Throughout my time at Monmouth University, I have accomplished many of my professional and personal goals. I, Cassandra Salas, am a first-generation college student and an NJ Educational Opportunity Fund Scholar who is a student leader, researcher, and an advocate.

As a first-generation college student, I sought to find a place where I felt welcomed. The First to Fly Club had a significant impact on my first year as a college student because it offered me a welcoming space with support and resources that allowed me to succeed. I wanted to share my experience with other students who were in the same position I found myself in at the beginning of my college journey. I decided to take on a leadership role in this club to share my experiences with other first-gen students and to learn from other first-gen students' experiences. One of my goals, as president, was to connect first-gen Monmouth alumni to current first-gen students in order to provide insight into first-gen college experiences during their four-years of college, as a networking opportunity, and to discuss life after college. In 2022, I invited four Monmouth University Alumni who identified as first-gen college graduates to participate in The First to Fly First-Gen Experience Panel. The participants shared their stories from college to career, the difficult obstacles they have overcome, and offered advice to students.

As an orientation leader, I was able to create this welcoming space for incoming first-year first-generation students. During my first year as an orientation leader, I worked with the Office of Student Engagement to incorporate a presentation where I discussed my experience as a first gen and went more in-depth about the First to Fly Club and the first-gen initiative led by Claude Taylor. In the second year, I did the presentation. Many of the first-year students expressed how welcomed they felt and could not wait to join the First to Fly Club. For most first-generation students this transition can be difficult at first, however, with support and resources the experiences can be rewarding. College can be an unknown territory for first-gen students, so it is important to create a space where first-gen students are able to ask questions and share their accomplishments and their stories with others.

Through my other involvements on campus, such as working at the Information Booth in the Student Center, working the Open Houses, working at the Career and Internship Fairs, and being a participant on the Accepted Students Day panel I have been able to share my own story and create a community of resilient first-generation young professionals. I am currently in Washington DC interning at The Office of Human Rights, and throughout this semester I have received messages from students at Monmouth asking me for advice, and guidance, as well as, sharing their accomplishments with me which allows me to see the impact I have had on many students' lives. I will always be willing to help any Monmouth student in any way I am able to.