

# FIRST GENERATION GUIDE



PCOM®

OFFICE OF DIVERSITY AND  
COMMUNITY RELATIONS



# RESOURCES



Explore PCOM's numerous scholarships for new and returning students. Many PCOM scholarships have criteria related to disadvantaged backgrounds or underrepresented racial populations.

The PCOM Office of Financial Aid offers a searchable database of external scholarships for medical and graduate students.

## OFFICE OF FINANCIAL AID RESOURCES

PCOM Financial Aid Lecture Series - Each year, PCOM invites industry professionals to present to graduating students on important financial topics such as home loans, home buying, financial planning, investing, student loan repayment, and more.



# RESOURCES



## AAMC Resources

- **Loan Repayment Strategies for Osteopathic Physicians Webinar:** This dynamic webinar addresses how residents, fellows and attending physicians are repaying their student loans; how to determine the best repayment strategy based on your student loan portfolio, training and career plans; and how to adjust your repayment strategy as your circumstances change. Paul S. Garrard is one of the nation's leading experts on student loans and educational debt management for medical students, residents, fellows, and attending physicians. View the webinar recording and presentation materials PDF.
- **AAMC Financial Wellness:** An interactive service that allows students to create a personal account to measure their financial health, receive personal feedback, set financial goals, review progress and ask questions of an AAMC expert at any time.
- **AAMC Managing Your Finances During Medical School:** Get tips on reducing debt and forming money management habits. View resources on the costs of applying to residencies, creating a budget, and more.
- **AAMC Transitioning to Medical School:** Explore financial advice for students who have recently been accepted into medical school, including accepting financial aid, deferring undergraduate loans, budgeting, and organizing healthcare records.

# RESOURCES



## AAMC

Tools and Resources for First-Generation Medical School Students

## FirstGenMedicine

Advice for preparing for med school

## Med Legs Podcast

Learn how to find your footing as a first-generation or low-income student in medicine



# WHAT TO EXPECT | YEAR 1

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**THE FIRST YEAR OF THE DO PROGRAM IS FOCUSED ON PROVIDING YOU WITH THE GROUNDWORK AND BACKGROUND THAT WILL ENABLE YOU TO UNDERSTAND PATHOLOGY AND CLINICAL DIAGNOSES THAT YOU WILL ENCOUNTER AS A PHYSICIAN. YOU START AT THE MOLECULAR LEVEL- LEARNING ABOUT BIOCHEMISTRY AND IMMUNOLOGY. THEN, YOU TRANSITION INTO LEARNING THE ANATOMY AND PHYSIOLOGY OF EACH BODY SYSTEM. YOUR LABS- WHERE YOU DO LOTS OF HANDS-ON LEARNING- ARE COMPOSED OF THE ANATOMY CADAVER LAB, PCS SKILLS LAB, AND OMM. IT IS A PRETTY DEMANDING AND RIGOROUS YEAR- BUT YOU ARE LEARNING LOTS OF THE BASICS THAT WILL REALLY HELP YOU UNDERSTAND AND CONNECT THE DOTS ONCE YOU GET INTO YOUR SECOND YEAR.**

# WHAT TO EXPECT | YEAR 2

A decorative graphic consisting of several horizontal yellow lines of varying lengths and thicknesses, with some lines curving upwards or downwards at their ends, positioned to the right of the main title.

**THE SECOND YEAR OF YOUR DO PROGRAM TAKES THINGS TO THE NEXT LEVEL- NOW THAT YOU HAVE LEARNED THE ANATOMY AND NORMAL PHYSIOLOGY, YOU WILL APPLY THIS KNOWLEDGE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THINGS GO WRONG. EACH BLOCK IS FOCUSED ON A BODY SYSTEM- YOU LEARN FROM A PATHOLOGY, PATHOPHYSIOLOGY, PHARMACOLOGIC, AND CLINICAL PERSPECTIVE. MANY OF YOUR CLASSES WILL HAVE CLINICAL LECTURERS: PHYSICIANS FROM NEARBY HOSPITALS WHO TEACH A TOPIC OF THEIR SPECIALTY THROUGH A CLINICAL LENS. AGAIN, YOU WILL HAVE PCS AND OMM LABS, WHERE YOU LEARN PLENTY OF NEW TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES.**

**ON TOP OF MANAGING CLASSWORK, YOUR SECOND YEAR WILL ALSO BE DEDICATED TO PREPARING FOR THIRD YEAR ROTATIONS AND BOARDS- BY LATE FALL YOU WILL SUBMIT YOUR ROTATION SITE RANKINGS, AND YOU WILL KNOW YOUR ASSIGNMENT EARLY INTO THE WINTER. BEFORE THE START OF YOUR THIRD YEAR, USUALLY IN THE SPRING OR EARLY SUMMER, YOU WILL BE EXPECTED TO HAVE TAKEN YOUR BOARDS- THE SCHOOL WILL KEEP YOU UPDATED WITH DUE DATES AND DEADLINES FOR EACH COMPONENT OF THIS JOURNEY. THEY HOST SEVERAL REQUIRED MEETINGS TO HELP YOU STAY WELL INFORMED AND ON TRACK WITH THIS PROCESS. THEY WILL ALSO HAVE A PROFESSIONALISM AND BOARDS REGINESS CLASS THAT WILL ASSIGN YOU WITH BOARDS STYLE QUESTIONS DUE EACH WEEK IN ANTICIPATION OF YOUR BOARDS EXAMS.**

# INSPIRATIONAL QUOTES FROM FELLOW FIRST-GENERATION MEDICAL STUDENTS

Be proud of how far you have come! You all got this and are going to be amazing doctors one day!

Don't ever hesitate to reach out for help; you have a huge support system here. There are lots of first-generation students willing to help and support you along this journey!

“

**You got this! Even when it gets hard, don't give up. Lean on those around you when you are feeling down. You will get through this!**

”

You've made it this far and you are here for a reason! Keep working hard, and you will reach your goal in no time!

“

**Personal growth lies within the unknown. Courage permits you to explore this space” Entering medical school may be daunting, but you've been equipped with the knowledge and resources to succeed! Continue believing in yourself, and just know YOU'VE GOT THIS! <3**

”

As a first-gen student, it becomes tough to ask for help about school to your family, but the love and support you get from the med school family is also shown here in medical school, so use that as your motivation to excel as a first-gen student.

# INSPIRATIONAL QUOTES FROM FELLOW FIRST-GENERATION MEDICAL STUDENTS

**Keep pushing yourself  
regardless of what others  
around you tell you;  
remember that you are  
your biggest supporter in  
life, no matter what you  
want to do!**

**“  
Think about your  
why, and then  
remember it  
when things get  
tough!”**

**No matter what blocks you in your  
path to success, there will always be  
ways to overcome the obstacles in  
front of you and push through.**

**“  
A person who  
never made a  
mistake never tried  
anything new!”**

**You are here for a reason.  
Med school will get hard,  
and you will ask if you  
have what it takes. I  
promise you, you're here  
because you have  
everything within you  
needed to succeed.**

**”**

**FIRST GENERATION  
FACULTY AND STAFF  
SPOTLIGHT**



# First-Generation Spotlight

PRESIDENT JAY S. FELDSTEIN, DO

## ABOUT PRESIDENT FELDSTEIN

Jay S. Feldstein, DO '81, serves as the eighth president and chief executive officer of Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine.

Dr. Feldstein earned his bachelor's degree from Penn State University and his doctor of osteopathic medicine degree from PCOM. He completed his residency in emergency medicine at the Medical Center of Delaware and his internship at John F. Kennedy Memorial Hospital in Stratford, New Jersey. He is board certified in emergency medicine and occupational medicine and is a fellow of the American College of Preventive Medicine.

is board certified in emergency medicine and occupational medicine and is a fellow of the American College of Preventive Medicine.

## HOW DO YOU DEFINE FIRST-GEN?

No physicians in immediate family including parents, aunts, uncles, cousins and siblings.

## TELL ME ABOUT EXPERIENCE IN GRADUATE/MEDICAL SCHOOL.

I loved every aspect of medical school, especially the third and 4th year. I suffered from impostor syndrome early in my first year, with intermittent bouts throughout the first two years.

## WHAT WAS IT LIKE AS A FIRST-GEN COLLEGE AND MEDICAL/ HEALTH PROFESSION STUDENT GRADUATE?

I lived at home and my parents did not understand time management when I chose not to go to certain classes in medical school, I had cousins who went to college so there were no issues at that level.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EXTERNAL PRESSURES THAT IMPACTED YOUR JOURNEY?

Many of my college peers had been accepted to medical school in their first application cycle that made me feel like a failure at times.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR MEDICAL/ GRADUATE STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY FIRST-GEN STUDENTS?

Understanding how you learn, whether you are visual, auditory, tactile, experiential or a combination and maximize those styles, couple that with time management and always stay curious and never stop learning because medicine is always changing.

## MANY FIRST-GEN STUDENTS FEEL A NOTION OF ENORMOUS PRESSURE TO SUCCEED. HOW DID YOU COMBAT IT?

Once you realize the pressure is really internal it becomes easier to deal with, getting rejected my first time around applying to PCOM help put things in perspective.



# First-Generation Spotlight

JOANNE M. JONES, MBA



## ABOUT JOANNE M. JONES, MBA

In 2018 Joanne Jones, MBA, was named campus officer for PCOM South Georgia in Moultrie, Georgia. Jones brings more than 30 years of experience with PCOM to the position in which she will direct the operational, non-academic activities of the campus. In addition, Jones is charged with fostering productive relationships between the campus and community, state and local governments.

In her most recent position, Jones served as the College's designated institutional official which ensured that all residency programs under PCOM's authority adhere to Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) compliance standards. During her career with PCOM she has also held the position of Practices Manager for the PCOM Healthcare Centers.

Jones currently serves on the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine's Undergraduate Medical Education – Graduate Medical Education Task Force which considers critical and time-sensitive issues impacting the osteopathic medical clinical learning environment.

Jones earned a bachelor's degree in administration in organizational management from Cabrini College in Radnor, Pennsylvania, and a master's degree in business administration from Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania. She is a member of the Leadership Gwinnett Class of 2014.



## HOW DO YOU DEFINE FIRST-GEN?

Although I am the first to graduate from college in my family it did not occur to me that it was such an accomplishment until I was sitting at my son's graduation from the University of West Georgia in 2017. During the ceremony they asked all of the first generation students to stand and it was a large portion of the class. It struck me at that moment that my expectations of my son were higher because I had a college degree. He has now completed his Masters degree and is working in Birmingham happy with his career choice.

## TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN GRADUATE/MEDICAL SCHOOL.

I completed an associates degree before becoming employed at PCOM. After realizing that career opportunities were available to those with degrees I finished my Bachelor of Art degree which gave me the confidence to start a Masters program. My goal was to complete that prior to my son starting 2nd grade. I think each level of education is really about persistence and not listening to anyone around you giving you negative feedback.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EXTERNAL PRESSURES THAT IMPACTED YOUR JOURNEY?

When I received my Associates degree I started working at PCOM in the Health Care Centers then got married the following year (way too young). While working with the PCOM 4th year medical students I knew that I needed to complete my Bachelor degree. At that time I was the same age as our medical students and realized that many of them overcame obstacles to get to where they were and that gave me the confidence to go back and complete my degree.

I started evening classes, had a baby and got divorced before completing. I like to think that I was so busy being a mom, working full time, going to school I did not have time to think about all of the external pressures and just plowed through everything with the help of my family.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR MEDICAL/GRADUATE STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY FIRST-GEN STUDENTS?

Don't listen to the people that say you cannot do it and don't be afraid of change. Change will be a constant in your life, embrace it even though it is hard at times, it helps you grow and mold you into the person you want to be.

## WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR MOST IMPORTANT, PROUDEST AND/OR FAVORITE EXPERIENCES IN YOUR CAREER

Now that I have worked for PCOM in different positions over my 37 year career, graduation season is my most favorite. Knowing that I have had a small piece of the student or resident training, knowing that every employee/faculty makes a difference in someone else's dream as they walk across the stage gives me great joy! I am so proud of our students and residents; they have a special place in my heart.

# First-Generation Spotlight

STACIE FAIRLEY, PHD



## ABOUT DR. STACIE FAIRLEY

Dr. Fairley teaches medical microbiology and immunology to first year DO students at PCOM South Georgia. Dr. Fairley's research interests focus on the various aspects of nanoscience and nanotechnology. In particular, she is interested in intracellular trafficking of nanoparticles.



## HOW DO YOU DEFINE FIRST-GEN?

This definition is fluid, and variations in the definition depend on who you ask. First gens usually accomplish the first achievements in a family (i.e., first teacher, first elected official, first business owner, first millionaire, etc.)

## TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN GRADUATE/MEDICAL SCHOOL.

I. I obtained my Ph.D. from Alabama State University. During graduate school, I was a Graduate Teachers' Assistant, a peer tutor, the Life Sciences Graduate Association President, and a member of the University's Executive Council. My Ph.D. studies focused on vaccine development using nanoparticles and IL-12. Everyone I encountered during my graduate school tenure became an extended family member. We laughed, cried, and encouraged one another. Without their support, I would not have made it. Even though I had a wonderful, supportive, diverse graduate cohort, I still experienced burnout. I would take a few days or weeks to reset and refocus to combat burnout and motivation. I did not realize the importance of these moments until I became an advisor for my students.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EXTERNAL PRESSURES THAT IMPACTED YOUR JOURNEY?

One external pressure was trying to assimilate to college and fit in with students with different backgrounds and ideologies. Another pressure was time management; I was chosen to be the leader for everything. I had to learn how to say no and not to feel guilty. Additionally, there were moments when I was dissatisfied with my project.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR MEDICAL/GRADUATE STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY FIRST-GEN STUDENTS?

Take advantage of academic support services. Take mental breaks. Baby steps are still steps. You got this!

## MANY FIRST-GEN STUDENTS FEEL A NOTION OF ENORMOUS PRESSURE TO SUCCEED. HOW DID YOU COMBAT IT?

Knowing that I represented my family and community was immense pressure. Finding familiar environments such as a church family, identifying a mentor, and taking advantage of the school's student services were pivotal in my journey to success.

# First-Generation Spotlight

PATIENCE A. MASON, MEd



## ABOUT PATIENCE MASON, MEd

In 2018, Patience A. Mason, MEd was named Chief Student Affairs Officer for the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the Suwanee and Moultrie, Georgia, campuses. In this role, Mason leads all student affairs operations. She oversees student activities, clubs, and organizations, in addition to career, academic support, counseling, and disability services, student recreation and fitness, and selected campus events for more than 2,800 students.

As the former PCOM interim chief student affairs officer, Mason has directed the Center for Student Affairs at GA-PCOM in Suwanee, Georgia since 2012. In addition, she served as the associate director of the Center for Student Affairs from 2007 to 2012. Prior to joining PCOM, Mason was the director of student life for Georgia Perimeter College, Atlanta, Georgia, and a first-year counselor at Montclair State University, Upper Montclair, New Jersey.

Mason currently serves on the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine Empathy and Diversity committees and on the Student Affairs Council. At GA-PCOM, Mason has served on the Student Progress and Evaluation Committee, the Campus Crisis Management Team, the PCOM Diversity Committee, and as an advisor to the Student National Medical Association. She is a 2018 graduate of Leadership Gwinnett.

Mason earned a master's degree in education with a specialization in higher education administration from the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, and a bachelor of arts degree in psychology from the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana.

## HOW DO YOU DEFINE FIRST-GEN?

I typically define first-generation as a student (attending college) whose parents did not attend college.

## WHAT WAS IT LIKE AS A FIRST-GEN COLLEGE STUDENT GRADUATE?

Having a supportive community is critical in any higher education environment. While there were not a ton of black students in the Curry School of Education, there was a black Graduate and Professional School organization that provided a sense of community. Many of my friends were first-generation, so I never felt like I was alone or that people couldn't understand my experience.

## TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN GRADUATE/MEDICAL SCHOOL.

I thoroughly enjoyed my graduate school experience. I attended the University of Virginia and obtained a Master's in Counseling with a focus on Higher Education Administration. It is different than undergrad in that you really get to focus on your area of interest. With the exception of statistics, I loved all my classes. Another benefit of graduate school was the interaction with your colleagues, people who had similar interests. Researching and studying subjects that excite you makes all the difference in the world.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EXTERNAL PRESSURES THAT IMPACTED YOUR JOURNEY?

I was fortunate that my family, and specifically my mom, was adamant that my siblings and I get a college education. But I was aware that it was a sacrifice. I did feel isolated being so far from home.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR MEDICAL/GRADUATE STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY FIRST-GEN STUDENTS?

Find your tribe. Find folks that have similar concerns and experiences. They will be a source of support. Find allies...you need to build rapport and relationships with faculty and administrators that will help you to navigate your way. Find a mentor. When embarking on a professional career, it is imperative that you find mentors that can assist you and advocate for you on your journey.

## WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR MOST IMPORTANT, PROUDEST AND/OR FAVORITE EXPERIENCES IN YOUR CAREER

I'm not sure I can point to one experience, but I truly enjoy working with students that overcome obstacles or barriers in their tenure here at the college. There is nothing like watching a student walk across the stage when you know what they have overcome to get to that point. I am overjoyed and humbled by the fact that I can be a part of that journey. We have the opportunity to see them during orientation, sometimes looking like a deer in headlights, nervous and excited, and then see them accomplish their goals during graduation.



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# First-Generation Spotlight

PETER F. BIDEY, DO, MSED



## ABOUT DR. PETER BIDEY

Dr. Peter Bidey has served on the faculty since 2012. Since 2018, he has acted as vice chair (and previously, medical director) of the Department of Family Medicine, and most recently, as assistant dean of clinical curricular integration. He is a clerkship director and co-course director for myriad ambulatory, family medicine, and primary care skills courses.

He is on staff at Main Line Health – Lankenau Medical Center. He previously served as an attending physician, as director of medical education and as program director of the PCOM/Suburban Community Hospital Family Medicine Residency at Suburban Community Hospital in Norristown.

Dr. Bidey serves as president of the Pennsylvania Osteopathic Family Physicians Society (POFPS). He sits on the Board of Governors of the American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians (ACOFP) and acts as department chair of various ACOFP committees. He also chairs the NBOME Clinical Decision-Making and Key Features Content Committee. He is a member of ACOFP, POFPS, the American Osteopathic Association, and the Pennsylvania Osteopathic Medical Association. At PCOM, he is a member of the Student Professional Conduct Committee and faculty advisor to the PCOM Student Chapter of ACOFP and the PCOM Student Chapter of Primary Care Progress.

Dr. Bidey holds a bachelor's degree from Duquesne University, a doctor of osteopathic medicine degree from PCOM, and a master of science in education degree from the University of Pennsylvania. Board-certified by the AOBFP in family medicine and OMT, he is a fellow of the American College of Osteopathic Family Physicians.



## HOW DO YOU DEFINE FIRST-GEN?

Some people think of the first generation as the first generation to go to college, or the first generation to go to graduate school, or the first generation to go to medical school, or you insert anything in there. I think the first generation is individual to the people and where they come from. When I was even asked about this, they said, are you first gen? I said, well, my dad was the first generation with his brother to go to college, so I'm not a first-generation college student, but I'm a first-generation medical student for my immediate family as things go.

## TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN GRADUATE/MEDICAL SCHOOL.

I really enjoyed medical school. I tell students all the time that you're entering a different world, and for many people, this is a world that you might not be accustomed to, and you might not have others that are not accustomed to it as well. I didn't have a lot of physician connections when I started, I had to forge my way. One unique thing about this is, one, you start forming your own family. My friends that I met did not have a lot of people to rely on either, so we stuck together. I also interacted with people that were not first gen. I love PCOM because it is one big PCOM family. The people I met became my PCOM family. The second unique thing about my journey was meeting really good mentors. Dr. Becker and Dr. Kuo are good mentors of mine. It is important to keep making new ones. Dr. Sesso is also a mentor of mine now, and I didn't have to interact with him very much as an undergraduate. Take these things and build upon it. My journey was nice, because I literally decided I wanted to do family medicine after meeting Dr. Becker at the hospital one day. I was open to opportunities, which worked well for me.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EXTERNAL PRESSURES THAT IMPACTED YOUR JOURNEY?

I always say that when you think about interacting with people, there's time and knowledge. When you're dealing with someone that might not have as many people around them that understand exactly what they're going through, it's very hard. Sometimes it's more troublesome to explain it, because you are trying not to think about the things stressing you out, but now you've got to explain it to somebody, and it stresses you out even more. I did that often with my parents as things went. I realized that you don't, just because we're not talking medicine doesn't mean you're not learning life. Whether you're a first-generation medical student, college student, high school student, whatever, there are things that will occur. Learn from the people around you. Just because you have a title or X amount of letters before or after your name, means very little in those aspects of things. Learning from people will make you a better doctor. It's going to make you a better educator. It's going to make you, hopefully, a better mentor later on. One thing I would realize is that whether you're a first generation student or anybody in medical school, you're achieving something that others haven't, so it can be lonely. I like the quote from The Great Gatsby, "there's like a green light somewhere that you're searching for". As a medical student, there is fog, buildings, financial constraints, and other things in front of you. Ultimately, what you end up doing will be amazing, as long as you keep that vision in your head.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR MEDICAL/GRADUATE STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY FIRST-GEN STUDENTS?

Find a mentor, no matter who that person may be. Mentors hold you accountable, and can help you in times of need. Never be afraid to ask for anything because it will never hurt. The worst that can happen is that somebody says no, but at least you asked, and put yourself out there to do it. Also, don't forget to give back. I wouldn't be in the position I am today without people pulling me through, watching over me, and helping me. They didn't have to help, they just did. The whole purpose is creating a community, and I think that's what is so unique about PCOM. PCOM is one giant community.

## WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR MOST IMPORTANT, PROUDEST AND/OR FAVORITE EXPERIENCES IN YOUR CAREER

I am in a new role, I'm the dean of the medical school, and it is pretty awesome. I never thought I'd ever be in this role. I don't think anybody who was my classmate would think, oh Pete's going to be the dean. This role is awesome and it is important to me. I've had moments where a student pulls me aside and says, you know, when you did this, it really mattered to me. I've had students say, I know you don't realize this, but it really was helpful when you did this. Those moments are small energy bolts that make you think like, holy crap, this is why I'm doing these types of things. There are times when celebrating the achievements is necessary, but impacting the lives of others is what matters to me the most. Those are my proudest moments.

# First-Generation Spotlight

DANA BROOKS, MED



## ABOUT DANA BROOKS, MED

Dana Brooks joined the PCOM South Georgia Admissions team in 2018 as the Assistant Director of Admissions. Dana is now the Executive Director of Admissions.

Dana holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Thomas University in Thomasville, and a master's degree in higher education administration from Georgia Southern University in Statesboro. She most recently worked as a talent search coordinator for Southern Regional Technical College. In addition, she has worked as a recruiter for Thomas University in Thomasville.



## HOW DO YOU DEFINE FIRST-GEN?

I am the first in my family to obtain a college degree. The second in my family to graduate high school!

## TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN GRADUATE/MEDICAL SCHOOL.

Wow! My journey was long to get here and not straightforward. I started off wanting to go to college to be a lawyer. Straight out of high school I enrolled in a local college to pursue a degree in political science. With little to no guidance I failed out my first semester. Right after high school graduation before starting college I obtained my apprenticeship license as a cosmetologist. So when I failed out of college I started working full time as a hair stylist and put off returning to a four-year college and instead completed my diploma as a master cosmetologist. I then went on to pass my state board and obtain my cosmetology license. I had a very successful career at a young age working as a hairstylist but knew that I ultimately wanted to go back to college. After being out of school for about 4 or 5 years I decided to go back to college and try again. I had to continue to work and at this point I had my own business within a business and clientele doing hair that I had to maintain during the day so I went to school at night to pursue my bachelors degree. It took me about 5 years to get my BS degree in Psychology due to me having to take remedial classes the first two semesters because my entrance test scores were so low. While completing my degree I knew I wanted to work at a college. I started teaching at a local college. I taught the night cosmetology program for two years. I knew then I wanted to help people go to college. I saw all the obstacles that students were facing just to go to school. I also related with those obstacles because I had experienced most of them myself.

About a year after graduating I started working at the school I graduated from for my BS as a recruiter and admissions counselor. I left the world of cosmetology behind. From there I went on to work at a technical college as a recruiter, dual enrollment coordinator and to work with federal grants geared to servicing high school students from low income backgrounds with programs to go to college. While working as a grant coordinator I started to pursue my masters degree in higher education administration. I then saw a news publication about PCOM SG being built and applied for my current job. I completed my masters about 2 months after starting with PCOM. I was employed here from the beginning and watched the school being built from the ground up.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EXTERNAL PRESSURES THAT IMPACTED YOUR JOURNEY?

I think just society's norm of what women should be doing at certain ages.. getting married, having kids, staying home and raising them... it's a constant lingering thought of how others are judging your journey. That caused a lot of doubt for me like I was missing out when everyone was getting married and having kids but I was in school and just not at that season in my life.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR MEDICAL/GRADUATE STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY FIRST-GEN STUDENTS?

Don't compare yourself to others. Enjoy the journey and don't focus so much on just getting to your goal. Learn on the way and be open. Be kind and respectful to everyone. That will get you further way faster than any amount of education. Stand up for what you believe in!

## WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR MOST IMPORTANT, PROUDEST AND/OR FAVORITE EXPERIENCES IN YOUR CAREER

Helping others! Leading a team and being a servant leader. I am most proud seeing others grow and succeed and knowing that I was able to help them get there. I have had a lot of moments like that in my career and that is what keeps me going!!!

# First-Generation Spotlight

BRANDY SREENILAYAM, PHD



## ABOUT DR. BRANDY SREENILAYAM

Brandy Sreenilayam, PhD, received her BS in Biochemistry from the University of Detroit Mercy. After completing her Ph.D. in Molecular Physiology and Biophysics from the University of Iowa, she taught biochemistry and other chemistry-related courses at four different institutions. Her research focused on trying to purify the protein LGN with the end goal of determining its structure using X-ray crystallography.

In 2019, Dr. Sreenilayam joined the faculty at PCOM South Georgia as an assistant professor of biochemistry and cellular genetics.

Outside of work, Dr. Sreenilayam enjoys hunting, fishing, watching her kids play sports, and spending time with her family.

Dr. Sreenilayam is a member of the Association of Biochemistry Educators (ABE), the American Chemical Society (ACS), Graduate Women in Science (GWIS), and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS).



## HOW DO YOU DEFINE FIRST-GEN?

A person who attends an undergraduate college whose parents did not attend any type of college (i.e. Community College, Undergraduate College)

## TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN GRADUATE/MEDICAL SCHOOL.

While in high school, I aspired to be a physician. I looked at undergraduate colleges that offered science degrees. When I enrolled at the University of Detroit Mercy, I didn't declare a major, but given my intent was pre-med, I was paired with an advisor who was a faculty member in the Chemistry department. I successfully made it onto the college softball team and there was a Senior who was also pre-med. She advised me to major in Biochemistry to prepare for medical school, so I declared Biochemistry my major during my Freshman year. I also worked as a tutor at the college for all 4 years in the work-study program; I tutored chemistry, physics, math, and biology courses. During my Junior year, I switched from pre-med to wanting to go to graduate school to become a Professor of Biochemistry. The summer before my Senior year, I worked at a local Research and Development company to gain more research experience and improve my chances of getting accepted into a graduate program in Biochemistry.

I applied to 8 universities and was accepted into 4 of them. I chose to attend the University of Iowa Biochemistry Department because I felt like I fit in with the graduate students when I did my campus visit. I had 4 rotations in various labs in the Biochemistry Department, but I did not find a lab I was interested in doing research with an open space to accept students. I transferred to the Biomedical Sciences Graduate Program at the University of Iowa and joined a Professor that was in the Molecular Physiology and Biophysics Department. I entered graduate school knowing my goal was to become a teacher at the end, so I focused on learning as much about teaching as I could. After graduation, I was offered a 1-year position at Illinois College as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Biochemistry. I taught Biochemistry lectures and labs to undergraduate students, as well as general chemistry labs. For the next 10 years, I taught at various institutions, mostly teaching biochemistry and other chemistry courses. When PCOM SGA was opening, I applied and accepted the offer to become an Assistant Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Genetics.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EXTERNAL PRESSURES THAT IMPACTED YOUR JOURNEY?

My biggest external pressure was that my PI wanted all his graduate students to pursue a career in research; this was never my plan. I had to look for extra opportunities to learn about the teaching career path on my own. As with many PIs, my PI always wanted more work out of us; it seems like no matter how much data was produced, it was never fast enough or good enough. It taught me the importance of a work-life balance and to schedule time for myself to destress. Given I was awarded a 2-year Pre-Doctoral Fellowship, there was immense pressure to delay my graduation by 1 year to utilize the 2nd year of my Fellowship. My Thesis Committee supported me to graduate on my expected timeline and I learned the importance of gathering input from multiple individuals over just one person.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR MEDICAL/GRADUATE STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY FIRST-GEN STUDENTS?

Believe in yourself and that you belong there. You earned the spot in your respective program and are qualified just like everyone else around you. Surround yourself with people who respect your self-worth and will give you honest feedback when you need to hear it.

## WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR MOST IMPORTANT, PROUDEST AND/OR FAVORITE EXPERIENCES IN YOUR CAREER

Earning my PhD was a great accomplishment, as well as being promoted up to Associate Professor. My proudest moments are when previous students of mine (from advising, teaching in the classroom, and/or research students), reach out to me after they have accomplished something important in their careers. My favorite experiences involve the friends and acquaintances I have been able to make at each stage of my career and the time I get to spend with them.

# First-Generation Spotlight

MEGAN PRESLEY



## ABOUT MEGAN PRESLEY

Megan is from Albany, Georgia. She graduated from the University of Georgia with a degree in Early Childhood Education. Before joining the admissions team at PCOM South Georgia, she was a teacher in Southwest Georgia for 5 years. She is currently the Assistant Director of Admissions and Junior CRM Administrator.



## HOW DO YOU DEFINE FIRST-GEN?

First gen is being the first in my family to graduate with a bachelor's degree. Even though neither of my parents were college graduates, I felt like I was expected to go to college. It was something I wanted to do for a couple of reasons: I wanted to make my family proud, but also because I knew I needed a college degree to meet the career goals I had set for myself.

## WHAT WAS IT LIKE AS A FIRST-GEN COLLEGE STUDENT GRADUATE?

It was exciting and a relief! It was one of the first times that I was able to step back and reflect on the fact that I had accomplished a huge goal that I had set for myself.

## MANY FIRST-GEN STUDENT FEEL A NOTION OF ENORMOUS PRESSURE TO SUCCEED. HOW DID YOU COMBAT IT?

The pressure was real! I can be my own worst critic, but my support system really helped with this. I began this journey with my husband who is also first-gen. We got married after our first two years of community college and moved to Athens to complete our bachelor degrees together. Our families never doubted that we would reach our goals. Anytime self doubt would creep in for me, my husband and our families were always there to pick me up and ensure I kept it moving forward!

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EXTERNAL PRESSURES THAT IMPACTED YOUR JOURNEY?

Paperwork, applications, deadlines, finances. Once I got through the first couple of years of these responsibilities and requirements for college, I began saying college was more about the process of working with different departments and meeting deadlines than it was the content in the courses. Being first-gen often means navigating a lot of these components on your own. It took a lot of determination and persistence to stay on top of these important pieces of the puzzle even though it can be confusing and frustrating. This is why I appreciate some of the federally funded programs that partner with high schools which can be great resources for students who may need assistance with these types of pressures.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR MEDICAL/GRADUATE STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY FIRST-GEN STUDENTS?

Don't give up. Keep moving forward. Reach out for help! And one thing I'm still trying to do... get comfortable being uncomfortable!

## WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR MOST IMPORTANT, PROUDEST AND/OR FAVORITE EXPERIENCES IN YOUR CAREER

The most important experiences in my career thus far are the relationships I've built along the way. My favorite experiences are a culmination of what brought me to where I am today. Walking away from my teaching career was difficult but so many of those experiences and the knowledge I gained from that journey have given me a unique perspective for the work I am currently doing.

# First-Generation Spotlight

JESSICA NEUMAN



## ABOUT JESSICA NEUMAN

Jessica Neuman serves as an Academic Support Specialist on the Philadelphia campus. She specializes in connecting students to their unique learner identity and supporting their academic success with tailored strategies and resources.

She has a background in special education, a Master's Degree from Rowan University in Urban Education and Community Studies, and special interests in ability studies and class justice.

When not buried in the latest research in adult learning theory, she can be found baking bread, cuddling with her cats, and daydreaming of urban homesteading.



## HOW DO YOU DEFINE FIRST-GEN?

I identify as a first generation college student because I am the first person in my family, extended family, in all generations to graduate from college. I am also the only member of my family to have pursued and achieved a graduate degree.

## TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN GRADUATE/MEDICAL SCHOOL.

I chose to pursue a graduate degree in Urban Education and Community Studies because it focused on understanding the macro-systems of privilege and oppression that impact educational spaces and communities. In graduate school, I was introduced to new systems like grant management, gatekeeping in academia, and navigating those systems was very valuable as someone without any models in my own life. I also learned to network with others as I gained access to more people and students who had experience in graduate spaces. These moments were invaluable as a student who did not have any access to people who had moved through higher education.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EXTERNAL PRESSURES THAT IMPACTED YOUR JOURNEY?

Outside of the financial pressures and enormous concerns about how I would pay for college, I distinctly remember that when I was applying to colleges, my grandfather called me to discourage me from going to college. He said, "None of us have ever needed to go to college. Why would you do this? Everyone has been able to work." I did not learn until later that this was not how most families felt – that many students were raised with the expectation that they would attend college, and that I was experiencing external factors that sent the opposite message.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR MEDICAL/GRADUATE STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY FIRST-GEN STUDENTS?

The most impactful moments for me, on my first-gen journey, have been through building connections with other first-gen students and graduates. Though every person is on their own path and we all have intersectional life experiences, my advice to first-gen students is to find a first-gen mentor or other first-gen students to work alongside you in your pursuits.

## WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR MOST IMPORTANT, PROUDEST AND/OR FAVORITE EXPERIENCES IN YOUR CAREER

Even though my parents did not understand my experiences at college or my commitment to it, when my father hugged me at my college graduation with tears in his eyes, I could feel how proud he was of me. In that moment, I felt seen and understood by him in my first-gen journey. My favorite experiences in my career are consistently when I support and build up others to meet their goals – in the same way that I have been supported.

# First-Generation Spotlight

RUTH MAHER, PT, PHD, DPT



## ABOUT DR. RUTH MAHER

Dr. Maher joined the faculty of PCOM Georgia in July 2019 as a professor. Dr. Maher has been teaching PT students for 20 years and practicing for 21 years in a variety of areas, including acute care, inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation settings, and private practice.

Dr. Maher is a board-certified clinical specialist in women's health from the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties and was awarded her second re-certification in 2019. Her published research centers on assessment and validation of novel wearable neuromuscular stimulation devices in the treatment of pelvic floor dysfunction and the use of ultrasound imaging in physical therapy research and practice.

She has held positions with the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties, women's health council and several committees within the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy. Prior to her life in academe she owned and ran private practices in Dublin and the USA specializing in women's health and chronic pain conditions.

She is also a consultant to a biomedical company in Ireland where she assists with the development and testing of novel wearable technologies using electrical stimulation. She holds a patent for a device she co-developed during her PhD studies in Ireland which recently received FDA approval for the treatment of stress urinary incontinence.



## HOW DO YOU DEFINE FIRST-GEN?

My parents left school in their early teens, did not complete secondary school education (the Irish equivalent of High School), and consequently did not attend college.

## WHAT WAS IT LIKE AS A FIRST-GEN COLLEGE STUDENT GRADUATE?

I was considerably older than most students in my classes and initially found learning challenging since I had been out of school for sixteen years. That said, I was doing something I loved: learning new things, which really motivated me to work hard. I also have to thank my husband, who supported me throughout my journey and gave me the space and support I needed to succeed.

## TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN GRADUATE/MEDICAL SCHOOL.

I did not have an undergraduate degree when I arrived in the USA in my thirties and decided to invest some of my early retirement money in my personal growth. I soon learned how expensive college was and overloaded my coursework when I could and completed my BS in 2.5 years at Georgia State University and later graduated from their Master of Physical Therapy Program in 2002. I worked hard, had good grades, and was offered a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) position in my second semester. I couldn't believe the opportunities the US afforded me. My tuition was covered, and I received a stipend. I was debt-free when I graduated in 2002. I loved the challenge of learning so much that I enrolled in a transitional Doctor of Physical Therapy program at Simmons University in 2004 while working as a physical therapist and then completed a Ph.D. at University College Dublin in 2013. I am still learning and continue to challenge myself.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EXTERNAL PRESSURES THAT IMPACTED YOUR JOURNEY?

Not having the funds or any science coursework to attend university in Ireland straight out of secondary school (high school) severely curtailed my journey by sixteen years.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR MEDICAL/GRADUATE STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY FIRST-GEN STUDENTS?

Research the graduate degree and career options to ensure it's what you want to pursue. Speak with currently enrolled students and find a mentor working in the field. Have good time management skills – and determine your learning style to maximize your learning. Learning is a challenge. I highly recommend finding a group to study with that challenges you. More importantly, don't be afraid to ask for help!

## WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR MOST IMPORTANT, PROUDEST AND/OR FAVORITE EXPERIENCES IN YOUR CAREER

I graduated with my Ph.D. from University College Dublin, which culminated in my inventing a medical device called INNOVO for treating stress urinary incontinence that was approved by the FDA in 2019.

# First-Generation Spotlight

LISA CORBIN, PHD, LPC, NCC



## ABOUT DR. LISA CORBIN

Lisa Corbin, PhD, LPC, NCC, has worked on college campuses for more than 25 years. She has held positions in both student life and academic affairs. Dr. Corbin currently serves as the Chair and Director of the MS Counseling program and as an assistant professor in the School of Professional and Applied Psychology where she teaches, advises, and mentors mental health counseling students.

In addition to her work at PCOM, Dr. Corbin serves as a counselor in her private practice. Her areas of specialty are sexual abuse and domestic violence, mindful meditations, as well as a grief and loss support.

Dr. Corbin completed her PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision at Walden University. She also completed her doctoral internship at a local rape crisis center where she provided trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy to individuals and families. She completed her graduate level internship and worked as the trauma counselor at a Philadelphia inpatient recovery facility for males.

Dr. Corbin is active in the Pennsylvania Counseling Association (PCA) where she served as awards chair and is also active with the Greater Philadelphia Area Counseling Association (GPACA) where she is currently serving as past president and secretary. She wrote her dissertation on variables that predict career choice within the field of counseling. Her hope is to use this data to increase diversity among the counseling profession.



## HOW DO YOU DEFINE FIRST-GEN?

As someone who is the first person in their family (family as defined by the person) to attend an institution of higher education.

## WHAT WAS IT LIKE AS A FIRST-GEN COLLEGE STUDENT GRADUATE?

Lonely at times; I had to navigate a lot by myself. I also had to deal with people thinking I was better than them just because I went to college. I vividly remember my older brother accusing me of thinking I was better than him because (as he said) I "made more money than him". The funny thing was that he made \$73,000 more than I did at that point! We were able to have a decent conversation once I showed him my paycheck. I currently deal with people focusing on my educational degrees and career success a bit too much - so, I share this cautiously so as to not have people hyperfocus on my successes.

## TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN GRADUATE/MEDICAL SCHOOL.

I worked full-time as I obtained all of my degrees. Therefore, my graduate school experience was limited to driving to campus (75 minutes one way), attending class, and driving back home. However, I was able to apply much of what I was learning in the classroom because I was working. The school in which I obtained my masters degree and phd in counseling are extremely diverse and had me take a trip to Costa Rica. This was the first time I felt as if I was bonding with my graduate school peers. I went to grad school with people who are my age ("non-traditional - older) and who worked. I quickly built my support system with my peers because graduate school was foreign to my familial support system.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EXTERNAL PRESSURES THAT IMPACTED YOUR JOURNEY?

I wanted to quit during my PhD program but knew I had to keep going because I didn't want to feel like a "quitter". And, I held a full-time faculty position which meant I had to continue to go on for the PhD or I would lose my job. And, I was a single mom - so, I needed the money to support my family. I also started my doctorate journey with my best friend. Unfortunately, she unexpectedly died as I (we) was working toward my degree. I then felt the pressure (and spiritual support from her) to obtain the dream we set forth to accomplish together.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR MEDICAL/GRADUATE STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY FIRST-GEN STUDENTS?

Stay humble. Remember who brought you to where you are today. You got this!

## WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR MOST IMPORTANT, PROUDEST AND/OR FAVORITE EXPERIENCES IN YOUR CAREER

Being able to share stories about my kids' personality in class. While I have been really successful in education, I realize that education isn't everyone's journey and that teens often need time to come into their educational journey BUT that raising good humans is more important than raising a student who has a 4.0 GPA. My son has stood up for friends in the LGBTQ+ community, me as a single mom, and his friend who has cancer. My daughter presented with me at a state-wide conference and then with another Adlerian at an international conference.

# First-Generation Spotlight

CINDY MONTGOMERY



## ABOUT CINDY MONTGOMERY

A Colquitt County native, Cindy Montgomery has more than two decades of experience in higher education marketing and communications. She is currently the public relations/social media manager at PCOM South Georgia. Montgomery has also held positions at four other universities in Georgia as well as newspapers in Georgia and Wisconsin.



## HOW DO YOU DEFINE FIRST-GEN?

I define "first generation" as a student whose parents did not graduate with a college degree.

## TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN GRADUATE/MEDICAL SCHOOL.

I began working on a master of public health degree in the fall of 2004 while I was employed as the publications editor with the College of Agriculture at Fort Valley State University. Studying public health meshed perfectly with the topics I wrote about as part of my job. I thoroughly enjoyed all of my classes, even though some of them were incredibly challenging. My classes were in the evening, and there were times when I could not find childcare for my elementary-age son. My professors were kind enough to allow me to bring him to class. He sat in the back either reading a book or watching a movie on his portable DVD player with headphones on. I graduated in 2009 with my MPH.

In the fall of 2018, I decided it was time to begin working on my PhD in communication with Regent University. This time my classes were all online, except for the week-long residencies each summer on campus. A lot had changed in my life between the time I earned the MPH and started the PhD program. My son grew up, graduated from college and moved out on his own. My husband Trey has been my biggest supporter through the entire PhD program. Right now I'm working on my dissertation and scheduled to graduate in May 2024.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EXTERNAL PRESSURES THAT IMPACTED YOUR JOURNEY?

I have always worked while I've been a student. As an undergraduate student, I usually worked at least two part-time jobs until my senior year. Then I worked full-time while taking a full load of classes. For both my master's degree and PhD, I've worked full-time. I've spent evenings and weekends doing classwork. It's really been a juggling act to get everything done, and I don't always succeed. My husband Trey is the one who jumps in and helps around the house. He's also the one who reminds me that I still need to rest.

## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR MEDICAL/GRADUATE STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY FIRST-GEN STUDENTS?

Know who your support system is. Take advantage of study groups. If there's not one, organize one. Manage your time wisely, but make sure you include time for rest and breaks.

## WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR MOST IMPORTANT, PROUDEST AND/OR FAVORITE EXPERIENCES IN YOUR CAREER

When I graduated with my bachelor's degree from Valdosta State University in 1997, I received the Anne Powe Hopper Award. At the time, that was the highest honor given to a student. I was so honored and humbled to receive that award.