets better, I can't honestly say that it gets better, because life really sucks sometimes, to be honest. But to be able to be unapologetically authentic in yourself is a really awesome thing to do.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Marco) I'm going to give you the last word. Is there anything you want to add, anything we didn't talk about?

(Maxwell) I have a lot to say. One is-- for students' sake is if you're thinking about how do I make an impact on campus, how do I find community, one of the best places to start is Student Life. I know that we always have an open door if students are just like, you know, I want to start a tree climbing club. But it's about creating community and helping students find what they're passionate about. And so I just want to encourage students to never go to college or never set foot on campus and not get involved in some shape or form.

(Marco) Well, with that, I take that as a personal challenge to start a tree climbing club. And I want to thank you, man. Thanks for coming out. I appreciate it.

(Maxwell) Yeah, totally

(Marco) All right. That's it.

(Maxwell) Awesome.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Emily) All right. So we've got the space, but what about the people?

(Monte) Exactly. Good question. Next time on Finding Your Place, we'll talk about mentors.

(Emily) The people we meet who help us along the way.

(Monte) The people who have been in our shoes and who know what we need.

(Emily) People kind of like us.

(Monte) Yeah. We're kind of like mentors now too.

(Emily) So take our advice. Subscribe to Finding Your Place on iTunes or give us a follow on SoundCloud, and please join us for the next episode.

Finding Your Place Episode 11: Connecting with Mentors

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Monte) She was actually like a friend, a mentor. I talked about my girlfriend with her. I talked about things that was going on at my family life with her. And she was just so understanding and awesome and really comforting. And from then on, I learned that if I really do want to make it in this life, I need people I can lean on besides my family. Because your family's a awesome support system. But once you leave the house, it's kind of hard.

(Marco) And let's be honest, sometimes you don't want to talk to your family--

(Monte) Yeah, that's very true.

(Marco) I'll be honest.

(Monte) That's very true.

(Marco) Sometimes there are issues that you don't want to talk about with your spouse, your mom or dad, or whatever.

(Monte) Yes.

(Marco) Kind of a third party ambiguous sort of person.

(Marco) You're listening to the Finding Your Place podcast series, a series made by college students for college students.

(Ana) OK, so here's the thing. Sometimes you get brought up to believe that you should do things by yourself, you know? Be independent. You hear that over and over again growing up.

(Marco) Yeah. I mean, like we were saying earlier, it seems like you're supposed to do college alone, to be grown up, make your own way, make your own decisions.

(Ana) Yeah. Like the younglings would say, adulting.

(Marco) [LAUGHS] Exactly. But you don't want to try to do it all alone. Most people who try to do it alone don't do so well.

(Ana) You need to connect with people and with little luck, find a mentor.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(the group of producers) I think we're back.

(the group of producers) Oh, yeah. That's--

(the group of producers) We're back.

[LAUGHTER]

(Ana) Is it recording now?

(Dave) It is recording.

(Ana) I guess going back to mentoring, what is something that you guys were looking for in a mentor?

(Monte) For me, I think the number one thing I always look for is do they have the ability to be informal with me? Because like I said, I'm big on that. Show me your true self, and then we can make a connection.

(Marco) I try to get it from people who have nothing to do with the military. And the reason why is I joined the Army at 17. I got out at 31. I grew up in the Army. And now I want to learn how to unlearn some of those behaviors and sort of all the quiriness that go along with being a soldier.

(Ana) Right.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Sonti) Independence was drilled into my brain so hard growing up. And after my car accident, it was like, oh, you have to be independent. So that's just my thing is just being independent. I can do everything myself. I wasn't looking for a mentor actually at all. My mentor kind of just was like, Hey, man. Like Sonti you don't have to do it by yourself. And it was just nice, and it made things smoother knowing I was like, oh, I can bounce this idea on-- he became my unofficial advisor.

(Marco) So how do you think your voice in this Finding Your Place podcast series is kind of going to serve as a guide, almost as if you're mentoring new college students? If you were trying to tell them something, what would it be?

(Ana) I think the biggest lesson to-- or I guess main message that we all are trying to share is besides the fact that we all do go through struggles and hardships, first of all, you're not alone, but also, seek help. You know? Most of the reasons why all of us here were able to succeed through these hardships were why? Because we sought help.

(Ana) We found somebody who were like, OK, for example, with a food insecurity, where can I go get somebody who can help me with this? If it was, I don't know, something mentally, where can I go get counseling? If you were struggling with grades, whatever it is, it was because we went seeking for help from somebody whether it was a faculty member, a student, I don't know, an administrator. But it was the fact that we asked for help that totally made the difference for us. You know? So yeah.

(Marco) Yeah, I agree. Something I've seen that's all too common, and I refer to it as the spiral effect, right? When faced with failure, you will fail. There are some things in college-- I'm not saying necessarily a class or something-- but there is something along the way in your college experience where you'll fail at.

(Ana) Right. You won't always succeed.

(Marco) Yeah. You'll fail at maybe a paper or maybe an entire class. Maybe you won't get along with a group you've been assigned to work with. Whatever it may be. And sometimes what I see in people is they have that initial failure, and then they just go down this spiral. You know what I mean? It's just like, Well, I failed that class, so whatever. I'm not going to try that hard in this class. Then before you know it, they've dropped out of school, and they let out-- it's almost like--

(Ana) You have two options after you fail.

(Marco) Right. When you're-- right. You can either pick yourself up and dust yourself off and go on with your life, or you can just keep going down the rabbit hole.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Marco) We're going to turn this episode over to producer Monte Brown. He recently caught up with one of his mentors, Mymique Baxter, another academic advisor at Minnesota State University Mankato.

(Ana) Mymique. Oh, you're going to love Mymique. Give it a listen.

(Dave) What's the plan for today? Talk to me a little bit.

(Monte) I sort of planned this to interview one of my mentors, Mymique Baxter. Going to go talk about how she's been a big help in my life.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[KNOCKING]

(Monte) Hey, Mymique.

(Mymique) Hello. You're already recording? Why you got the little thing out there? Knock, knock. Hello?

[LAUGHS]

(Mymique) This is Mymique. Microphone check. My name is Dr. Mymique Baxter. I am the academic advisor on record for all elementary and special education students. I also mentor a bunch of different students and different student organizations, specifically Teachers of Tomorrow, which is a student organization that supports students of color going into the teaching field.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Monte) What does mentoring means to you?

(Mymique) Mentoring is more than just being there for somebody. It's believing in them and their abilities. Not just the abilities they have now, but the abilities they will have in the future, their skills. Guiding them, being a sounding board for their concerns and their needs, being able to reprimand or correct them to tell them this is a learning moment. You should have done it this way. Or giving them guidance on past mistakes that I've made saying this what happened to me when I did that. You can make your own choice, but hopefully you make the right choice.

(Monte) Why do you think students need mentoring?

(Mymique) I think students need mentoring because it's all about the cycle of life. And there's always more wisdom that comes from the more seasoned people. And as we continue to churn, eventually the young, like you, will become the seasoned. [LAUGHS] And then you will have to mentor others and help them.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Dave) Do you have advice for people who are told, Hey, you should find a mentor? How do you find a mentor?

(Mymique) I would say the first thing they would probably need to check into is student organizations. Each student organization has a faculty or a staff advisor. And so if there's something they're interested in, that would be the first place I would talk to because that's

generally an adult that has been on campus for a while. I would say start with what they like. If they like bowling, if they like soccer, basketball, if it's sports, find a sports team first. If it's ceramics, or if it's academics, or if it's a sorority, fraternity, look into that stuff also because there's always going to be a faculty or staff advisor. And then from there, they can probably connect the dots.

(Monte) Can you describe our relationship in three words?

(Mymique) Respectful, loving, and hilarious.

(Dave) You keep saying that you love this guy. What do you love about this guy?

(Mymique) I would say mostly, I love his sense of humor. I love his work ethic. He has an attitude that's like I'm not going to give up. He may not be the best at everything, but he continues to try. And you can see that in him. And he's always trying to help others be successful. Once he's learned something and he's mastered or he feels confident in his ability, he's always willing to share with others what he's learned. And I really love that about him.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Mymique) That first semester is the most telling semester. Do you want to go back home? Are you going to be academically successful? What did you get on that first test? If you're used to getting A's in high school and that first test is a D, your confidence is pretty much shattered.

[LAUGHS] And so you have to be able to build that back up either with friends, a mentor, or you have to have that inner ability to say it's OK. I didn't do so hot on that one, but I'm going to take another shot. And the candy dish. That's always for students.

(Monte) Oh, yeah. The candy dish.

(Mymique) That's always for the students.

(Monte) I'm going to take a Last Twix.

[LAUGHTER]

(Monte) All right. Thank you, Mymique, for allowing us to do this. Thank you so much for being a big role in my life.

(Marco) So, Ana, what's next?

(Ana) We're actually going to go into an instructor's office. And wait for it. It's going to be during office hours.

(Marco) Whoa. You can actually do that?

(Ana) [LAUGHS] Yeah. And we're going to find out what happens when we try and talk to our professors. Keep listening. You don't want to miss it.

Finding Your Place Episode 12: Communicating with Your Professors

(Tanita) So I have some questions for a professor. So we are going to go to her office, and hopefully she's in. I have checked her calendar, so it says she has office hours, but sometimes they're in the bathroom, or they go and get something to drink, or they have meetings during that time. But usually, if you check their office hours on the syllabus or on their doors, they'll be in. Knock, knock.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Marco) Talk with your professor. Sure, I mean, it's easier said than done, right?

(Ana) Some professors are intimidating. Well, at least they seem like it. But we're going to share something in this episode that might surprise you.

(Marco) And may even shock you.

(Ana) This is breaking news, a Finding Your Place exclusive.

(Marco) Your professors-- many of them-- actually want to talk to you.

(Ana) One of our producers decided to put this idea to the test and recently visited one of their professors during office hours.

(Tanita) Knock, knock.

(Professor) Hey. Hey, Tanita. How are you?

(Tanita) Hi, how are you?

(Professor) I'm good. What's going on today?

(Tanita) So I just have some questions.

(Professor) OK, class stuff, life stuff?

(Tanita) Both.

(Professor) OK, you want to sit?

(Tanita) Yeah, can I, please?

(Professor) Yeah, of course you can sit.

(Tanita) Oh, geez. OK, so the first time I came to an instructor's office, it was scary for me, especially as an older student, because if I ask for help, it's a sign of weakness. And I'm sure that's not just true for older students but a lot of students, especially first-time students. I know a lot of men that are this way and a lot of cultures, too, is to not ask for help. So thinking back on

those experiences and how fearful I was about, would they understand what it is that I needed, are they going to turn me away, and all of these things. And I was hoping you could help with some advice for students who may be going through this.

(Professor) I can talk about that. I think you're right. There's pride involved there asking for help. But I think it's also tough because it's a change of context. In the classroom, you're one of many students, and the instructor is there talking to the whole room. And there's a really familiar pattern of how that interaction works. And even if you pop up before or after class, it's still in that really familiar setting, which is normally how your interactions go. But now you're walking into this instructor's space.

(Professor) For advice, I think check the office hours first, because that's when that person would expect to see students. So they should do things to be welcoming, like have the door open and be watching for people and have time, so you won't walk in and surprise someone. So office hours are a really good first step. And then think out your question and bring some things to be ready for that. You can write it down and have it written down, or you can have that exact assignment out or your work and have, maybe, something starred or highlighted or with a Post-it. So it's always nice to see a student come in and want to work on classwork and seek out a conversation.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Tanita) I notice that you have a nice, open environment here. I'm wondering if that is intentional or if you just like to be organized.

(Professor) Thanks for seeing it that way, because I look around and see a few piles. But yeah, I try to keep some open desk space. But also, this tends to be a job that generates a lot of papers and books. So yeah, and I've got a lot of pictures up of friends and family and things I like, because students sometimes ask about it, I've noticed, like if I need to read something, some student's work, it gives them something to do, is to look around. And then I feel like it's less awkward to sit here waiting for me to say something.

(Tanita) No, I appreciate it, as a student, having something to look at or something to read while you're reading my paper because, yeah, it is awkward. And you're just sitting here. You have a nice, big, bright poster on the wall that says Celebrating Women in Arts, nice picture of Prince. And some family photos, too, gives me some insight into your personality and who you are. So yeah, that's cool.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Tanita) One last thing-- I was just wondering, you're very open and a bright person, but not all professors are as open as you are. And I was wondering if you have some advice for students who may have encountered the more prickly professor.

(Professor) Yeah, that's true. That's tricky. The personality-- that's a big factor, too, in some instructors. And to be honest, it took me a while to build my office-visit skills. I suspect some instructors are just introverts and figuring that out. And it's probably not personal or that they

don't like you, that they're maybe just trying to figure out how to help and uncertain of what your question is. And sometimes students are uncertain, too. So there's a little awkwardness there.

(Professor) But yeah, I would also trust your instincts on that. And if you are not clicking with an instructor, or if you're feeling like you just don't want to do that conversation in person, then make it happen in the five minutes after class. Make it happen over email. Make a phone call happen. There are other ways to talk to that person without the one-on-one office visit, too, so phone calls during office hours.

(Professor) Go in with a classmate is another strong strategy for just minimizing that discomfort. If you're just stressing out and would rather avoid, but you've got to do it, bring someone along. Lots of students come with a buddy, whether it's someone from that class or another class. And that's super normal that you're traveling with a pal around campus and just want to check in because you're there. So make that happen.

(Tanita) Thank you for sitting down with me and talking with me about office visits today. I really appreciate it. Office visits are really scary, especially for first-year students. Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

(Professor) You're the best.

(Tanita) Aw, thank you. You're the best.

(Professor) Thanks.

(Tanita) All right, thanks, Amanda.

(Professor) All right.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

(Marco) OK, that's just one visit. But many professors we know really do seem to enjoy talking with students about our lives and our concerns.

(Ana) So speaking of professors, two of them have been helping us with this podcast series, Professor Robert Jersak and Dr. David Engen.

(Marco) They decided to sit down with some of their colleagues and get their opinions about communicating with professors.

(Ana) Why don't we listen in?

(Professor on campus) Make yourself known to your teachers. Ask questions in class, and then come to their office and ask a question about the homework assignment. Help them connect your face with your name.

(Professor on campus) If you're going to email a professor, using Doctor or Professor as an address is a good way to go. And I think you should sign off after your email, using your name.

(Professor on campus) Faculty love to talk to students, so the more that you talk to them, the more they will talk to you.

(Professor on campus) Look through your email. And if you can catch grammar mistakes or punctuation mistakes, that'd be fantastic.

(Professor on campus) I think you would walk up to a professor after a class, and you would say, hi, I'm Jenny. I'm in your class, and I just wanted to introduce myself to you and say hello.

(Professor on campus) Be as professional as you can. And then the reciprocal relationship that you build with them is a professional one. And I think that's actually something you can take from your time as a student into the workplace later on.

(Professor on campus) It's OK to be scared at first. That's OK. But then, over time, I think that'll ease up. And you realize, hey, this could be a good, nurturing relationship that helps me succeed in school.

(Ana) So maybe professors are not as intimidating as you think.

(Marco) And maybe they mostly want the best for us. And if we take a minute here and there before or after class to connect, to find out more about what they do and why they do it, we might add another person to our team, another person on our side.

(Ana) And more people on our side matters. It does.

(Marco) Keep us on your side, too. Remember to subscribe to Finding Your Place on iTunes or give us a follow on SoundCloud.

(Ana) We'll see you here next time.

(Person on campus) My advice to students in their first year college or fifth year of college-- when things start getting hard, you have to find a way to push through. And always, always, always, always, always communicate with your professors.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we would like to again thank our student producers **Emily Albright, Sonti Brandts, Monte Brown, Tanita Cronk, Ana Leyva and Marko Milosevic** for their talents, their patience and their brilliant work on this series. We thank their families and loved ones as well for opening the door to this production.

Sasha Aslanian (American Public Media) served as an informal consultant to this series. Her expertise in radio and podcasting, her passion for student voices and her constant encouragement helped give the series depth and authenticity.

Marcus Bagala has produced soundtracks for nationally-syndicated radio programs, including This American Life. His music perfectly set the tone of each Finding Your Place episode, and he graciously donated his album, Materials, for use in this series. Please support his work at <https://www.marcusbagala.com/>

Stephen Kelly (Open Education and Innovation Program Coordinator for Minnesota State) supported this work in every way possible: facilitating the Shark Tank innovation grant funding events, responding to budgeting and distribution questions, and connecting us with interested campuses, departments and programs.

April Walton (Director of Continuing Education at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University) has always served as a guide and mentor in our journey through CDS&Duke coursework, helping us build connections and choose curriculum that would best serve our skills.

Gary Hatteberg (independent media producer) played a vital role in helping us create and share the story of the Dreaming by Degrees/Finding Your Place production.

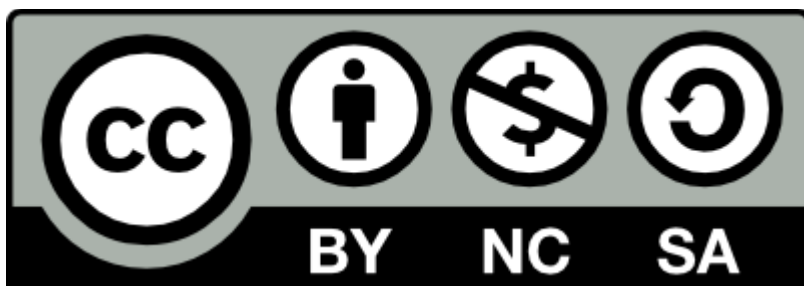
Zoe Ross has been a wonderful advocate for the series, serving as a producer for the PSEO Experience episode, as well as an outstanding intern for promotion, aggregation of survey data and accessibility review of this Educator's Guide.

Dave and Robert also wish to thank many others who lent us their voices and/or provided support, feedback and cheers throughout the production: **Michele Jersak, Jenn Rasset, Kelly Pontowatrain, Jenni Swenson, Julie Zaloudek, Mymique Baxter, Brenda Flannery, Gina Maahs-Zurbey, Amanda Olson, Maxwell Poessnecker, Frank Schultz, Mareese Brown, Rachel Tanquist, Laura Bemel, Eddie Engen and Grace Engen.**

Dave would also like to express appreciation for the **Nadine B. Andreas Creative or Faculty Research Grant** he received from the Department of Communication Studies at MSU, Mankato in the summer of 2019. The grant provided additional time to complete the editing of the podcast and begin working on research to explore the potential impact of this and other podcasts in higher education.



The Finding Your Place Podcast Series has been created with the support of Minnesota State "Shark Tank" grant funding for innovation in higher education.



The Finding Your Place Educator's Guide is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike (CC BY-NC-SA). This license allows you to remix, tweak, and build upon this work non-commercially, as long as you credit the creators and license any new creations under the identical terms.