



# GUIDING LIGHT

*Giving a voice to first-generation students like herself, Molly Moloney '24 started a club to help others navigate the mystery of campus life.*

## THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE CAN BE TOUGH

for many students. There's the copious amount of coursework, the fear of not fitting in and the challenge of juggling multiple commitments. These challenges are often magnified for first-generation college students, who may also struggle to navigate the campus resources available to them.

It's that last issue, in particular, that prompted Molly Moloney '24 to co-found the First Generation Students of CofC. The club, which held its first meeting in February, aims to foster community among first-generation students and connect them with first-generation staff and other essential resources.

When Moloney and club co-founder Katie Hughes, now a sophomore majoring in environmental and sustainability studies, connected last year, they recognized that first-generation students often encounter a "hidden curriculum" of unspoken rules, practices and procedures. This tacit curriculum can include a college's dizzying number of resources.

"We both realized that CofC had so many resources available, but it's hard to even begin to identify them," says Moloney. "A big part of being a first-generation student is not knowing how to navigate these spaces, so helping with that makes a big difference."

Of course, Moloney herself hadn't always known about the state of first-generation student support at the College and what additional services were needed. It was a data visualization and storytelling class she took with Lancia Affonso '96 (M.S. '08) during her sophomore year that sparked her interest in the first-generation community.

"He sort of put the seed in my mind," says Moloney. "He made me realize that there's actually a whole community of people out there that have this shared experience."

Moloney has watched her idea to help the first-generation community

morph into not just a club with over 50 members, but a Bonner Leader capstone project that will be accessible through an online hub. For the project, Moloney filmed a 20-minute documentary about the experiences of first-generation students at the College, which she hopes conveys the importance of education.

"My only hope is that people will see that education is impactful, that everybody deserves access to education and resources that would help them navigate education," says the Charles T. Brown Endowed Scholarship recipient.

Moloney's impressive list of accomplishments and experiences certainly tout the merits of education. As a Bonner Leader, she received an

annual scholarship in exchange for weekly service with a community partner. The program allowed the Myrtle Beach native to intern with Charleston Waterkeeper, an environmental nonprofit focused on protecting local waterways, where she spearheaded an event campaign called the Public Access Takeover.

Degrees in Hispanic studies and public health in hand, Moloney is taking a gap year before returning to school to either pursue a master's degree in public health or complete a dual program in environmental and sustainability studies and public administration.

Whatever her path, Affonso will be cheering her on.

"She's got an exciting career ahead of her," he says. "My hopes are that she will continue to follow her passions and then fight for those who did not have a voice in many ways, which she's done very effectively." — *Zeniya Cooley*



*First Generation Students of CofC co-founders Katie Hughes (left) and Molly Moloney.*

| photo by Katie Cleveland |