

SUMMER 2016 BOARD RETREAT

This past July, Class Action staff and board members convened for our annual in-person retreat. With board members coming from across the country, we meet for just one day. While it's challenging to get everything accomplished in only a day, this team works well to maximize our time together.



Class Action board members and staff combining the big picture and the little picture to advance our mission. Pictured L-R: Chuck Collins, Susan Ostrander, intern Sarah Shusta, Jane Van Galen, Denise Moorehead, Betsy Leonard-Wright and Gita Gulati-Partee

We participated in a visioning exercise, led by board member Gita Gulati-Partee, an organizational development ace and Founder of OpenSource Leadership Strategies in Durham, N.C. During this exercise, half of the group closely examined our program areas and checked them against our vision and values, while the other half of the group took a look at our values and distilled them down to our actual program work. The process helped us identify subtle gaps in our work, while mostly reaffirming that our day-to-day activities are indeed meeting our mission.

In addition to the visioning work, Denise Moorehead, *Classism Exposed* editor and Principal at Moorehead Creative Solutions, facilitated a lively discussion to hone each board members' elevator speeches. We also collectively established a new positioning statement. What do you think?

Class Action inspires action to end classism and extreme inequality by providing change-makers with tools, training and inspiration to raise awareness and shift cultural beliefs about social class, build cross-class solidarity, and transform institutions and systems.



SURVEY REVEALS FIRST-GEN STUDENT REALITY

Sarah Shusta

Class Action's First-Generation College Students Program holds an important place nationally – and even internationally – in fighting for and giving voice to this perpetually overlooked group. In recent years, our work has focused on providing opportunities for first-gen students to come out of the shadows, raise awareness of the special challenges they face, and organize on and across campuses nationwide.

Building on Strengths

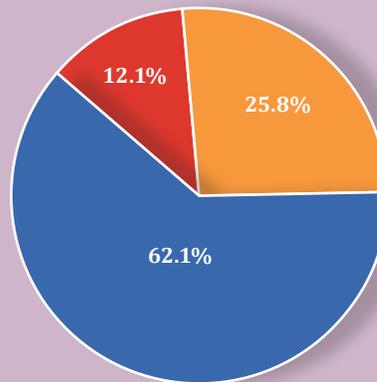
Our unique approach uses a strengths-based model instead of highlighting the deficits or the structures that first-gen students lack. To widen the breadth of knowledge on first-gens and to strengthen this model, we conducted a survey over the summer.

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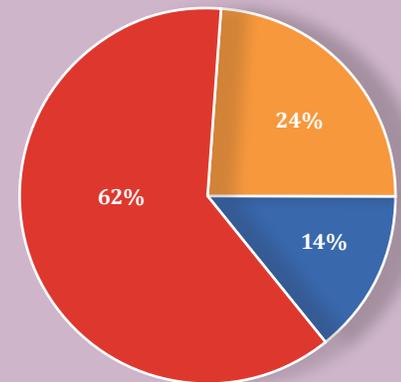
Existence of First-Gen Programs Among Current and Former Respondents

● Yes ● No ● I don't know

Current first-gens: Does your school have a first-gen program?



Former first-gens: Did your school have a first-gen program?



In comparing whether current or former first-gen students had specific programming at their schools we see that even the existence of programs for first-gens has increased. However, still a quarter of all respondents were unsure about programs for first-gens at their schools, showing there is still a need to let students know what's out there to support them.

WHAT'S INSIDE



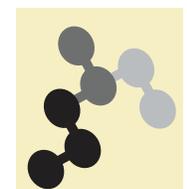
STAFFING THE MISSION



TRAIN THE TRAINER



CASE SPOTLIGHT



BRING CLASS ACTION TO WORK WITH YOUR STAFF

STAFFING THE MISSION



Many mission-driven organizations strive to become more inclusive workplaces through interventions in hiring, training and organizational culture. But these efforts can fall flat when compensation isn't part of the conversation. It's time to ask different questions:

- What do our pay scales say about how we value different kinds of work and workers?
- How do compensation structures unintentionally reinforce inequality across race, gender, and class?
- How do differences in wages and other compensation impact employee morale, burnout and retention?

- What ways have organizations with limited budgets found to provide fair and sustaining employment?

Staffing the Mission brings together workers, activists, organizers, foundation staff and more to identify, document and promote practical strategies that mission-driven organizations can adopt to better live our missions.

Another Way Is Possible!

Some examples of the innovative practices we will spotlight:

- A resource-constrained nonprofit made its jobs “affordable” for employees from working class backgrounds through relatively low-cost measures: subsidizing child care, flexible work schedules,

student loan assistance, and paying a regionally-adjusted living wage.

- Staff and board of one nonprofit collaboratively developed new salary ranges that were more equitable than prevailing wage benchmarks and felt fair to everyone

We want to hear from you! Please get in touch to:

- *share your success stories, horror stories, questions and ideas*
- *inquire about becoming part of our advisory council*
- *discuss opportunities to support this project by contributing financially*
- *discuss opportunities to support this project by contributing your time, expertise, or networks* **BB**

DEEPENING OUR IMPACT TO END CLASSISM

Class Action hosted a Train the Trainer weekend in Seattle, Wash. in August. Our senior trainers Betsy Leondar-Wright and Tanya Williams led 20 activists, facilitators and teachers in an intensive three-day workshop during which the participants deepened their understanding of class and classism, explored the experiential learning model and practiced using a wide variety of training tools.

Additionally, Seattle-based senior trainers Anita Garcia Morales and Alan Preston facilitated workshops on integrating race and class into the conversations through multimedia tools.

The weekend was packed with learning. As one participant put it, “I appreciated seeing other facilitators work their magic!”

Westward Ho

For many participants, this hands-on training was the first

step in becoming a recognized Class Action associate trainer. For others, the weekend served as a great opportunity to learn and practice the facilitation skills needed to run class workshops within their own organizations and institutions.

One participant described the weekend as “a fantastic way to deepen your own class analysis while growing as a facilitator and trainer.” Many of the participants were local from the Seattle area and were able to connect deeply with other local social justice activists.

Class Action has always been a national organization, but strongest in our headquarters region of the Northeast. But gradually we are expanding our networks.

In addition to the Train the Trainer weekend, senior trainers Alan and Anita have had great success in hosting open race/class workshops. In previous years, we ran a series of workshops with the Social Justice Fund of the Northwest and Resource Generation. All of these activities have been important steps in deepening our relationships on the West Coast. **BB**



Seattle Area Train the Trainer Participants



Pictured L-R: senior Trainers Tanya Williams, Anita Garcia Morales and Betsy Leondar-Wright facilitating an activity.

We wanted to observe both current and former students, and, therefore, created two different surveys that were directed towards these two similar, yet distinct, populations. We had over 150 participants, and the responses were powerful.

The State of Current and Former First-Gens

In analyzing the two surveys, there were many similarities for both populations. For the majority of both first-gen groups, college was discovered through their friends and/or high school counselors. Their parents were unable to attend college because of a lack of resources and financial means. They found their support outside of their family, and most parents were unable to give advice or help them in their application process.

Both surveys presented three significant themes:

- awareness and first-gen programs
- the idea of Imposter Syndrome
- networking

Awareness

First-generation college student programs within an institution are essential to provide needed support and a sense of community. Awareness has increased and, therefore, more resources are being offered, giving students affirmation and assistance in their college career. Only 14% of former first-gens knew of a program their college offered for first-generation students, as compared to 61.5% of current first-gens who know of a program or organization designed for their success. Nevertheless, according to 60% of current first-gen college students, their institution's programs can still be better developed including better accessibility, further awareness, and more resources that can be utilized post-graduation. For graduate programs, however, both awareness and organizations do not exist or are arbitrarily conceived.

Imposter Syndrome

Even though many first-gens are highly successful, they often doubt their abilities. This idea is known as Imposter

Syndrome, in which people view themselves as a fraud and are unable to take responsibility for their achievements. A combined 70% of former and current first-gen students and professionals suffer from Imposter Syndrome and feel incompetent in their respective institutions. Due to the fact that first-gens obtain a greater amount of education than their family, there becomes an invisible division between themselves and family members. Imposter Syndrome, therefore, is also reproduced when they go back home.

FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT PROGRAMS WITHIN AN INSTITUTION PROVIDE NEEDED SUPPORT AND A SENSE OF COMMUNITY.

Networking

The idea of networking and using individual capital for opportunities is perceived as an essential and even inherent professional skill. However, for most first-gens, networking is far from natural, and most are not exposed to the concept until college. For first-gens who are already in the professional world, 67.3% find networking awkward and

uncomfortable, and 65% do not know how to network at all. For current first-gens, networking still holds a cord of unfamiliarity with only 17% of participants feeling comfortable networking. But more and more students are participating with 62% actively networking because they know the value of it and hope that it will help in their future prospects.

Overall Findings

Institutions have dramatically improved their attentiveness and efforts towards the first-gen population. However, advances still need to be made, especially within graduate programs. The first-gen identity is one that persists even after graduation. And with it follows self-doubt. However, when programs are created to address the challenge first-gens face, these doubts can change into confidence and affirmation.

Class Action continues to support and aid in awareness. And this survey supplements our knowledge about this remarkable population.

Sarah Shusta is a senior, first-gen and community college transfer student at Amherst College. Sarah was Class Action's First-Gen Organizer this past summer as a part of a summer fellowship through her school. [BB](#)



Class Action summer 2016 staff. Pictured L-R: Sarah Shusta (Amherst), Vanessa Correia (Boston University), Annie Hamilton (Project Manager), Anne Phillips (Executive Director), Denise Moorehead (Blog Editor) and Josie Snider (Emerson)

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ATTENTION MASSACHUSETTS-BASED ORGANIZATIONS!

Is your school, organization or group an employer based in Massachusetts? If so, you may be eligible to receive a matching grant up to **\$3,000 from the Massachusetts Workforce Development Fund** to bring Class Action to work with your staff. If you are interested in learning more about this opportunity, please reach out to us at:
WORKSHOPS@CLASSISM.ORG

INTERN SPOTLIGHT: LISA LOZANO, MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY '17

Following my spring 2016 internship with Class Action and learning about its First-Generation College Student Programs, I began questioning what my own college was doing about class inequality. MIT covers most, if not all, of their low-income students' tuition. This is fantastic, as low-income students would probably choose not to attend MIT if they knew they would be hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt a few years down the line. Yet once these students are accepted and enrolled, administrators fail to help this group get to the finish line: graduation day. Unfortunately, at MIT and hundreds of other universities and colleges, there is no official department, office or organization where low-income students can go if they are having financial difficulties or are merely seeking some sort of support as a first-gen student. Now, empowered and driven, I am developing an organization at MIT called Class Awareness, Support and Equality (CASE), which will solely focus on class disparities and issues.

Launching CASE

After planning all summer with the help of Kyla Truman '17 and Janaya Shelly '20, CASE was launched this fall. We've also solidified connections with several professors who were also raised low-income and some administrators that are willing to sponsor us.



CASE leadership: William Lopez-Cordero, Brianna Berrios, Kyla Truman, Lisa Lozano, Shirin Shivaiei, and Rene Garcia. (Missing Phillip Graham & Janaya Shelly)

In early September, we launched with our first event. More than 50 people attended! Anne and Annie from Class Action joined us to facilitate an activity that gave us a snapshot of all the beliefs that were in the room. Based on the high turnout, we are excited about spreading awareness of the silent challenges low-income students shoulder in a high-status, high-stress school like MIT, and gaining more traction for CASE. Moving forward, we will host seminars and forums meant to cultivate conversations regarding class-related differences and challenges. Our events will create a supportive atmosphere that provides students with a safe space to talk about the difficulties that come with their class and allow them to see that they are not alone in their struggle. BB