



The

FLOW

Experience

By Melissa Hernandez-Panameno

# My Senior Work Journey

- At the beginning of the term, my senior work was originally going to be a podcast
  - Titled *The FLoW Podcast* it would have consisted of 3 episodes that were about:
    - Access to health services and mental health on a college campus
    - The financial part of college
    - Interactions with non-FLoW students and faculty
  - The episode would have interviews with current and former FLoW students mixed my story at Bennington, and research I have done on topics connecting to first-generation and low-income students
- Once the campus shifted to remote learning, changes needed to be made to my project
- Thus my senior work is a narrative/journalistic portfolio

# What is FLoW?

- FLoW - First-generation, low-income, and working class
  - Some students are just one of the pillars and others are multiple like me (a first-generation and low-income student)
- Core students and staff tied to the founding of FLoW
  - Jocelyn Salcedo-Edwards - Bennington College Alumni from Class of 2018
  - Francesca Salcedo-Edwards - Admissions Counselor & from the Class of 2018
  - Kelsey Broadfield - Bennington College student from the Class of 2020
  - Kate Child - Assistant Dean for Academic Services
  - Dr. Debbie Warnock - Professor at Bennington
  - Adriana Diaz - Former First-Year Advisor

# Mission Statement

FLoW (first-generation, low-income, and working-class) is a student (as well as staff and faculty) network focused on supporting, connecting, and raising awareness about the FLoW student experience at Bennington. Throughout the academic year, FLoW holds Student Collective Meetings intended to allow FLoW identifying students to be among those who have similar backgrounds and may face similar challenges. In addition, FLoW hosts a wide range of educational programs from awareness raising events such as panels and film screenings to Grad School discussions, First-Year Forum workshops, and assistance in reapplying for financial aid. Some of FLoW's events are for the entire Bennington community while many serve as spaces to intentionally bring together FLoW identifying students, staff, and faculty to create connections and build mutual support systems/networks. FLoW also runs the Little Extras Pantry, a food and supplies pantry (toiletries, home goods, and art supplies when available) and holds campus wide drives to keep it stocked for students and community members who may be experiencing food insecurity.



# Programs, Services, and much more

- Here are some of the programs and services FLoW runs:
  - FLoW Student Collective Meeting
  - FLoW Student Union
  - FLoW Steering Committee
  - Little Extras Pantry
  - Services like tax help and desktop loan program
  - Events aimed to tackle different subjects and bring communities together



## iMac Desktop Loan Program

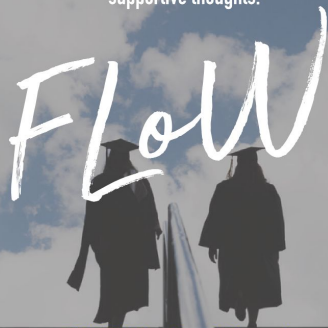
**Fill out the  
request form  
TODAY!**

If you are a currently enrolled student and you are interested in borrowing an iMac desktop for the duration of the Spring term please fill out the request form online.

The request form will remain open throughout the term. Priority of iMac rentals will be given to students with demonstrated financial need. If you would like to learn more about this opportunity or have questions please contact us by email.

For access to the request form email  
[flow@bennington.edu](mailto:flow@bennington.edu) or stop by Barn North!

Join us for our **first-generation, low-income, working-class (FLoW)** Panel Discussion where FLoW faculty, staff, and students will share their experiences. Come with your questions, stories, or supportive thoughts.



**FREE PIZZA at Panel Discussion**  
Tuesday, November 14 at 7 pm, in the DownCaf

**FLoW**

## Tax Help

Is this your first time filing taxes on your own? Do you have difficulty filing taxes each year? Do you just want to have an extra set of eyes helping you file your taxes?

If so, AARP is offering **Free and Individualized Tax Preparation for low-to moderate-income taxpayers**. There are two locations in the Bennington area (North Bennington and Downtown Bennington) where you can schedule an appointment for free tax help preparation.

### Sacred Heart St Francis Church

Mon 9:00 am - 12:00 pm  
Tues 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm  
Thur 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Making an appointment is **required**  
(802) 442-9504

238 Main St  
Bennington, VT 05201

### St John Baptist

Wed 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm

There is no appointment required but you  
can call (802) 442-9504

PO BOX 219  
North Bennington, VT 05257

**If you have any additional questions about the FREE tax help, stop by  
First Year Experience in Barn North 113**

**FLoW**

**ALL  
STUDENTS  
ARE  
WELCOME!**

Come to the Financial Aid Office to work one-on-one, with a Financial Aid Counselor at their student workstation. The Counselor can help you at any stage in the reapplication process. Whether you have started reapplying or not, feel free to meet with a Counselor.

**FREE HELP  
REAPPLYING  
FOR  
FINANCIAL  
AID**

**Open Hours  
Wednesday  
1-4 pm  
Barn 104**

**REAPPLY BY MARCH 30TH**  
BROUGHT TO YOU BY FINANCIAL AID

**FLOW  
WELCOME  
BACK  
MIXER**

Join FLoW students, faculty, and staff members for our first Welcome Back Mixer.

Come for the snacks and drinks, but stay for the great conversations!

**MARCH 6, 2018**  
DownCaf from 7 pm - 9 pm

# History of FLoW

- Important to note: Each of the founding member of FLoW has a different journey that led them to each other, so the involvement in FLoW starts at different times for them
- Started in the Spring of 2017 w/just a few student, staff, and faculty members
  - Students, staff, and faculty attended the 5th Annual First-Generation Summit
    - Everyone was inspired to take action after being inspired by the speakers, workshops, and other students
- One of the main important steps taken towards creating a network was deciding the name (shoutout to Adriana) and identifying students who would be FLoW
- As more joined, the ideas of what could be offered from FLoW grew and has led to the current work FLoW offers



# The 6th Annual First Gen Summit at Mount Holyoke



# The Interviews

- Because the founding members of FLoW come from different backgrounds, it was important to capture each one's perspective on how FLoW came together
- The following are the ones I was able to reach out to and interview for the portfolio:
  - Kate Child
  - Dr. Debbie Warnock
  - Jocelyn Salcedo-Edwards
  - Francesca Salcedo-Edwards
- All interviews were conducted through either Zoom or Google Hangouts
- Notes were taken and their thoughts were put together in the Founding of FLoW section of my portfolio
  - The interviews covered their background, what led them to create FLoW, their involvement, and their goals for the future

# Takeaways from the Interviews

- Each of the interviewees had similar and different experience that eventually led them to come together to establish FLoW
  - Debbie has been working on establishing groups like FLoW at other college campuses and has done research into this topic
  - Some have begun doing work in assisting FLoW students on campus
    - Kate Child emailing first-generation students over the summer
  - Being an international student as well has influenced Fran in the work she currently does and how she felt while at Bennington
- Some have different goals for the future that makes it beneficial for FLoW as a whole
  - Even amongst the FLoW group there are different points to consider on where to go next and plan for the present
- The founding members had to put in more work even though there was help from the college
  - Making it possible to do the desktop loan program

# My Narrative

- A big part of this portfolio was my story
- My story, which includes all four years at Bennington, connects to the topics covered in the research I have done and similar to other FLoW students
- My story addresses a variety of different topics: the plan process, my mental health journey on campus, experience w/FWT, and much more
- There are two sections in the portfolio that cover my story: the written section and the audio bits
  - The written section covers more my four years at Bennington broadly
  - The audio bits go into more detail

# The audio bits

- This came together as I was writing my narrative for the portfolio
  - I felt that I had more to tell and that there was more to my story
- Through audio, there is more emotion and honesty in my storytelling
- The audio bits are not edited
  - I recorded myself on my phone and then uploaded the recording to the portfolio
- Each bit is titled and covers a different topic
  - Some include stories
  - Others are my opinions on topics like study abroad
- This helps me connect to my original plan on making a podcast

# My Recommendations

- For the College:
  - Use the experience of COVID-19 to address classism at Bennington
  - Push/move towards making institutionalized changes towards policies and programs already at Bennington
    - Ex. Making adjustments to field-work term (working more closely on offering paid positions, stipend)
    - A first-generation orientation & polishing up freshman orientation
    - Hiring more faculty of color
- For FLoW:
  - Reconsider/look into the different ways the FLoW collective meeting can run
  - Mentorship b/w FLoW members
  - Showcasing more of the steering committee and the student union amongst FLoW members

# Conclusion

While Bennington College wants every student to feel equal and give the atmosphere that “we are all Bennington”, that is not the case. Even though its made with good intentions, not every Bennington student is the same. Not every student has the same resources that others have. Some come in with knowledge that can help them navigate college while others don't. The college can't ignore the classism and racial disparities on campus. Not every “problem” can be solved in a timely matter, but there needs to be more push towards having these conversations. It's on us to come together to make Bennington College an actual inclusive environment. Listening and working together is how progress and change is made.