

I distinctly remember staring up at the Dunkin' Donuts menu, looking down at two \$20 bills in my hand, then staring back up again, with two large suitcases by my side on a hot August day in 2009. I had just moved from Ethiopia to attend Harvard College. I arrived about a week before move-in day to take part in a pre-college program called *Dorm Crew* – a four day job in which Harvard College students clean dormitories before the rest of their classmates arrive to earn a little bit of extra cash. Not knowing how far I would have to stretch my \$40, I decided to get a bagel and a small coffee, and slowly wheeled my suitcases to Harvard Yard. A few minutes later, I learned that dining halls would not be open until about a week later and that it would take another week to process our Dorm Crew payment. Even worse, our rooms did not come with bedsheets.

So I spent the first week of college cleaning unairconditioned bathrooms with less than \$20 for food. I slept on \$20 bedsheets from CVS and a makeshift blanket using a *gabi* that my grandmother had given me when I left home. On official move-in day, like many of my classmates, I felt a sense of excitement and nervousness; but, like a few of my fellow low-income international students, I was also exhausted and hungry.

That week, in a sense, set the tone for the remainder of my college days. My four years as a college student were some of the most stimulating, but they were also some of the most difficult times of my life. As the only Black woman in my department and one of only a handful of students who did not grow up participating in mathematics competitions, I constantly felt invisible and inferior. Unable to travel back to Ethiopia over breaks due to travel costs throughout college, I felt homesick. Unfamiliar with U.S. norms and culture, I felt out of place.

Ten years later, I have returned to the same institution as a Junior Fellow at the Harvard Society of Fellows, one of the oldest and most exclusive institutions within the University. As a Junior Fellow, I take part in elaborate weekly dinners in Eliot House – the same building I spent the last days of summer cleaning ten years ago. These experiences inspire me to be more attuned to the lived experiences of students and aspiring researchers. Now more than ever, I feel the urgency to tackle diversity and inclusion efforts within my research communities, institutions, departments, and classrooms.

Nine years after arriving as a college freshman, I had the pleasure of reliving the move-in experience through my sister's eyes when she arrived as a college student at SUNY Plattsburgh. I picked her up from the airport with a sandwich and coffee in hand. Before she moved in to her dorm, we drove around Plattsburgh buying non-perishable food and dorm-essentials. We arrived together at the international students' office, where she checked in to get her ID and various information. As we were getting ready to leave, the woman helping my sister asked "*do you need bedsheets for tonight?*"