

Arturo Waner '13
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Community and Dartmouth's World
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AL-JABER: Today is Friday, March 8th, 2013. I'm here at Rauner Library with Arturo Waner, who is a '13. And so, just to get us started could you please tell me about your life before you came to Dartmouth?

WANER: Yes, so I was born and raised in South-central Los Angeles and went to public school my entire life. Come high school, the public school that I was supposed to go to was not accredited, so I didn't go there, and I went to a charter school instead. And I ended up getting into a college match program, and that's how I ended up hearing about Dartmouth.

And before getting here, I didn't even know what it—like, I didn't know what the Ivy League was. I didn't know that Dartmouth College was, you know, a good college, according to everyone. So I kind of just ended up here because it was the best option financially.

AL-JABER: I see. And so what was high school like? Did it prepare you for Dartmouth?

WANER: I feel that there are a lot of weak areas, specifically in the math and sciences, but I don't know that that's specific to—it's kind of like across the board, I guess. But I especially felt it in math and science. I feel like in writing and English and everything else I could catch up and if I worked hard I could get to a certain level here that was good enough, but in math and science I just couldn't do it. And I tried. I tried for a long time. And I ended up getting suspended because of low grades, so I ended up under academic suspension. So at that point, I was like, *Okay, I probably shouldn't keep trying math and science.*

AL-JABER: Oh, you got suspended here at Dartmouth?

WANER: Yeah, yeah, so I had to go back home for nine months.

AL-JABER: Oh, my gosh.

WANER: Yeah.

AL-JABER: What was *that* like?

WANER: It was a little hard, mostly because I felt like I'd failed. I feel like the reason I had done well in school is because my parents always instilled this idea that my only responsibility was school, and I kind of, like, failed at that here. So I went back home, and I worked [chuckles]—I mean, I've been working for a long time, but that was kind of like the only thing I could do at the time because one of the terms of the academic suspension is that you can't transfer any credits. Even if I did take classes when I was home, they wouldn't count here. So just—I needed money, so I worked. I ended up working in a middle school, where I had been working there since tenth grade, I think, so I was a TA/tutor/ES-ELL--I guess, assistant--and a TA.

So that was fun. I feel like in the end, you know, looking back on it now, as a senior, I feel that it definitely helped me find my way, just in terms of what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. And opened my eyes to the reality of how inequitable education is in the United States.

AL-JABER: So were you taking a lot of math and science classes, is that part of your major?

WANER: Yes. So I came in either as an engineering major or as a bio major, and that didn't work out. [Chuckles.]

AL-JABER: So what are you majoring in now?

WANER: So after that happened, I kind of had to step back and look at—be very honest with myself and look at what I was good at, and I was definitely interested in education because when I went back home, I was, like, *Okay, what happened? Why wasn't I able to hang in there with the students at Dartmouth in math and science?* And I feel that was when I took a step back and I started reading up on literature and found all this data on how SES has a direct impact on your academic achievement. And being bilingual has a direct impact on how you write English. And all these things that I feel like the

college knows and didn't really, I guess, warn me. I feel like if someone would have told me, "Hey, you're from a low SES background. You're a first-gen student. You should probably not take a chemistry course and a math course your first term here." That would have made a big difference in terms of how I would have performed overall. And I feel like I rushed into this place kind of like thinking that I was the same good student that I was in high school. And I feel like that's a universal thing here. Once you get here, it's, like, "Oh, you're the best in your high school," and when you get here, everyone's *really* good.

AL-JABER: Yeah, it's interesting. Weren't you, like, valedictorian of your class?

WANER: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, in high school I was valedictorian, I trained for a marathon, I was working, like, half time, and I was taking community college courses, and I was doing—since my school was new—so I think that's important, too. Like, my charter school was—I was the second graduating class. So I got the opportunity to just, start a lot of clubs, so I did that. So, I mean, I was doing a lot, what I think was a lot, and I felt very confident in my abilities, but I feel like all of the skills that I had just didn't transfer over here to Dartmouth. Yeah, so it was interesting—when that happened, I had to, just take a step back and analyze where I was coming from and kind of like look at the facts and get over, my pride or the sense that—I feel like people here are instilled with this idea that if you work hard enough, you'll do well, and if you don't do well, it's your fault. And I feel like I had to accept the hard data, the research that's out there that contradicts that. You know, okay, there will be exceptions. There will be people who come from under-resourced, underprivileged, low SES, minority backgrounds that *do* well in math and science. But for the most part, they don't.

AL-JABER: But that must have been comforting, you knowing it wasn't your fault.

WANER: I feel like it was comforting. And that's what drove me to—well, now I'm planning to become a teacher. And I feel that outside from, budget issues in the education system, there's a lot of cultural issues that I just didn't understand when I got

here. I didn't know how to argue for a grade. I didn't know that office hours were a thing [Chuckles] you know? I feel like in urban schools, for the most part the teacher is out of there; as soon as it's 3 p.m., he's gone.

And just talking with other people here that come from suburban schools, it's completely different. The culture is just—you know, your teachers are there; they'll stay with you after school and do clubs with you. You know, you can go to another—I feel like a lot of people here have gone to other countries to study a second language.

My school didn't even have, like, labs for chemistry. We were a new school. Our first year, we didn't even have a building. We rented a church, and that's where we went to school. And we walked over to—we still do that. I mean, right now we walk over to a park for PE.

So I feel like if someone would have, asked or maybe just told me, like, "Hey, if you didn't take AP chem, you should probably not be rushing into chem your freshmen fall" or "If you've never done a lab before because your school didn't have a laboratory, you should probably think about that option a little bit harder." And I feel like no one did that. I kind of had to learn the hard way, on my own.

And I guess one of my goals as a teacher will be to let people know that, "Hey, you're gonna be outgunned, you're gonna be out-resourced, and you're probably gonna be working, you know, 10, 15 hours, one or two jobs while you're in school. Keep that in mind when you're picking your classes. Keep that in mind when you're trying to figure out your major. You know, this has nothing to do on your ability. Like, this has nothing to do with how smart you are or how much you can do; it's just has to do with the reality is if you're working a job or two while you're on campus because you need to pay for your classes, those are 10 or 15 hours that other people have to study," you know?

AL-JABER: Yeah.

WANER: "And you don't even have that." [Chuckles.] So there's little things like that I've learned here that I feel I can definitely

take back to South-central and kind of like pass on to whoever is going to come after me.

AL-JABER: Yeah. But you felt when you got here that you were at a disadvantage.

WANER: Yeah, I just didn't understand the why. Like, without that knowledge, I feel like I was just, like, *Oh, crap, everyone is just smarter than me.* You know? *They're just smarter.* And I feel like that might be, like, a common experience. But there's a difference between, *Oh, okay, I'm just slower* to *Oh, crap, everyone's getting it on the first try, and I'm still trying to figure out step one,* you know? Yeah.

AL-JABER: Yeah. I just had an interview with another student, and she was a really great student in her high school, one of the smartest there, and she was telling me the exact same thing, that her high school failed in terms of making her ready in math and science, and she also said the exact same thing, that she was the smartest in her class and that when she got here, it was, like, you're surrounded by all these other smart people who are also smart in their class, so it must have been an intimidating environment at first.

WANER: Yeah. And I feel like the longer I'm here, the more I realize how many opportunities and resources I didn't have. Again, I don't know if this is specific to my school, but we had a very limited number of AP classes and, like, people here taking, like, AP chem, AP bio. I just didn't have the opportunity to take that. I feel that's another thing that the school as an institution can kind of look into. You know, all right, let's look at what opportunities they had. Because I feel I did pretty well in high school, but I lacked opportunities that others didn't.

AL-JABER: Did you reach out to any professors, academic advisers or even other students at this time to try to figure out what's going on?

WANER: Yeah. I mean, we had an academic dean, your first-year academic dean or your dean, your mentor, your adviser. Advisor—that's the word. And, yeah, I went over with him, and I was, like, "Okay, you know, these are the classes I'm thinking of taking. What do you think?" And he was, like,

“That’s fine. Go for it. You should be fine.” You know? So that wasn’t helpful at all. I mean, when someone tells you that—if someone tells you, “Yeah, you can do it” and you’re not doing it, I mean, my reaction was to keep trying because, you know, if someone tells me I could do it, so I should be able to do it, someone that works in the school, whose, you know, role is specifically to be my advisor, told me I can do it, so my mentality was, *Okay, why am I not doing it? I have to keep working. I have to keep studying. I have to keep doing this or that.* But the gap was too large. It was just too large.

AL-JABER: How long before you changed your major?

WANER: When I came back. When I came back, I had to reassess my abilities and my goals.

AL-JABER: When were you suspended? What year?

WANER: My sophomore year? Or my fresh—the end of my freshman year, I think.

AL-JABER: That’s good. It happened early on.

WANER: It happened very early on, yeah. So I kind of picked up from there and figured out what I wanted to do pretty fast after that. So now I’m an Hispanic studies major, and I’m minoring in education and women and gender studies, and I also got into the teacher education program. So I’m getting my credentials now, so I’ll be able to kind of like teach right off the bat.

AL-JABER: And so, outside of academics, what was it like when you first came into Dartmouth? Did you visit the campus before you got here?

WANER: Yeah, with the program I got into—so I was in a program in high school called College Match, which was one of the opportunities I really appreciate and feel like I definitely that a lot of people from South-central don’t, which is a program that gave you SAT prep. They brought us to the East Coast and showed us, a lot of—you know, Bates, Dartmouth, Harvard, Brown, Wheaton—just like a handful of schools that I otherwise wouldn’t even know existed. Again, I’m, a first-gen student, so my parents wanted to help me; they just

couldn't 'cause they never went to college, so it's not like they could. I figured everything out on my own.

So that program did that, gave us SAT prep, and helped us write our personal statement and stuff like that that I feel normally people get out of their school. But, again, this was a competitive program. There were four or five schools involved and only, like, five, eight students from each school. So, we had the opportunity, but basically if you weren't in the top five students in the school, you didn't have that opportunity, you know?

And that's one of the problems I see with the system right now, is that, all right, let's see who does get the opportunity, and you might have been a .01 difference in the GPA, but that's sealed your deal, you know?

AL-JABER: Yeah. Sort of, like, people are reduced to numbers.

WANER: Exactly. And, I mean, that program was good for me. Honestly, that's what got me here. I feel like that program is what got my foot into this prestigious school where—you know, just the knowledge that these prestigious schools were out there. Because, growing up, my parents told me, "You're gonna have to go to college," but that was it. You know, "Go to college." They don't know the difference between a state school, a private or a community college. College is college. [Chuckles.] It's the one thing. And I feel like that program kind of like educated me on, okay, you have your privates, you have your UCs—I'm from California—you have your UCs, your Cal states. And, this is how much you're going to have to pay for this school; this is how much you're going to have to pay for this school. You know, they broke it down for me, and the things my other, I guess, sources of information couldn't do.

AL-JABER: But it's kind of a big deal. Like you said, you could have gone to, like, a state school, but to be a first-generation college student and you got into Dartmouth, did you feel a lot of pressure to live up to that—

WANER: Like, I guess, previous expectations?

AL-JABER: Did you put pressure on *yourself*?

WANER: Yeah, yeah. I feel like—I mean, one of the reasons I did well in high school was because I had that kind of like the whole way. And I think I might have been too ambitious right off the bat.

And, yeah, I felt pressure because so far, —well, we have a big family. You know, my mother has, like, seven siblings, so we have a big family. Out of every cousin I have, it's only been me and another cousin that have gone to college. So I guess in terms of pressure from family, it was just there because, I have a lot of little cousins, 'cause—I have a lot of younger cousins, so I'm kind of the example or since I've been doing well in school for a while, I'm always the guy who'll be, "Do what he does. Do well in school and," you know? "Do what he does." And I failed that time, so I did let down a lot of people. So, yeah, there was definitely pressure there. But I had to get over it.

AL-JABER: When you got here, did you reach out to other first-generation students? Because right now I'm aware there's a group, but was that set up when you first came here?

WANER: I went to a meeting once, and it just—I mean, I didn't know why I was there. It was kind of like a little meeting, and there were very few people who actually went, and we didn't really talk about anything.

AL-JABER: Oh, I see. It wasn't productive.

WANER: Yeah.

AL-JABER: But outside of academics, when you got here, how did you establish your sense of community? Did you go on the DOC trips?

WANER: Yeah, yeah, I went on a DOC trip, and I feel like my first—I guess—I couldn't really blend in or fit in here. I feel like one of the main reasons was because of the wealth. Like, coming in here, I wasn't aware of my SES background. It just wasn't—didn't register because everyone around me was like me, you know? Everyone around my school was a low

SES, so we didn't really feel a difference between each other.

But once I got here, that difference was very clear. You know, just in daily conversation. It was, like, "Oh, you know, I went to Spain last summer for vac—'cause I wanted a vacation" or "I'm leaving school this weekend, and I'm going to go visit my parents" or "I'm going to fly over to blah-blah-blah," you know? "For fun." And I've never—I mean, the only time I've left California was to come here, and the only time I left L.A. was, like, a wedding, and we went to Santa Barbara. So I was in a very small bubble economically, geographically, culturally, across the board. It was just a very small bubble.

And what struck me the most was the wealth here and just how much wealth people have. I feel like I've been working for myself for a very long time, and I don't know—the idea that your parents can just give you money [chuckles] is foreign to me because—I mean, my parents love me. They want what's best for me, but they just didn't have the money to be, like, "Oh, here's a hundred dollars" or like "Go get some new clothes" or "Here's five hundred dollars. Fly over and visit us for Thanksgiving or something," you know?

I've always earned everything—like, everything I have now, I've bought myself with my own money that I worked for, and that's been the case since—I mean, I've been working—I started working the summer after eighth grade. As soon as I was able to legally work, I started working. And I feel like that was because, again, I'm aware, I was always aware that money was tight. I wasn't aware that we were poor, but I was aware how money was, you know, tight.

So I never wanted to burden my parents by asking for things I didn't feel I needed. I feel like they gave me shelter, they gave me food, and they gave me a family, and that was all that they were required to do as my parents. Anything more than that was me asking for more.

So, you know, I started working, and I started buying my own shoes, buying my own clothes, buying my own school supplies, everything, paying for my SATs. You know, like, all that stuff I did on my own, and that's something I'm proud of.

And then when I got here, I just—you know, like, *Oh, no one does that. You know? They just ask their parents for money...and they get it.*

So just that—it was a huge, huge difference for me, I feel. Like the idea that you need money, you can just ask for it and you'll get it.

AL-JABER: So you couldn't relate to the students, but could you tell them why you couldn't relate to them? Or was it...?

WANER: I don't think they could understand that you had to work for your own money. You know, they were asking me, "Oh, why don't your parents give it to you?" And my reaction would be, like, "Oh, they don't have it." And then it would be, like, "Oh." And, you know, that's where the conversation would end.

AL-JABER: Yeah, I see.

WANER: So I feel—I mean, I've never been a very social person. I'm a quiet person. I've never been shy, but I'm just quiet. I don't talk a lot. I don't talk to people a lot, I feel that also played a role in it, but that's been the case my entire life. But I feel like when it did happen, it just always ended up around that. Like, we realize that there was a fundamental difference in how we viewed a lot of things. Because I feel, like, money—but money connects to a lot of other things. So.

AL-JABER: But that was sort of, like, when you first got here. But afterwards, how did you go about setting up—

WANER: I mean, like, now?

AL-JABER: Yeah.

WANER: Like, right now I still see that all the time. All the time. But I found friends that have similar backgrounds. You know, we can relate. We can be, like, "Oh, my parents are kind of not doing so well this month. I'm gonna have to work an extra couple of shifts to send them a little help." I feel like that reversal of roles is a big factor with whoever I connect with. You know, like, if your parents aren't supporting you and you're actually helping them when you can, that's

automatically something that I can—that we share that I don't share with 90 percent of the campus here, you know?

So I feel like similar SES backgrounds have—that's kind of how I found my friends.

AL-JABER: How did you meet these students on campus?

WANER: Through—I don't know. I feel like I just ran into them at some point, usually at work, you know. We're working. We talk, and then you get to know each other, and you find out that you're working because you need money. "Okay, why do you need money?" And you get to know each other. I met a couple of people through mutual friends.

So when I came back—so I had a very small group of friends my freshman year. It was, like, two or three people. And after I left—after I was suspended—after I came back, that group kind of like split up and found their own little group of friends, so I met a lot of people that way, because my old friends met new people and those people were similar to them and they were similar to me, so it worked out that way.

AL-JABER: But it must have been—was it a shock coming from California? It's hot all the time.

WANER: [Chuckles.]

AL-JABER: And there's a lot to do. Was it a shock adjusting to New Hampshire life?

WANER: Yeah, yeah, it definitely was, just because I'm not used to it. I'm not used to being so relaxed. Nothing happens here. I mean, like, nothing happens. Like, no one gets shot, no one gets stabbed, no one gets mugged. And I feel like that's what I'm used to. Like, getting here, I was just like, *Why isn't anything happening? Why is it so calm?* I wasn't upset; I was just confused. And, like, when I go back home and that feels like home—you know, like, if that's happening, like, *Aw, that sucks*. But that's home.

And that's kind of like what me and my friends talk about sometimes. You know, like, we've been desensitized—what's the word?

AL-JABER: Desensitized?

WANER: Yeah, that's the word, desensitized to violence, and when we tell other people what we've gone through, they're, like, shocked. [Chuckles.] And we're, like, "Well, that's what happens. You know, it happens all the time. It happens to everyone where we come from." So, I definitely adapted to Dartmouth, to New Hampshire, but just because it was so easy, I didn't have to worry about anything.

AL-JABER: I see.

WANER: So in that sense, it was easy. I could go out whenever I wanted and didn't have to worry about what color I'm wearing or who's going to—you know, what I actually have on me. Like, back home I would never walk with my iPod out and my earphones on 'cause that's like asking to get your iPod stolen. So I feel like in that sense, it was pretty easy because it was safe. I had nothing to worry about. I feel like it was more difficult in the sense of, like, finding people that were like me, that thought like me, that worked like me, I guess. And but then in a practical sense, it was smooth.

AL-JABER: It's interesting that you say nothing's going on on campus because a lot of people say that there's too much going on on campus, especially, like, with these bias incidents that have been going on.

WANER: Yeah. I mean, I agree that—I guess being here four years, I can see why that's a big deal. But back home [chuckles], that would not be a big deal. It happens all the time. But I agree that it's a big deal here because, you know, we're not in South-central, we're in Dartmouth, where everyone's supposed to be intellectual, everyone's supposed to be informed, educated. So in that sense, it scares me because, you know, for better or worse, the people that come here are gonna be in positions of power after they graduate. And if these are the people who are going to be the bosses, the people in charge and these are their ideas and that's how they're going to treat the people that work under them and, just statistically speaking, it's a lot more like my family is going to be working for them than someone else from

Dartmouth, you know? So in that sense, it scares me because if someone that comes here still has those ideas, then, yeah, it's scary because it kind of keeps the system going.

I feel like, again—I go back to how people think that—have this ingrained belief in meritocracy. You know, if you're smart and you work hard and you do your job, you will get here; everyone can do it. But the reality is no, not everyone can do it. You know, if you went to my school and you were number six instead of number five—you know, how much—you know, by a 0.1 GPA, you're automatically, like, out. You don't get SAT prep, you don't get to know that there's schools outside of California. So how fair is that?

AL-JABER: So are you trying to, like—have you reached out to administrators or anything to try to get them to change their perception of how they—

WANER: I'm actually working for the First-Gen Network. So I'm working with OPAL, the Office of Pluralism and Leadership. And, yeah, you know, I'm trying to do little things like that that'll help a little bit. I feel like, you know, I'm the intern and OPAL is only one office, and OPAL is taking on a lot. You know, they're dealing with a lot of things. But I feel like I'm trying to do what I can do here to make it a little better, at least for the '17s, '16s. And I feel like I've—to some level, my friends and I have done that.

You know, as seniors, we meet freshmen, and they're, like, "Oh, I'm gonna take Math 8 and Chem 5." You know, we tell them, "Okay, maybe you don't want to take both of them at the same time. You have time. You can take math your freshman fall and then take Chem 5 your winter term. Take your time. There's no rush. Take two classes—you know, balance your classes out. Take a class that's relies on exams, and take something you like for fun, and take something that's kind of challenging but not too challenging—you know, something that you still enjoy but it still pushes you a little bit."

And I feel like there's been a lot of small projects like that, small things like that that make a difference, at least with the younger—with underclassmen that I've spoken to. Like,

they're like, "Okay, I'm glad you told me not to do that because I'm struggling now, and I can only imagine how I'd be struggling if I'd taken two math or science classes instead of one," you know? So it's very little things like that, which is I feel like all I can do for now.

AL-JABER: Do you feel like you'd be able to do more as an alumni?

WANER: As a rich alumni, maybe. Yeah, maybe as a rich alumni but not as a regular alumni.

AL-JABER: Yeah, you have a very practical view on all this.

WANER: Yeah. I feel—that's how it is. There's a lot of systemic issues wrong with the education system, with Dartmouth, with economics, you know? But I'm focusing on what I consider are my people, which happen to be low-income, minority, first-gen, under-served students. That's what I know, kind of like what I learned when I was like, *Okay, what do I know? What do I actually know about? What can I talk about?*

I come from there, you know? It's very different to have a teacher that comes to Dartmouth and then becomes a teacher who went to a suburban school than to have someone that came from the same school that you're in, you know? —that knows that you don't have labs or maybe you should try to take one at the community colleges. If you want to be an engineer, you know, go to a community college; take a chem class there. You'll have labs there. You'll have—you know, try it, and then if you can handle it in high school, then you'll have a better shot of handling it in college. But don't go—if you don't have an AP chem course, don't go right into, like, regular chem in college.

I have a lot of ideas, but I feel like, again, they're based on personal experience. What I'm trying to do now—the reason I decided to minor in education was, like, *All right, this is kind of what I've gone through, but let's see what the research says*, and I've consistently found research [chuckles] that basically supports or that aligns with my experiences here. So that kind of like—what's the word I'm looking for? [Snaps fingers four times.]—supports or confirms that what I've gone through isn't unique. It's universal, at least in America, in college, in higher education. And I've definitely, like—have

very specific ideas on what I can do, just based off research. And I feel like that's a little better than personal experience.

AL-JABER: So what was it like—what is it like, maybe, if you're still working, juggling the demanding courses that you're taking and work? Do you find it got easier over time?

WANER: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, it definitely got easier. I mean, the thing that scares me was that I've been working for a while, so I'm used to this, and it was still a struggle. And I can imagine someone that didn't work before, and I can only imagine, like, what a shock that must be: *Oh, crap; now I have to work in addition to taking classes?*

So, I mean, I definitely adapted to it here. I found jobs that I enjoy. I enjoy doing research to figure out how to help first-gen students. I enjoy thinking of ways that I can help by having a little study session or offering, like, a workshop in writing a paper or, you know, time management, simple things like that that I feel other people already have that first-gen students don't.

AL-JABER: So we sort of talked about you being a low-income, first-gen student at Dartmouth. Well, what is it like being a minority on campus?

WANER: Mmm, I feel like a lot of people have issues with that here. [Sighs.] It didn't get to me as much, just because I didn't have time to worry about that. [Chuckles.] You know, I was very much caught up in paying for school and doing as well as I could. So, I mean, as a minority, yeah, there's a lot of things that are different. Maybe the simplest ones, like food. Like, we don't get minority food. Foco tries, but it's, like, it'll be the special of the day. You know, it'll be, Mexican beans or something, Spanish rice. And, you know, they're trying, but it's, like—and I feel just being a—

I mean, just using my first language—so I think that, too, has also impacted me across the board here because unless I'm taking a Spanish class, I'm writing in English. And while my English is good enough, it wasn't, like, A material, you know? So I guess as a minority, you know, like, —sorry. There's, like, language things; there's cultural things. I'm sorry, I can't think of an example.

Okay, the easiest one that I always bring up, because I think it's pretty simple and people just don't get it, is, like, these, like, themed parties they have. It'll be, like, Tequila Thursday, and everyone wears a sombrero and a fake moustache and a poncho. And it's all fun if you think that's what Mexican people are. But it's not fun if your grandparent is actually Mexican and wears that because that's who he is.

AL-JABER: Yeah.

WANER: So I think things like that—then, it's not to the point where I get upset about it or I don't make a big deal about it, but definitely I'm not comfortable with it, you know? I feel like if I had extra time on my hands, yeah, I'd get angry and I would be upset, and, I'd probably say something. But I'm struggling just to get work done and pay for school. I feel like it's a luxury. Being angry or offended is a luxury that I can't have here just because I don't have time for it. It all takes time, you know? Any action requires time. And as much as I'd like to reach out and be, like, "Hey, you probably shouldn't do that; it might be offensive," I mean, they're also students at Dartmouth—you know, like, if they can't figure that out on their own, I don't think I'm going to persuade them.

AL-JABER: Yeah.

WANER: Things like that, I guess, as a minority. There's been racial bias incidents, they call them now, which, I mean, I'm glad they put a label on it, but I feel like, again, it's a very soft label. You know, like, "bias" versus, like—I guess it's kind of like an umbrella term, but I feel like it'd be helpful to call it by what it is, which is racism, homophobia, misogyny—you know, whatever it is, call it by its name. Don't soften it up with "bias incidents." That's my opinion.

AL-JABER: Are you a member of a minority group on campus?

WANER: I was. I was. I was part of La Alianza Latina for a while. And it was fun, but I guess, like, one of the big issues with grouping people under an umbrella is that we're not all the same. So, I could be Latino and I could meet another student that are Latino, but if he's not, I guess, going back to low SES, if his parents are both engineers [chuckles], we have—

I'll have more in common with a poor Caucasian person than I do with him, you know?

AL-JABER: Mm-hm.

WANER: And I guess kind of what I've gone with—like, my friends aren't bound by my culture identity or my ethnicity but more by, like, my ideas and how we think about things. That's kind of been how I've found my group of friends here and how I identify with people.

AL-JABER: So did you distance yourself from that group because you felt like you weren't identifying with them?

WANER: No, it was just—I mean, it wasn't intentional. It just happened. I feel like slowly I was less and less interested in what they were talking about, and eventually I was, like, *Oh, I could do other stuff*. And that was more interesting to me, at least.

AL-JABER: So it sounds like you're saying that it's very hard to be here if you're not, like, privileged, if you don't come from a certain background, if you don't—would you say that's your assessment?

WANER: Yeah. I mean—[Sighs.] It definitely has been, I guess, hard, but it is what it is. I guess, I've learned how to handle it. I am just nervous saying it's been hard because I feel like that implies some, like, helplessness, and I don't think that's the approach I've taken with Dartmouth. I would call it a challenge. It's been a challenge being here.

AL-JABER: So could we talk a little bit about Greek life? A lot of students, when they first get here, they're sort of attracted to Greek life because it's a really easy, convenient way of establishing a sense of community. Were you ever interested in it?

WANER: Mmm, I mean, I go to parties when they have parties, but, like, in terms of joining a fraternity? No. Again, it's very simple: money. I don't have X amount of thousands of dollars to pay to a fraternity every term. You know?

AL-JABER: But would you join one if you could?

- WANER: I don't know. I don't think I can—if I had the money, just my mentality wouldn't go towards that. I'd send it home, you know?
- AL-JABER: I see.
- WANER: You know, if I had an extra—I don't know how much it costs to be in a fraternity, but I'm pretty sure it's in the thousands.
- AL-JABER: Oh, really? That's a lot.
- WANER: Yeah. I mean, if I had an extra thousand bucks, I would send them home. I can make friends another way. [Chuckles.] I don't feel I've needed—like, so, I have made this metaphor—or at least, like, analogy before, and I don't know if it applies, but it kind of makes sense in my head. But where I come from, there's also an organization that's a group that you can get into that—you know, you'll be a “brother”—you know, quote-unquote, “brother.” And they'll have your back, and you'll have, you know, economic opportunity or network opportunities. And they're gangs. [Chuckles.]
- AL-JABER: Yeah, I was just about to say.
- WANER: They're gangs. So, I mean, I feel like the reason we don't call these things gangs is because we're at Dartmouth. [Chuckles.] But, I mean, I feel a lot of parallels between gangs and fraternities. And, I didn't get to where I was that way, so I feel like I've gotten here on my own and I can get through it on my own, and that's something I'm proud of.
- AL-JABER: It *is* something to be proud of.
- WANER: Yeah. The whole, like, community thing—it's never been a big deal for me because, I come from this background where, people will call out your community and people—if you're in a gang, they will—you know, your homeys will back you up 'til the end. I don't doubt that. It's just the community I've had wasn't reliant on benefits. It was more like: Okay, we agree. We're friends. You care about me. I care about you. That's fine. You're my friend, then that makes it part of my community.

AL-JABER: Yeah, it sounds like they're naturally occurring and they don't have labels on it.

WANER: Yeah, exactly. I have a lot of very good friends that I still talk to in high school. And the way it happened in high school was—because we weren't interested—you know, we weren't interested in joining gangs. We were interested in going to college, you know, and that was the common factor in high school. And that's how we kind of hung—that's how I met my friends in high school.

AL-JABER: So what do you make of the exclusivity of the Greek system? And it's sort of, like, seen as the only—one of the few things to do on campus.

WANER: Yeah, no, it definitely has a lot of power over social life here. And, again, it's because so many people can afford to be in them. I feel like if you let—if you had more diversity, you'd realize that not everyone wants to be in one and that not everyone can afford to be in one and that not everyone thinks that those are the best ways to socialize—again, if you had, quote-unquote, “real diversity,” which I don't think we have right now.

AL-JABER: So what do you do, other than go to parties? What do you do for fun? What's your social scene like?

WANER: I feel like my thing here has been boxing.

AL-JABER: Oh, you're president of the boxing club.

WANER: That was until very recently. I kind of put that away 'cause I wanted to do very well in my last two terms here, but I am still involved. I still go—but, yeah, that was my thing. One of the few times when skills I had [chuckles] were applicable here at Dartmouth. So it was fun. I mean, that's one of the few spaces I feel like—where I'm comfortable 'cause it's something I know how to do. It's something I've developed here. And it's one of these spaces where I can be, like, “Okay, this is what I know, and I can help you. I can teach you.” You know, and I feel like I don't get that a lot here. And I enjoy it. It's good for you. It's fitness, and it's fun. So that's my thing, I guess, here.

- AL-JABER: So are there any other roles you have on campus? Part of any other groups?
- WANER: Right now, I feel like—I got to a point where I was, like, *Okay, I need to focus on me now and just wrap it up as best as I can.* So I kind of, like, stopped. I was involved in La Alianza. Yeah, I've kind of been—usually what I do with my free time is work or study. So I don't really—I mean, I socialize, yeah, but it's, like, you know, for an hour or two every Friday night or maybe Thur—you know, it'll be nice when I go out and I have fun, but it's not a routine. It's whenever I have time.
- AL-JABER: And that's sort of—like, it's different from, like, what I would think the average college—the average Dartmouth student, who's like—I spoke about this in an earlier interview. It's, like, a work-hard, play-hard mentality on campus.
- WANER: Mm-hm.
- AL-JABER: So you're very distant from that.
- WANER: Yeah. I feel like working hard and then playing hard is a privilege that I don't have. And I'm okay with that.
- AL-JABER: So you don't feel like you've been, like, deprived of, like, the stereotypical college experience where it's like hard partying.
- WANER: I don't think I would have wanted that. I find no interest in—
- AL-JABER: Just doesn't appeal to you.
- WANER: Yeah, I don't find any kind of reward in that.
- AL-JABER: So we've talked about how you feel like an insider on campus, but other than boxing, are there any other ways that you do feel like an insider?
- WANER: Mmm, within, like, specific spaces?
- AL-JABER: Yeah.
- WANER: I guess OPAL. OPAL has definitely been a place where I'm, like, *Oh, crap, there's people like me that think like me.* Or

sometimes it's not people like me but they still think like me. You know, that's been a very rewarding and, I guess— what's the word I'm looking for? —comforting experience, just because I've met people there who don't come from similar background but still, you know, see what's wrong. [Chuckles.] And it gives me hope.

'Cause on the one hand, you have these people who are causing these bias incidents, who will go on and keep thinking that way when they're someone's boss, but you also have these other people who don't think that way and are going to keep trying to do something about it.

AL-JABER: And so how do you define—going back a little bit, how do you define the Dartmouth community? Does it involve students, administrators? What is it?

WANER: I guess community—I feel like people who are big here in social life. So a big part of it will be the Greek scene, and then the minorities. You have, like, the AAm and the LALACS and stuff like that. It's very simple, I think.

AL-JABER: So do you feel like it's evolved over the four years that you've been here?

WANER: No, I don't think so. I think it's been the same since I got here.

AL-JABER: Do you see that as a positive or a negative?

WANER: For me or for, like, incoming students?

AL-JABER: For you. And I guess you could talk about incoming students.

WANER: I mean, like, for me it's bleh. You know, it's what it's been since I got here, so I'm not—I'm leaving now, so I'm not worried about it. I think it's a problem for the future because if Dartmouth stays this way, you're not gonna—Dartmouth isn't gonna be the lead institution anymore. We're falling behind if everyone else is, like, you know, "Oh, crap, our Greek system is very—you know, not good for everyone," and everyone's realizing this, but Dartmouth...

AL-JABER: Yeah.

WANER: You know, I feel like another thing here is: Don't let traditions fail or something. They don't like changing stuff. They want to stick to the tradition, and I don't think that's the reality of America. You know, America's changing, and if you keep these ideas that, I guess, are exclusive to certain privileged individuals, then Dartmouth is going to become an institution for those privileged individuals and you're going to lose out on all this diversity, which is already, struggling.

I feel, like, in a classroom whenever we're talking about anything, you have the overall—like, the mainstream point of view, and then you have us in the back, being like, "Wait. What about how is it for poor people? How is it for minorities? How is it for—you know, first gen people?" And we're the ones bringing that up, and if we're not comfortable here, people like us are going to stop coming here, and then you're just going to have the one view that's dominating everything, and if everyone believes in meritocracy, then, you know, it's going to lead to everyone thinking that if you're not doing well it's because you just didn't work hard enough. And I feel like this idea of meritocracy is ingrained in a lot of places in America, but it's not the reality right now.

AL-JABER: But if you had a chance to go back, and knowing what you know now about Dartmouth, would you have still come here?

WANER: Yes. Just because there's no other way I could have gotten this experience anywhere else. Like, I wouldn't know that people can be this rich [chuckles] if I didn't come here. I wouldn't know that people who are still educated and privileged and had every opportunity still have these, you know, like, racist, misogynistic, patriarchal, homophobic underlying ideas, you know? And I would still come here, just because of that, just because it broadened my world and it broadened my idea of what's real after college.

AL-JABER: So is that sort of the main thing that you're gonna take away from Dartmouth? How has it really changed you as a person over the past four years?

WANER: I feel like the biggest thing was that it made me realize how unfair the education system is right now, how it's not based

on the meritocracy, and that's important, and I don't think enough people realize that. Yet.

AL-JABER: So, like, you're going to take all these things that you've picked up here and you're going to sort of apply it back home. Do you think it's going to be hard going back, adjusting to that way of life?

WANER: No, no, I don't think so. Just because I feel weird here. When I go back home, I'm home, you know?

AL-JABER: Mm-hm.

WANER: Yeah, like I said, like, I'm, like, *Oh, crap, that sucks that this fool got shot. It's sucks that he got killed. It sucks that this happened.* But that's been there my entire life, so it's, like, — it shouldn't be that way, but it is. What can I do about it, you know? And I feel like that's the first step.

Like, another thing is that people that do come from similar— from backgrounds like mine— what happens after Dartmouth is that they'll be, like, "I never want to go back. I'm not going back. I'm gonna get my family outta there." And I can understand why they would think that way, because honestly, I would want to get my—I have two younger sisters. I don't want them growing up in a place like that. You know, I went through all the crap growing up because of gangs, because of all this crap, and they're going through it, too, as girls, you know?

And I don't mean that in any way other than in a patriarchal, misogynistic society—you know, I grew up as a man in that society, and I had all the benefits of being a man in that society. They don't, you know? So, on one hand, it's, like, yeah, I don't want them there. But on the other hand, they're going to have the same ideas that I did, and because of that, they're gonna think about the world the same way I do, hopefully. [Chuckles.]

And hopefully they won't get this idea of, you know, like, escapism that I feel people from that background get. They leave, and they never come back, and then that's what keeps the system going, you know? 'Cause if you're learning all these things and then moving to a suburban house where

you'll never have to worry about getting shot again, then, you know, your kids will be fine and everything, but then, you know, the rest of your fam—you can't bring your entire family to suburbia. You can't do that. It's unrealistic.

And I feel like that's what's keeping me home, my family. I have not just my sisters, not just my parents but my cousins, my aunts, my uncles, my grandparents. You know, my little cousins—like, it sucks looking at my three- or four-year-old cousin and knowing that statistically he's probably not going to go to college. It's just, off statistics. He's probably going to end up in jail. He's more likely to end up in jail than he is in college. I'm not okay with that.

And that's what keeps me—what's keeping me or what's motivating me to go back and do something about it, because I have a very personal connection to that space and those people.

AL-JABER: It feels like you're trying to reconfirm that you do have to go back.

WANER: Yeah. Yeah. Definitely.

AL-JABER: But do you plan to, like, stay active in the Dartmouth community? Are you going to be one of those alumni that, like, keeps coming back here?

WANER: I don't see myself coming back here often. The only ways I see myself being involved in the future is to help these groups, you know? Maybe I feel like FYSEP is doing some thing that are right, so I see myself supporting FYSEP as long as I continue to agree with their approach. You know, OPAL, things like that.

AL-JABER: Are you currently a member of FYSEP?

WANER: I'm a mentor. I wasn't enrolled—I feel like that would have made a big difference. I'm a mentor just because I saw something that I thought was effective and actually making a difference. So I'm a mentor right now. But, you know, like every program, there's good things and there's not so good things, but for the most part, I agree with FYSEP right now. I think it's doing a lot of things pretty well. I think they put out

the numbers—their data a couple of weeks ago, and they bridged the gap, the academic achievement gap in first-gen. So, I mean, they're doing something right, you know? And that's the first step. And I know FYSEP has been a little—not everyone agrees with it, the administration and all that, but it's doing something right. So if I'm involved in this school in the future, that's how I see myself doing it.

AL-JABER: I see. So I think we've covered all the questions, but is there anything you want to add sort of about how your sense of community has evolved over the four years that you've been here or in terms of how you see yourself fitting into the Dartmouth community?

WANER: Mmm, I guess I don't see myself fitting in. But that's never been a bad thing. It's always been—I feel like the reason I'm here, you know, it's to kind of bring those points up. I feel like a lot of people don't think about these things just because they've never been exposed to it. In the same way I was never exposed to high-income, suburban schools, they've never been exposed to low-income, low SES schools, you know?

AL-JABER: Mmm.

WANER: So I guess just letting them know that these things are real, you know? People like me exist. And there's a lot more of me, you know? I feel like there's a lot more poor people than there are rich people. I feel like that makes sense. And they have to be aware of that, and I don't think they are, just because they've grown up in their own little suburban bubble—you know, going to Spain, going everywhere else, going to the nice touristy places. But they've never been to South-central. They've never been to Watts. You know, they've never been to, like, all the bad parts of New York. And I feel like they have to know that these things are real.

AL-JABER: Okay. I think that's it. Thank you. I'm going to turn off the tape now.

WANER: Cool.

[End of interview]

