

Francisco Herrera, Class of 2013  
Dartmouth College Oral History Project  
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World  
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AL-JABER: My name is Laala Al-Jaber. Today is Wednesday, January 30, 2013. I'm here with Francisco Herrera who is a '13. Is that correct?

HERRERA: Yes.

AL-JABER: So just to get us started, could you please tell me a little bit more about your life before you came to Dartmouth?

HERRERA: Okay. Well, I come from Miami, Florida. After I came to Dartmouth, I found out that my community, the community I grew up in, is actually one of the two highest communities with populations of Nicaraguans in the U.S. My parents are Nicaraguan so that kind of makes sense now. But in general, the community I come from is predominantly Latino. Very diverse in terms of the different nationality groups. A lot of Cubans, but also when I thought about it, I had met someone from every country in Latin America except Bolivia and Uruguay.

So that was mostly how I grew up. I grew up speaking Spanish inside and outside the home. English was usually...I thought about it more kind of like that's what I did in school, and that's how I talked to my cousins and everything. It was a working-class background. So kind of like the paycheck-to-paycheck kind of thing. But I also did not realize what that meant until I came here and had a context for that. But it was great because, you know, when everyone's kind of in the same situation, you don't really notice certain things that you have in common with everybody. So that was one aspect of growing up, I guess.

[I] have a lot of cousins that over time I saw less and less of. Over the years they moved away, some finished high school, some didn't. Most of them moved away. So by the time I was in high school, I mostly only saw my parents, my sister, and my really close cousins are the two cousins on my mom's brother's side. So my mother's brother and his two sons.

AL-JABER: And how did you first hear about Dartmouth?

HERRERA: So my high school was very new, and I was the third graduating class. And one of the seniors during my junior year had gotten into Dartmouth. And so he was really excited about it, and he wouldn't stop talking about Dartmouth. And I was real annoyed; I am the kind of person that when you tell me how much you like something and you kind of shove that down my throat, I just really hate it. So I was really annoyed by this so-called Dartmouth.

And one day I was like, I don't even know why I don't like this school. [Laughs] So I looked into it, and I thought, I don't even know where New Hampshire is. This is an interesting-looking school. And that was it.

One day I got a letter in the mail to come and visit for a summer visitation program. It used to be called Destination Dartmouth. And what happened was they flew us up.... You know you applied, and then if you got accepted, they flew you up with a group of students, and they did different workshops about the college application process and actually going to college and what kind of questions we should be thinking about. The experience of thinking about how to apply to college was so amazingly useful because it was something that no one had mentioned to me before. I'm the first in my family to go to college, out of all my extended cousins.

I mean, this last break I went home, and it was the first time in maybe a good seven or eight years that I've seen all of my family, so everyone I know that is in the U.S. And I realized I'm the first one to go to college. And God willing—

AL-JABER: You didn't know that beforehand, so there was not that sort of pressure of—

HERRERA: There was a pressure that I kind of put on myself. I mean there were things that I think—I didn't label it that way. There were a lot of things I did not name until I realized that there was a name for these experiences and these feelings or certain things. So, for example, like I didn't know that being a first-generation college student was a thing. When I was in Miami, I was never Latino. I was Frankie. If anything, I was Nicaraguan because I was always the only Nicaraguan in my classroom. But even then, I was Frankie, I was loud. You know, me and my friends, we always had fun, so we were always laughing. And that was that. And here there were all these different names that came up: So being first generation or being Latino or low-income, under-resourced neighborhoods. Like

these are all different things that I didn't have a name for before I came to Dartmouth. That once I came here and I realized that people talk and think about these things academically, and more importantly that they have very real effects on not just me but on the lives of many people, that it is something that is actually significant.

AL-JABER: So when you came here, all these labels were placed on you. What effect did that have on you?

HERRERA: Well, at first I was very—I think I was very reluctant at first to pay attention to these labels. I think I was very reluctant to really notice what was going on. I have a friend who said, you know, "Don't do any of the Latino things because all you do is self-segregate. And I met my best friends by avoiding all that and just, you know, hanging out on my floor."

And I thought, "Oh, my God! I really need to meet my best friends, so I'd better not go to any of the 'Latino things.'" So everything that had the word Latino or was in Spanish or was about the Latino community, I ignored— You know I read the blitzes, I read the emails, and some of them were hilarious because some of them were written by students. Later I met these people, and they were great. But at first I never went to anything.

So on my floor, being the only Latino, feeling like the only person that had to work to financially help support myself and sometimes to even help out my family at home...there were all these different things. I knew I was different, but I couldn't quite place it.

AL-JABER: What sort of changed your mind and got you more involved within your community?

HERRERA: I think by the end of my— So I came to Dartmouth wanting to really like Dartmouth. And so for a very long time I was all about, you know, oh, yes, I love Dartmouth. It's the best place on earth and all that. But by the end of my freshman year, I'd had various, you know, very difficult academic experiences. I was pulling all these Cs, and I had to withdraw from a class. And, at the time, I thought that having to withdraw from a class was one of the biggest failures ever.

So I thought I had failed, you know, on this really gigantic level. And it's one of the things that I think made me really look around at what

was going on. Like... What was actually contributing to this?... Because I knew I'd worked as hard as I could. So I started looking to different people around me and my freshman spring I got more involved with FYSEP [First Year Student Enrichment Program]. When I came back in my sophomore fall, partly because of the people I met through FYSEP and some of their different interests, one of the places I got more involved with was the Latino community. And I realized it was something I actually did enjoy very much.

AL-JABER: And you have all these different roles within the Dartmouth community. How do you juggle that? And with which community do you identify more?

HERRERA: Well, okay. So I think having all these different roles is something that, you know, you don't stop being one or the other at any time. One of the things that we told the freshmen in FYSEP, at least one of the things I say, I should say... One of the things I say is, you know, you don't stop being a person when you're in a classroom. And you don't stop being a student when you go out on Friday nights. So it doesn't mean don't have fun. It doesn't mean don't study. It means there is a time and a place for everything.

I mean, I have a role in the Latino community I guess because I am Latino and because I've always been very invested in ensuring that the next class has a better experience than we did. So sometimes that means that I can have a conversation about their academics with them. But it also means that when they miss home and they—we have a common cultural interest like maybe it's the music or maybe it's just hearing Spanish, that's something that I can share with them.

I think it's something that is kind of—it's very fluid to me because these things are often simultaneous. So a lot of my closest friends are very similar to me in that they are also first-generation Latinos from communities that have under-resourced high schools. We are often the first generation that was born in the United States. We are the first generation to go through school in the United States. So we share a lot of the experiences of, you know, having to explain what the SAT is and why we need to pay \$40 for this test that may or may not help us get into college. Or, you know, the experience of not just worrying about ourselves getting into college; but now that we're here, you know, thinking about our siblings.

And I mean, we're not just at a college, we're at Dartmouth. So it's an elite, predominantly upper-middle-class white institution. It's not like if I would have gone to, for example, a community college where a lot of people would look like me, would, you know, have a lot more in common with me than most of the people at Dartmouth do.

AL-JABER: So do you feel as though your background placed you at a disadvantage when you came into Dartmouth?

HERRERA: For certain things, yes. I think there were certain things that I should have done differently. I should probably not have taken so many math and science classes together, at the same time, so often, so early. [Laughs] I think if I would have waited even a term or two to figure out how I learn—or to figure out, you know, you're in college now, and you're not just at college. It's like I said: You're at Dartmouth.

If I would have taken a term or two to figure that out, if someone would have said, you know, there's this other way of taking this class, you know, ask for a tutor. Or if someone would have said, you know, go to office hours. Or even explained how to use office hours. I think my experience would have been very different.

Because coming in, I think I had a very consolidated idea of, I'd go to class, I'd do my homework, I have to work in order to help pay for my education, and that was what I was here to do. I was here to go to school and help pay for that.

AL-JABER: So is that one of the reasons why you're involved in FYSEP, so that you can help other students? [Laughter]

HERRERA: Yes. FYSEP has been a truly extraordinary experience for me because I've been able to see this campus change for people like me. And it doesn't have to be Latinos. I've seen, you know, black students that are not Latino and black students who are. And, you know, all races really, of all races and all income backgrounds be at Dartmouth and struggle.

So this year the third cohort of students came in. And I've been able to see this program benefit them in ways that me and my peers and the other '13s could not even have imagined really. I mean some of the things we were able to do, I remember thinking, wow! I think we're going to be able to do this. This would be awesome. Do you

think—like what else could we possibly do to help? And we would just, you know, sit and think about what kind of things would help us, you know, during our first year, during our first terms, during our first experiences here? And we were always just trying to.... Like in our minds we were always trying to push the envelope and see how much more we could help them build so that it wasn't so much that we were doing for them, but that we were helping them, you know, realize that there was this entire other skill set that they might need to build up in order to succeed here.

I think we do come in at a disadvantage for certain things. But there are other things that come quite natural to—at least to me. I came in. It was very difficult for me to understand how to use office hours, to ask for help. I was not used to asking the grownups around me about what was going on in school. I was used to figuring that out on my own. And so that's one of the things we always try to do.

But something that came naturally for me was, you know, just struggling and not just feeling like I was struggling, but working really hard even when things weren't going well. So I was used to.... For example, my first term, I took Math 11 and Chem 5 and Spanish 37 and I got really bad grades in my math and my chemistry classes. But I was used to... If I got a bad grade, you know, I felt bad about it. But I was used to saying, alright, let me figure out what I need to do now. And so I, you know, I started looking around and asking around: What else can I do? How can I do better? How can I raise my grades? What can I possibly do to figure out how to improve what I'm doing?

I realized that that was something that a lot of people around me were not doing. A lot of people, you know, they got—I got Cs, and a lot of people got Bs, and they were very upset, and they dropped the chemistry stuff, and they dropped the premed stuff. And I had no desire to do that. I mean I knew I was struggling, I knew it would be hard. But to me it was just...I was like, well, I'm going to have to work at this. So I realized that was a very big difference between me and other people around me.

AL-JABER: You keep mentioning this idea that you were unfamiliar with Dartmouth's reputation.

HERRERA: Yes. [Laughs]

AL-JABER: When did you become aware that you were entering this elite institution? How did that affect you as a student?

HERRERA: I think I keep figuring it out as I go along. I knew it was an Ivy League. I knew Ivy Leagues were the best schools. But I had no idea what that meant. I had no idea of the opportunities, the kind of money and resources and just power that the name has.

I think I learned about Dartmouth's reputation and the true weight of it every time I'm flying home or every time I'm in an airport and someone asks me, you know, where do you go to school? And I say Dartmouth. Usually if I am—if I'm in Boston or some part north of Florida, usually people respond to this: Wow! You're at Dartmouth! And that reaction, to this day, still gets me, and it really floors me and reminds me that I'm at a place that is very prominent and people respect very, very much.

Every time I go home, you know, sometimes.... Like I was at a bank and they were asking me where I go to school. And I said Dartmouth. And they were like, is that a school? Where is it? What's that like? At home most people don't know about Dartmouth and what kind of school it is or what it means that I'm here. But it has been really interesting to kind of get those responses.

I think as a student, my performance academically, I don't know that it's affected me as much because I think from the get-go I realized it was very hard. I realized classes were very hard, and they were very different from the kind of stuff I was doing in high school. But those interactions at airports have definitely helped me understand a little bit more about what kind of things Dartmouth can do, both while I'm here and after...after I graduate.

AL-JABER: You mentioned that you struggled in your...when you first came into Dartmouth. At what point did you start feeling comfortable in terms of your sense of community? How long did that take to establish? And did it change over time?

HERRERA: Okay. So I think I first really established a sense of community sometime—I want to say my sophomore winter. My sophomore winter I had moved into the LALACS House, so the Latin American, Latino and Caribbean Studies Affinity House. I know it's a mouthful. I moved in, and there were 14—there's 14 of us, we were residents. And I got to know the house really well. I got to know the seniors really well. I got to know the '13s and the '12s really well. And that

became a kind of support group for me. I had been to the house before, and I knew the people that lived in the house. I knew the people that lived in the house, and I knew it's fantastic to actually live in the house instead of just hanging out there all the time.

AL-JABER: Mm-hmm.

HERRERA: But that was I think when I first felt a sense of community. Because before then, I would, you know I would take a test, and I'd be working however many hours a week I was working, you know, ten, 15. And it was kind of just me by myself or it felt that way, mostly.

But after I moved in my sophomore winter, whenever I had a test, I'd go back to the house, and someone always noticed that something was bothering me, and they'd be like, "Oh, what's wrong?" "You know I just took a test." And, you know, they'd cheer me up or, you know, they'd take me out. "Let's go eat something." Or, you know, we'd watch *Jersey Shore* in the living room. Or we'd play board games. Or maybe on Friday we'd all make plans to hang out together or something like that. And it was the first time that I felt like, you know, even though I'm struggling, even though this other stuff is going on, there's this group of people waiting for me at the end of the day to hear what's going on with me and to tell me what's going on with them. You know we had dinner.

Every Sunday we took turns cooking for each other as part of the program of living in the house and having—sharing—a meal that someone made for you once a week around this big beautiful dinner table, and everyone's just there and talking, laughing. You know it's an hour out of the week that felt like we were actually home. Not to mention it is an actual house.

So there were a lot of things that created the feeling of home, like walking around in our pajamas doing homework; or maybe if I was taking a break from my work and whenever I did that I'd like knock on all the seniors' rooms and just go bother them, ask them about what they were doing, look into their bookshelves and ask when or why they read a particular book, getting ideas about classes or professors that I'd like to take. I felt like the curious little brother that was always running around asking about everything I found. And I think that was the first time that I felt community.

I think my sense of community has changed, especially when that community was disrupted. So, you know, the seniors graduated.



And all of a sudden I was like whoa! Who am I spending my Fridays with now? So it increasingly became the people that I spent my time with. So the people I spent my time with at work; the people I spent my time with during FYSEP; the people that I spent my time with in class. And mostly it was usually FYSEP and work because those tended to be the individuals that tended to understand where I was coming from more often, without, you know, kind of saying, Well, why don't you just—why don't you just work harder? I'm like, I'm already not sleeping. [Laughter] I'm not sure how much harder I can work, you know. And they were the ones that were usually more supportive, that were usually there for me. So the community, what I consider my community, has both grown and shifted as time has passed by.

AL-JABER: It sounds as though the moment you sort of stopped preoccupying yourself with all these categories that people wanted you to be in, that you established your sense of community. Is that fair?

HERRERA: Somewhat. I think that there came a point when, you know, there came a point when I thought, I'm Latino, but does that mean that I have to be at every Latino event? Does that mean that the only way to be Latino is to do all these things? And my answer was no.

So my junior year I was the UGA, the undergraduate advisor, at the LALACS House. And it was a very, I think, satisfying experience. It was also a very challenging one. But I took that—I applied, and I accepted the position because I really liked the sense of community about the house. And so I wanted to foster that community because there was a strong community. The fact that there was a Latino component to it was fantastic, but it wasn't the only thing because there were definitely.... Latinos are not the only ones that live in the house, nor the only ones that visit it or use it. So that was more about building a community that cared about each other than it was about, you know, blasting all of our Latino music and speaking Spanish all the time, which we don't speak in the house. It's informal but it's not a requirement.

And it was the same thing with a lot of other stuff. Like, sure, being a first-generation college student for me has been a very salient identity because it has really helped me make sense of how I experience Dartmouth. And it's been the kind of thing that I can... I guess it's another way of naming, of labeling something. So I can say I'm a first-generation college student, and parts of that are the fact that I had no one to ask, you know, about certain things on

campus. The fact that I had no idea how to do this, or different components of my experience, are I think—are the way I understand them encapsulated in that identity.

AL-JABER: And in a broader sense, how would you define the Dartmouth community?

HERRERA: Okay. I don't know if I could, to be honest. Because there's so many different—I think there are so many different people that we have from a lot of different backgrounds. I think that Dartmouth is still predominantly white, upper middle class. But there's definitely a lot more to Dartmouth than that.

I would say that the broader Dartmouth community, I think, is made up of everyone at Dartmouth. So the students, but also not just the students but the professors, the administrators. I think if you play a role in some aspect of life at Dartmouth, I consider you're part of our community.

So I think a good way of framing this is, I was helping a friend who was working on a petition last term, and they wanted everyone that was a part of the community to sign it. And so another friend said, "Well, you know who we haven't tapped into that could be a really strong component are the parents. Because our parents, they're very invested in our experiences here." And they said, "Well, you know, are they part of our community at Dartmouth? Are they part of a 'Dartmouth community?'" And I thought about that for a little bit. And at the end of the day I thought, yes, of course they're a part of our community because they're just as invested in our experience as students here, as anyone else. Their role is different, sure. They're not on campus all the time. At least my parents aren't. I know some parents come back and some are alums and all that stuff. But for the most part, parents are not here, but I think they're definitely part of the community. So I think that's how I would define the broad "Dartmouth community"—anyone that has a role to play in the life of someone here at Dartmouth.

AL-JABER: Do you think it's changed over time?

HERRERA: I think it has changed over time. You know, this year one of the big things is celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> year of coeducation, so having women on campus. That's the big change. And we've had—we now have—all these different racial groups that are here, and there's all kinds of different identities that are coming up, that are being claimed and

celebrated. So there's, you know, first-generation students, there's a lot of identities. There's a lot of different things that are, I think, that we're being able to name as part of our experience.

AL-JABER: And do you think that Dartmouth's location affects its sense of community?

HERRERA: I think so. I think it definitely affects its sense of community because if we were in an urban setting, you know, it wouldn't be as easy to spend, I think, as much time with as many people as we do here. So it's very easy on a Friday night to, you know, maybe you take a nap after all your classes and you wake up at eight and you have no plans. The furthest distance you might have to travel is probably a 15-minute walk. So if you have no plans, you can probably call up a friend and, you know, make a plan. And in 15 minutes you could be hanging out with somebody. Or maybe you want to go to the Nugget and watch a movie. Or if someone's having a very difficult time you can do whatever you need to do if you have very important things going on. But you can usually get to them in a few minutes because the campus is so small. You know, we're able to be there for each other in a very easy way, I think. Being in an urban setting might make that a lot harder.

AL-JABER: You sort of talk about how close everyone is just because of its location. And I just wanted to build on that. There's been some unrest on campus; how do you feel about that?

HERRERA: I guess I should have put in "for better or worse." [Laughs] Yes. I think because it's such a small community, I think we have that ability to be able to say whatever we want—to be very bold with what we're saying. And the fact that we're isolated is both helpful but also in some ways challenging with, you said, unrest on campus? Yes. I think that's a very good way of putting it. I hadn't heard that but it's very good.

But, yes, I think being here has its own flavor... there's a lot to it. I think one of the ways that it might help if we were in an urban setting is there's just so many people. So it's a lot easier to mobilize a group of a thousand supporters which in a group, in a city of 300,000 or 500,000 or whatever metropolis we're in it's a lot easier to mobilize a bigger group for a cause than it is to mobilize that same number when we have 4,000 undergraduates. And graduate students that are very busy; I'm sure they all have their interests and are definitely willing to do this. But with such a smaller group of

people to begin with, it's a lot harder to get everyone to do something, I think, than when you have a bigger pool to pull from.

And at the end of the day, I think that something that administrators, alumni, trustees are all looking at is...this is a very fact- and statistic-driven time at Dartmouth. So people want to see numbers. And if no one is saying these things and no one is coming out and writing in *The D* and, you know, walking into Parkhurst every day to talk to an administrator, walking into OPAL every day to report something or to have these conversations, these things are not accumulating over time. I think it's very easy for things to stay stagnant, for things not to move, to change. And part of being at Dartmouth, I think, it's harder to get that big a mass or because of the strong culture it might be hard for someone to speak up to disagree. But by the same token, because it's so much smaller, it's a lot easier for me to say, I'm going to go talk to Dean Johnson. Or I'm going to go talk to Alysson Satterlund—she's the director of OPAL now. And I have. I've been able to say, you know, this doesn't sit right with me; I want to go talk to somebody about this. And I've met with a lot of people in the administration whenever things have—whenever I have a bone to pick. [Laughs]

AL-JABER: So in terms of where you fit in in the Dartmouth community, do you see yourself as more of an insider or an outsider or does it change over time? Are there certain times when you're both or neither?

HERRERA: I think the majority of my time at Dartmouth I've felt like an outsider, and there have been instances when I felt like an insider. So one of the first times I began to think about that, you know, very explicitly labeling myself as feeling this way, feeling like I am a part of this community or feeling like I am outside of it, was my sophomore summer.

So I felt like I was an outsider in this community because I was not on campus my sophomore summer. But I was very proud that I was able to do a Tucker internship; so a Dartmouth Partners in Community Service, so DPCS. I did a DPCS internship at a nonprofit organization in Oakland, California. Since I got to Dartmouth, I had heard all about Tucker and this community service stuff that everyone loves to do. And I hear about how everyone would get these internships to travel, and they get money to spend their off-terms, you know, doing all these great things. And I thought, wow! I have this opportunity that so many people here have. Being able to travel on Dartmouth's dime was a very big deal

for me. I had never spent so much time away from home, not at school, much less spent that much money on a project that I designed myself.

So all my life I'd either been at home or at Dartmouth. And to spend three months somewhere that I had never been before, volunteering for this organization, was extraordinary for me. And that was something that I felt very proud of.... And because of the community I was able to engage with and the way I was able to reframe some of my perspectives.

It was fantastic. I loved that experience. It's one of my favorite ones that I've had while I've been here. And that was one time that I think I felt like I was an insider. But for most of my time at Dartmouth, I've felt like an outsider because of things I've mentioned. For example, I think the more time I've spent at Dartmouth, the more I realize how the amount of work, the number of hours a week that I work, actually is very different from most people here. So I definitely don't work as much as some of my friends who are working 30 or 40 hours a week, easy.

AL-JABER: Oh.

HERRERA: But I mean, my junior year I was working easily 20-25 hours a week. And those are definitely times where I've struggled.... And I've received comments about that. Sometimes they were very supportive and like, "Wow! You work so hard. Good for you. I could never do that. I'm so proud of you. This is amazing that you're doing this for yourself, for your education."

But there were also moments when that was questioned. You know, like, "Why are you doing that? You should be working on your classes—you should be doing your homework. You shouldn't even be wasting your time with this stuff. That's cute. But you're here to go to school." And of course, the assumption is that I can just go to school and not work—that, you know, my school is paid for. Or the assumption is that I don't need the money because somehow the cost of attendance would be covered.

And there are also times when I was just— Before I kind of started realizing these things, I remember there was one day when we still had Home Plate, so Home Plate. I'm not sure if you were here then. So Home Plate was one of the dining halls in '53 Commons. And

we had three. We had the pavilion in the back, and Home Plate was kind of to the left when you walk in.

I was at Home Plate with one of my friends, and this was our sophomore fall. And she was asking about whether I was going to rush or pledge a Greek letter organization. And so I said, “You know what? I really don’t like them. I really don’t think that’s going to happen. And to be perfectly honest, on a very practical level, my very first concern is the money. I don’t have money to pay dues. I barely have money for books or to fly here or to fly home. I don’t really think that I’m going to try and come up with hundreds of dollars just to be in this organization.”

And so she said, “Well, you should just get a job, and you can use that money that you get from the job to pay for—to pay for your dues.” And I said, “I already have a job. And I use that money to pay for other things like books and my flights.” She’s like, “Well, you know, you can just take another one.” I was like, “You must not understand what I’m saying.”

And those are the moments when they said, you know, you should really be doing this part of Dartmouth and not so much that part, you know. This is.... It’s much more important to be in a Greek house than it is to do whatever other stuff you’re doing, without ever asking, you know, what’s going on here? Why do you not like these houses? Why can’t you pay for them? Why can’t you add another job to your schedule?

So those are definitely moments that have persisted throughout my four years. And those are the times that I realize my experience here is very different from a lot of my peers.

AL-JABER:

One of the easiest ways new students who are coming to Dartmouth who want to integrate into the community, they go immediately to that frat culture. And so you talk about you’re not comfortable with it. Can you elaborate on that?

HERRERA:

[Laughs] Yes. They still make me uncomfortable. I mean, I remember my first night here, I was like really excited. And I thought, what is there to do after eight p.m.? I mean sure enough, what do you hear about all the time? The frats. And so I went. I went into a frat, and I remember thinking, I’ll come back when they clean this up. They must not have cleaned it yet. And I said that the

next few times I visited, too...until I realized that that was kind of the state of affairs there.

So that hasn't really changed very much. I think the only thing that has changed is that I now see how those kinds of organizations can be good for certain people. I think some people genuinely do find a community there for them. And they get support from that community, and they support each other. But I've never felt like these organizations are the only ones where I could find that support or community. I never felt like they were the only ones that could help me achieve the goals that I want to achieve.

And for what it's worth, part of the conversation that I had with my friend that day at Home Plate was, you know, if I'm going to come up with, you know, however many hundreds of dollars every term to pay for this organization, I'd rather spend that money on an entire list of other things before I give it to this—to this cause, this thing. Because, you know, this could go to my flight, this could go to my books. I would really like to buy—there is always clothes to be bought, you know.

My sister is very soon going to be applying to colleges. I'd rather send the money home, which I have sometimes, to help out with whatever bills are being paid at home, with paying for her SAT or maybe she could take an SAT prep course. I never got that. I realized that was very common apparently, to prepare for the SAT by taking a course or getting a tutor or some kind of thing. And I didn't even know that was a thing. So maybe even if I get her a book that would be a step up.

AL-JABER: Did your different set of priorities alienate you from some of your peers?

HERRERA: Absolutely, they definitely did earlier on, and they still do. But I think in a less prevalent way. I think it's a little bit less loud now.

I think my freshman year, my first year, a lot of my peers were very excited to be in the frats and to be doing all kinds of stuff that you know.... I was struggling with my classes and with work. I was overwhelmed with all this stuff. In my mind, I had no time to be out in a frat, to be getting drunk every weekend. So that was never a thing for me. And I realized, you know, it's not necessary to be drunk all the time, but just to be out with your floor or to be out with your friends and to go out to the different frats.

By the time I came back sophomore fall, I knew I had a very different experience because people around me were able to say, you know, this house has people that are more like this, and these people in this other house are more this way than, you know, this other way. And they knew all the people in these houses. I was like, I barely knew the people on my floor. [Laughter]

I clearly did not have this common experience of being out on Frat Row often, by any stretch of the imagination. So in that sense it did alienate me and I think it took me a while to realize that there was this other group of people that were working.

When I came to Dartmouth, I was always—I was a tutor, a math and chemistry tutor, for about a year and a half. And that was usually what I did for work. So that was just me and my tutee. But then I started working at other things, interning for FYSEP. I was a drill instructor; I was a UGA. Working at Novack [Café]. All these different things. Those have been, those kinds of working opportunities became how I'd meet other students that are also working, and they have been the ones who've let me see that it's not just me that's doing this.

AL-JABER: But do you ever feel like you're missing out on the stereotypical Dartmouth experience?

HERRERA: Absolutely. I absolutely feel like I'm missing out from the stereotypical Dartmouth experience. By that same token, I know that there's a lot of other.... Like I think.... I actually just said this to a friend today, you know. Whatever we're doing, we're missing out on what we're not doing. Right? So my Dartmouth experience will be very different from a lot of other students' Dartmouth experience, just by the token that I'm the first one in my family to go to Dartmouth. Like my path here was very different from my other peers' path to Dartmouth. And so I know that my way through it definitely is shaped very differently than theirs. So I do feel like I'm missing out on it, but I don't know that I necessarily want the same things as a lot of my peers.

AL-JABER: And how have.... You may have answered this already, but just to reiterate. How has your experience at Dartmouth changed you?

HERRERA: Oh. I think one very key way is that the way I define success is much more internal than external. And what I mean by that is I think



I measure my own success. I guess coming here, my dream or my picture of success was, you know, having straight As or really high grades. And being able to publish a thesis and having all these research opportunities.

To me that was how you were successful and there wasn't a lot of room for other stuff. There weren't any other components to that. And a lot of that went away very quickly. [Laughs] So the grades were definitely gone. You know, I always kept trying to pull my grades up, and they came up a little bit at some point.

But my junior year things got really rough with my academics. I was on academic probation. I had to switch my major...or rather I made the decision to. I could have continued pursuing.... So I was originally a chemistry major. And my junior spring I was on probation. I was still failing the chemistry class, and I thought, alright, if I don't want to get suspended, I need to try and drop this class so I don't get a failing grade. And if I decide to try this again, I will be doing it while I'm taking this class plus a graduate class, plus two more classes to make up for the credit I failed and the same thing my senior spring. And I thought, No. Enough.

It was a really easy decision to make because by then I was not ashamed of what had happened. I knew I'd worked as hard as I could, which was counter to what a lot of different people were saying: professors, peers had often said, you know, you're just not working hard enough. So for a very long time I listened to them without really pushing back and thought, "I'm not doing the best. I need to work harder."

But by then, that was.... When push came to shove, that was something that I realized had changed within me, which was that I decide how I am successful, and I decide whether I am working hard enough or not. I know I am the only one that knows if I've worked hard enough. And that was something that my experience here has changed. I think when I came in I was very much oriented on valuing myself through these different merits. But now I'm much more oriented towards being satisfied with myself as a person. And of course there's the academic part of that, but there's a lot of other pieces to that that I realize I value a lot, too.

AL-JABER:

I think we've covered everything, but is there something that you think I've not asked you or an experience that you feel is worth sharing?

HERRERA: An experience worth sharing. [Laughs]

AL-JABER: That relates to your sense of community or how you felt as an insider or an outsider.

HERRERA: Well, I guess this is an experience worth sharing. My freshman winter I was working at the DHMC. I guess that was another job I had. [Laughs] I was working at a lab at the DHMC, and I came back one day. And I'd missed like the first two buses, and I was real tired. It was snowing, and it was my first winter in Hanover. I had not seen the sun in weeks. I was exhausted. I was taking a history class for the first time, and I had all this reading. My eyes were burning. And I remember I walked onto my freshman floor when I got back to campus that evening, and I saw a friend lying on the floor with an iPad. And this was back when the iPads came out; it was the very day that the iPad had come out.

So I remember seeing him. He was just lying on the floor playing on the iPad, and he said to me, "Hey, look, I got an iPad for the floor. I'm so excited. Look, we can share." And I don't know what it was about that one moment, but I remember I just flipped. And I remember thinking, "You did not get us an iPad. You got yourself an iPad that you would like to share with us—or let us use. But this is yours not mine. This does not belong to any of us. This is yours, that you bought, with your money because you can, while I was at work trying to pay for my little, you know, whatever paperback book I'm trying to use for Writing 5." So this is.... And I remember I felt bad afterwards because I had flipped so quickly, and I was so frustrated.

AL-JABER: You told this to him, to his face?

HERRERA: Yes. [Laughs] And it was just in the moment. I remember I walked away, and I just like stayed in my room until dinner. And I went out in the hall later and everything was fine. He didn't even remember. I felt bad about it. But I remember thinking, "Whoa, that was really weird because I had not had that kind of outburst with people before." And I remember those were one of the first instances when I thought, "I am different. My experience here is very different from the experience of the people around me."

AL-JABER: Okay. I'm going to turn off the recorder now.

HERRERA: All right.

**[End of Interview]**