

1st Gen alumni to share experiences at conference

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Yale will host a conference this April to explore the lives of alumni from underserved and underrepresented backgrounds.

The conference, titled “Blazing the Trail: Being the First,” is organized by 1stGenYale, a shared interest group at the Association of Yale Alumni. 1stGenYale was founded in the spring of 2016 to connect students and alumni who come from underresourced families and were among the first in their families to attend college or graduate school, as well as people interested in supporting current students on campus who come from similar backgrounds.

Unlike 1stGenYale’s previous events, which centered on connecting students with alumni, this April’s conference will focus on the experiences of alumni from underserved backgrounds, according to Lise Pfeiffer Chapman SOM ’81, co-chair and co-founder of 1stGenYale.

“This is our chance to meet each other and share our own stories, get together from all the different classes and schools at one time on

campus ... for the alumni to come together for the first time and focus on alumni issues and alumni stories.” Chapman said.

At the conference, Yale professors and alumni will talk about overcoming challenges, their career success stories and their other life experiences. The event will also feature a panel of current Yale undergraduates and graduate and professional school students who will talk about their lives on campus today.

Although the conference will focus more on alumni, there will also be a networking reception for alumni and all interested and registered Yale students, as well as multiple recruiting events led by nonprofit and corporate sponsors for both students and alumni in attendance.

“The AYA facilitates connection and communication among our alumni, and that is certainly the case with 1stGenYale,” said J. Weili Cheng ’77, executive director of AYA. “Being that so many Yalies are indeed first-generation college graduates or represent underserved populations, this conference provides a wonderful opportunity to foster — and deepen — the sense of kinship that goes along with being a lifelong member of the Yale community.”

The discussions at the conference will focus on imposter syndrome, the challenges inherent in navigating two worlds at home and at Yale and succeeding in careers in the arts, public service and nonprofit fields.

This April’s keynote speakers will include Marta Moret SPH ’84, the president of Urban Policy Strategies, a New Haven-based consulting

firm that conducts research and assessment in public health, Peggy Kuo '85, magistrate judge in the Eastern District of New York, and David A. Thomas '78 GRD '86, president of Morehouse College.

“I am Puerto Rican — a New YorRican, really. I grew up in the South Bronx only a few streets away from Colin Powell and Sonya Sotomayor,” Moret said. “I am the first in my family to attend college. While it was not always easy, it made all the difference in my life. ... I never pass up the opportunity to talk about being first gen because being a role model for those students who are also first gen can offer them hope that they, too, can achieve their dreams.”

Chapman said that allowing alumni to meet one another and share their experiences is “the most exciting thing” about the conference.

She added that the conference will also allow alumni to “reconnect with Yale” — especially those who have not engaged with the University much since graduation. Chapman also said that since 1stGenYale is a relatively young “mission-driven startup,” it needs alumni help to figure out what else the organization can do for both alumni and Yale students.

“Being the first in anything can be exhilarating but also isolating,” Kuo said. “Coming together at events like this conference is an opportunity to find support and inspiration from one another.”

The conference will take place on April 13–15.

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