

1stGenYale Celebrates National First-Generation College Celebration Day Throughout the Country

By Suzanne Solensky '83 | Posted December 03, 2024



This year, 1stGenYale joined in the fun of National First-Generation College Celebration Day. Five alumni in five different cities created a series of gatherings and events around the country, in New York City, Washington DC, Boston, San Francisco, and New Haven, from November 8-14, 2024, in honor of November 8, a national day that recognizes the accomplishments and experiences of first-gen college students.

1stGenYale's celebration kicked off on Friday, November 8, in Boston with an event hosted by Linda Chin '81. She shared, "As a FGLI student, ushering at concerts at Woolsey Hall helped satisfy my love of live music performance and need for extra spending



1stGenYale's celebration in Boston

money. To this day, I believe that music is a universal language that has the power to heal and create community connection, so launching the inaugural Boston event for Yalies and friends to celebrate National First-Gen College Celebration Day around a live performance was what I sought to organize.

Serendipitously, the Boston-based orchestra “A Far Cry” had a concert scheduled for November 8 that featured music from four different world cultures, and two of the “Criers” are Yale School of Music alumni!

The following Saturday morning, November 9, and three thousand miles away, Joanne Siu '90 hosted a picnic in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. The engagement was exciting, and attendees enjoyed a beautiful day in the sunshine. Joanne shared, “I even got to reconnect with my floormate from sophomore year for the first time in 30 years!”

1stGenYalies fostered their love of lifelong learning in New York City and Washington DC. Over 30 alumni and students from Yale College and the G&P schools gathered on Friday, November 8, at The Metropolitan Museum of Art for a self-guided tour of “Mexican Prints at the Vanguard.” The exhibit focused on the legacies of artists like José Guadalupe Posada and Jean Charlot, whose stories exemplify resilience, cultural pride, and the power of creative expression.

Grace Kim '22, who coordinated the event, noted how the artists' lives and careers mirror the experiences of many first-gen students, “Posada, a self-taught printmaker, overcame significant societal barriers to create art that reflected the struggles of everyday people, while Charlot mentored and uplifted emerging artists, bridging the gap between marginalized voices and prestigious institutions.”

Mingling before the event, alumni and students shared experiences of perseverance, mentorship, and the transformative power of education. As Grace said, “Just as Posada and Charlot's work enriched the cultural landscape, our community continues to grow stronger through the connections we build and the stories we share. The gathering reinforced that success for first-gen students is not only about individual achievement but about lifting each other.”

Rounding out the celebration weekend on Sunday, November 10, was a tour at Dumbarton Oaks Museum in Washington DC, which Barb Protacio '81 initiated. Nearly 30 alums and friends from the classes of 1977 through 2024 and throughout the greater

DC area came to hear Dr. Joanne Baron and Dr. Noa Corcoran-Tadd present on Mayan glyphs and Andean artifacts.

Barb noted, “Some alums already had close experience with the topics, but some of us were newbies. Maybe now we all know how to read some Mayan glyphs (at least count to 9!) – and we glimpsed the complex political relationships that their art reveals.” After hearing about the museum’s decision-making process for displaying Inca gold, alums could also view artifacts in the galleries. Several alums joined Barb for dinner afterward to continue the conversations.



9th annual 1stGenYale Career Networking Mixer

A week after the official day, 1stGenYale was still celebrating – at our 9th annual Career Networking Mixer on Thursday, November 14. Over 150 alumni and students filled the Afro-American Cultural Center for a meal and an evening of mentoring and sharing career stories and aspirations – and we ended with a special cake to mark the first-gen

celebration day. Host Lise Chapman '81 MBA noted, "This event continues to inspire us to connect with fellow alumni and give of ourselves to the next generation of Yale students in a place where we share the joy of being members of the Yale family."

Marv Berenblum '56 shared, "Mentoring these remarkable first-gen Yale students is a rewarding experience. They are so grateful that you cared enough about them to take the time to share your thoughts with them. But it's also fascinating to learn about their incredible journeys to Yale."

On the other side, SOM student Duyen Pham '26 MBA commented about meeting Marv, "Never did I imagine spending hours speaking with a Yale '56 alum, listening to a U.S. veteran sing a Vietnamese song in my mother tongue, bonding over life's simplest moments, and receiving career advice from accomplished leaders across business, arts, science, and government. The 1stGenYale Career Networking Mixer brought together incredible individuals with the most relatable yet inspiring stories, reminding me of the power of community and the wealth of support available to first-generation students at Yale. I'm deeply grateful for this experience and the connections I've made."

In all the gatherings, first-gen alums were inspired by the words of 1stGenYalie Kimberly Jones '00, president of the Council for Opportunity in Education, which co-founded National First-Generation College Celebration Day.

Kimberly said, "I could not be prouder of 1stGenYale for embracing this movement. By highlighting the achievements of Yale's first-generation students and alumni, we are building bridges to foster a greater sense of belonging and a shared commitment to success. I sincerely wish that this celebration will have a lasting impact, inspiring future generations to believe in their potential and pursue their dreams. It is a privilege to lead COE in this work, and I commend 1stGenYale for its leadership and commitment to celebrating the triumphs of first-gen students everywhere."

A big thank you goes to Suzanne Solensky '83, who developed and chaired this entire project--the first time 1stGenYale did a five-city alumni engagement series in only one week!

1stGenYale is a member of the YAA Shared Interest Groups and a self-funded 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization run by alumni volunteers without remuneration or financial support from Yale.

If you would like to support its volunteer efforts in creating career and life programs in an organic mentorship for the first-gen low-income community, please consider making a gift. They especially need your support for their Summer Bulldogs student internship program to make it sustainable. [Donate to 1stGenYale](#) here.

Since 2016, 1stGenYale has been empowering FGLI alumni and students from across all Yale schools, with a network now encompassing over 4,500 alumni and 700 students. Additional information regarding 1stGenYale's impact is contained in the [SB24 Report](#) for this year's results, [2024 Newsletter](#), [2023 Annual Report](#), and website: 1stgenyale.org. For questions, email 1stgenyale@1stgenyale.org.

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