Interview Synopsis: Omar Garcia is a recent Berkeley alum in the architecture department. Omar grew up in Barrio Logan and was involved in Barrio Logan College Institute (BLCI) since third grade. Omar and I discuss different ways his community and family influenced, inspired, and allowed him to reach for higher education. Omar will go into detail about his childhood and adolescence, and will discuss how he ended up at UC Berkeley instead of another school. Omar will also share how the roots of his success comes from his family and BLCI. This interview covers topics such as staying grounded, fighting off unsettling feelings such as imposter syndrome, and how to stay motivated during your college career. Omar and I were introduced through BLCI and the interview was conducted over Zoom in order to practice social distancing during the Covid-19 pandemic. The interview was conducted by Valeria Almaraz Corona (she/hers), a third year Ethnic Studies Major at UCSD who is interested in uplifting people's voices especially those from communities who have been silenced.

<u>Valeria</u>: Okay I started recording. So, hi my name is Valeria Almaraz. Today is May 26, 2021. And I am interviewing Omar Garcia through zoom for the University of California San Diego Race and Oral History Project. Omar, do you agree to grant the University permission to archive and publish this interview for educational purposes?

Omar: I agree (chuckles).

<u>Valeria</u>: Okay. (laughs) Okay, hi Omar. So really quickly to start off the interview I just kinda wanted to ask you to introduce yourself. So your age, you are currently studying your undergrad so you could give us a little bit of information about that.

Omar: Okay, perfect. My name is Omar Garcia. I actually just graduated from the University of California Berkeley, like a few weeks ago. And yeah my major was in architecture and yeah that's it.

<u>Valeria</u>: Awesome, okay. So how- how did-, Imma ask you a little bit more about your childhood, so could you tell me a little bit of how it was growing up? What your community was like or what your family is like?

Omar: Okay so, my community. So I grew up in Barrio Logan, Logan Heights. And yeah I mean it was just like, like, I guess like, like in San Diego it's not, it's not one of the best neighborhoods to grow up in. There's not- I guess there was and there still is like a lot of affiliations with like gang activity or just like just just bad stuff that happens. Like just, I don't want to say like criminals because it's my community but like bad stuff tends to happen in- in Logan. But no, I mean- but like the other part of the question was also about my family. Yeah, so my parents came over, I was born here in the states and yeah. Th- I think, I mean if I, if I had to pick my mom

was always the one that really like pushed me to go to school and really wanted me to succeed. And it wasn't - I guess college wasn't and university in general wasn't something I really thought of until like, I think like I wanna say like middle school like late elementary school. Just cause I didn't, I just didn't know anything. I hope that answered the question, if not I can-

<u>Valeria</u>: No yeah, um just a little bit to dive in into the community part a little bit more. In the area that you grew up, you said you grew up in Lincoln Heights, what was the demographics or what were- who surrounded you around in that area?

Omar: Okay. From my high school, correct?

<u>Valeria</u>: It can be elementary school, like when you were growing up in elementary school, middle school, or high school, whatever you'd like to discuss.

Omar: Okay, perfect. In elementary, I went to King Chavez element- King Chavez Academy. And that was my elementary school. I went there from kinder to fifth grade and it was just all like, um, it was a school that was still in Logan heights. It was, I wanna say it was like four blocks down my house, going left on my street on Webster. But yeah, it was just, it was- it was all Latinos that- it was just students of color. It was African American and Latino students. And my middle school and high school were both in The Preuss School UCSD and that is a low- it's a, it's a charter school meant for low income students. And it's just meant to like, prepare students for college. And the Preuss school in- the full name is the Preuss School UCSD. So I would take a bus to La Jolla every- every morning and back every afternoon for middle school and high school. But yeah, of course was also filled with a lot of students of color um so it was just I hope am- I sound politically correct. But some Asians, African Americans and Latinos, just mainly that and there's maybe a handful of white kids but that's it.

<u>Valeria</u>: Then just one more question to kind of dive into your childhood. But what was your favorite memory growing up? Or what's one of your favorite memories that you can recall from when you were growing up?

Omar: I guess one of my favorite memories growing up was um, I want to say there was a time where my mom had just gotten her papers. And I think, yeah, and it was just like, it was a big deal for everyone. And I didn't get it really at the time. But I was like, Oh, I guess we're gonna go to Mexico. So when that happened, we all took a trip and my mom wasn't able to go yet because she still had to receive the documents in the mail. But I flew down with my dad and it was just me and him. And he dropped me off with my grandparents while he would go out and like see my other family. And yes, it was just me and my grandparents for like a couple weeks and it was like around Christmas time.

Valeria: Mmm, nice.

Omar: This was my first time seeing like, a lot of fireworks, a lot of them like 'las posadas', all that so it was it was a nice, nice memory to have.

<u>Valeria</u>: Okay, so moving on to the second question. You said that you didn't think about going to college until your late elementary school. But can you dive in into a little bit more if your family or even just your friends had any influence in your choice to actually going to a university.

Omar: I guess not to sound mean to my friends in elementary and middle school or even high school but like none of them had- And not that this is a bad a bad thing, but like none of them just ever had that type of aspiration because I think, even from my friends in high school, I think um sadly, I think one of them dropped out. Two of them have stopped going, like just at all and like, it's just, it wasn't like, I mean, like, they're all doing well, but it just wasn't necessarily for my friends. It was mainly for my family. I think. Like I said, like, my mom was the one that really like, pushed me to go and I think I always wanted to have like the work ethic- work ethic of my dad. And also like, programs like BLCI, Barrio Logan College Institute, we're like really influential and like, and instrumental in helping me want to go to college cause it was BLCI. Like, gave us like, like in my family different resources. They took in my sibling and yeah, like program- programs like that were really helpful, as well.

<u>Valeria</u>: Um, do you have any siblings? Are you the oldest or youngest?

Omar: Yeah, I have- I have a little sister. Her name is Alicia Garcia. She's currently going to CSU Channel Islands. I think she just finished her first year. And I have a little brother and his name is Moises Garcia and he should be finishing up, I want to say his last year of middle school. So eighth grade, he should be finishing up some- cause he is also on units. My- both my siblings are- attended and- Because attended cause my sister already graduated, they both attended and are attending Preuss as well.

Valeria: So you're the oldest of three?

Omar: Yes I am the oldest of three.

<u>Valeria</u>: I have three other sisters and so I knew I wanted to go to university, partly because of my parents. But also because when I was I think it was my fifth grade year my sister was doing her first year UCR. So that was already in the back of my head like Well, my older sisters are going and applying to these schools. So I'm going to apply as well. So that's interesting.

Omar: eah, no, I think that's like, that's like, congrats, but like, but that's really because I remember like, just just really quick, just a tangent, I think that's a very important thing in family is to have a sibling that goes to university because like even I've, um, I have a couple of friends here. And like, just like some of the guys that hang out like in the architecture studios, like a lot of them have siblings that went to college. And that was like very influential for them, as well. So it's a nice, it's a good pattern.

<u>Valeria</u>: Yeah. I think, yeah, honestly, like, I do good in school, but it's not like, I don't really have fun like, it's not necessarily fun for me. So I think if my parents wouldn't have told me like, I would have gone, but I wouldn't have taken it as seriously if my older sisters wouldn't have done it. Because I copy everything they do. (laughs) So like if they go to school, I'm going to school too. Yeah. Did your parents or your family have any influence on what you wanted to study? Or Was that all your decision?

Omar: Uh, I don't-. So it was mainly my dad, my mom always just told me to pick a profession, like, I guess, just profession that like, I guess for lack of a better word just pays well, like, but that's only because like, I think I remember having a conversation with my mother. And she was telling me how like, She's like, like, She's like, um, she was trying to tell me that I should really pick a career that I'm passionate about. But at the same time, like, I and my sister and my brother, we don't have the luxury of looking through careers forever. And like, because we're just not, we're not in the best financial situation. So it's like, it's more of a matter of like, get a good career and, like, like 'balancearse'. But I think the most influential person was my dad. I think since I was about seven, he would wake me up in the morning to go work with him. And my dad does construction and like mainly framing, but like, I'm going to just construction as a general term.

Valeria: Mhm.

Omar: And he would take me with him. And yeah, it was just, I'm just I grew up like, going to Home Depot with him, like, putting up stuff with them, like just different walls, studs, like trusses, like what what it might be. And he was the first one that sort of gave me the idea of like being an architect, which is what I'm studying as a vocation. And yeah, that's all I really knew. In the back of my head, like for a few years, I had, like, dabbled in like little research, quote, unquote, of like, medic-medical field of, like law and things like that. But um, I think architecture was, I mean, I was always like, (background noise) sorry, in the back of my head. Yeah. And it wasn't until my high school years that I really started to see architecture more as a viable vocation. Because my dad sort of just told me like, Oh, just you'll design stuff. And you can flip it. And so that that was like the idea but now like, and especially now that I've gone through Berkeley, I'm like, I know, I kind of know more what I want to do with this.

<u>Valeria</u>: That's great, that's so cool. Yeah, my parents, or at least my mom has always been more of like, you need to become a lawyer or a doctor. And I've never wanted to become one of those things. So I feel like (laughs)

Omar: (laughs)

<u>Valeria</u>: It's just it's kind of like funny to see now that my sisters have graduated but none of them have you decided to major in what she wanted to. But that's kind of- that's cool that you-you did what your dad kind of influenced you to do. So earlier in the preliminary interview you told me that you've been in BLCI since you were in third grade. Can you tell me a little bit about how that came to be, like how you heard about it and why you decided to join?

Omar: Yeah. So in elementary, I think this was my first grade teacher, Mrs. Estadillo. She was very good friends with- my mom became really good friends with her cause my mom was always just involved with field trips, like P-PTA stuff, like stuff of that nature. My mom was always trying to help out like be as invested as she could with like, my education. So yeah, so she and Mrs. Estadillo became good friends. And Mrs. Estadillo had her son shadow one of myone of my good friends in BLCI in third grade. Because I joined in like, halfway through third grade. And she would always tell my mom like, oh, like, I'm shadowing someone at this program. Like it's just after school, like your- Omar wouldn't miss anything. But yeah, so um, she told my mom about the program. I remember thinking like, at first I thought it was just a whole new school. So I was kind of upset. But it wasn't, it was just an after school program. And then she- we went and my mom forced me to apply, well (laughs) its- its okay though.

Valeria: (laughs).

Omar: The application I think it consisted of a few essays, a few questionnaires, like oh, like, why do you want to go to college? Like, what do you want to study? So I just wrote down what I wrote down in second grade or third grade. But yeah, after that, I had my interview with one of the coordinators... at BLCI and yeah, I got in thankfully. I met*can't understand* (minute 11:27). And yeah, I've just been there ever since.

<u>Valeria</u>: Can you give a little bit of like, a recap of what Barrio Logan College Institute, BLCI, is for the people who don't know what it is?

Omar: Perfect. Yeah, Barrio Logan College Institute is a great program. It helps students, I guess, like my-because they have their mission statement on their website, blci.org (laughs quietly). But I guess for me what it does, it's um, it's an organization that levels the playing field for students. And like- when in regards to education, because there's a lot of things that students of color and just students from my, from my socio economic background wouldn't have. Like I

remember, like, BLCI was like e- cause even my high school didn't provide us with SAT like prep or ACT prep. It was BLCI that gave us that prep. And like, it's just things like that, like, like granted (chuckles) I didn't do as well on both exams, but like, the fact that it was this program that gave us that like, like I said, leveled the playing field. And it gives me enough resources that maybe other students have, like, the privilege of having and like students I guess of color don't have so yeah, that's um what BLCI does, it prepares students and encourages them. And it like it cultivates their dream of going to college, which yeah.

<u>Valeria</u>: Yeah, I was volunteering this quarter to g- going or going to BLCI through zoom. And I thought that was something really cool that I would ever be- like if I grew up in Barrio Logan or the San Diego area, and I participate in a program like that I feel like that's something I would have really appreciated. Because I know a lot of schools don't have those resources, or kids don't have the privilege to have like the ACT prep provided to them. I also think that's really cool. Okay, we can move on to the next question. And you said Barrio Logan was really helpful to you and there was a lot of resources. Can you explain a little bit more on how Barrio Logan College Institute helped you out when you were applying to colleges or like your university career? And then how did you take advantage of these resources?

Omar: Yeah, perfect. Um, so ever since elementary Barrio Logan College Institute, I'll just say BLCI for short. BLCI always has like these different workshops, or career fairs. Where like people in different vocations come in, they speak to us. So my mom would always try to get me to go to as many of those as possible and I remember one of the first ones I went to was a medical one at UCSD. So BLCI took a group of us. I think it was like, honestly, it was five to 10 of us. They took us in the BLCI van and we went to UCSD and they just took us around to like the different like, like different lecture halls at UCSD. And it was just people from the medical profession and professors speaking to us. So that was like one of the earliest ones I remember when it came time to applying for colleges. Thankfully, Preuss was also very helpful with this because Preuss was a- because it's part of the- UCSD it's part of the UC system. They really helped us with our UCs and our- as well as our CSUs. But no, BLCI for other students that weren't in Preuss like a- like you can see like the difference of like, because Preuss very-thankfully it was very helpful in helping us apply but like people who went to different high schools in San Diego weren't as helpful. So BLCI like for sure for them was like their main like one to one resource.

Valeria: Mhhm.

Omar: Because I think it was interesting to see how like cause like- how different students coming up like my high school still didn't know if they had all the requirements then like the counselors were often not very helpful. So yeah, BLCI was definitely a tool that helped us ensure that we had all our requirements ready to go, we were taking the right classes. Right, right

extracurriculars, getting involved. And making sure our essays were like in tip top shape, like I remember I'm going back (laughs quietly) like multiple times to make sure my personal statements are ready to go.

<u>Valeria</u>: This is just a question because I'm curious. You mentioned that your high school was really helpful when you- when it came to applying to UCs and CSUs. Did you know that Berkeley was the school you wanted to go to? Was that like your top choice? Or did you make that decision? Like, how many schools Did you even apply to? Was there like a- like two schools that you were like tied between or-

Omar: Yeah, it was um, it was quite a bit a few. It was a quite a bit of schools. Quite a few. (Quitely) That's why I didn't get accepted (sighs and chuckles). I applied to most of the Ivy's and surprise, surprise I didn't get in. I think the closest was Princeton that was on- that was either waitlisted or something like that. But I ended up not getting in I think it was either it was either my application was deferred or waitlisted or something like that. I already forgot. But Princeton was the closest one that I- that was the dream school before. But I'm really- but granted I have no experience on the east coast and I have no idea what I would have gotten myself into so I'm happy that didn't work out. When it comes to the UCs, I think I applied to UCs-. So Preuss always wants- wants you to apply to UCSD. So that's where we applied. I applied to UCSD. I got in. And I think I got into all the schools I applied to, I think. So I got into Berkeley, UCSD, UCR, and I think I applied to Santa Barbara or Santa Cruz, one of the 'Santas'. And I applied to the CSUs and I got into San Diego State. Sac state. And I can't remember the others. But yeah, I think I applied to an extra CSU because I had an extra fee waiv- fee waiver. So I applied to five CSUs, four UCs, and a lot of IVs. But that is it, I think, yeah. And I got into Berkeley. My last choice was between Berkeley and UCSD. And it was- it was, it was a tough choice at the time, because because that was when it finally hit me like oh, like, I might have to leave my family for school for multiple years. And so I was like really, really jittery about that. And so it was like, and it was because of BLCI also, like I had conversations with the coordinators, with Tony and Christina. And I had conversations with some of my teachers in high school, like Dr. Weber and like these people were just like, really helpful. And like NSR people, they were just really helpful, like, and helping me decide to like yeah, like Berkeley is the right choice, because I think UCSD would have been like a great option like regardless, but I think it- UCSD doesn't have architecture. And for me to go to a school that doesn't- already doesn't have my major, like, yeah, I probably would have had my school paid for. But no, I think- like I said I had to like doors opened up through BLCI as well, because BLCI also offered me scholarships. And one of my main scholarship donors is a Berkeley alum. And he was the one that really helped me like, give me like the last little bump in order to be able to come to Berkeley and have everything paid for. So yeah (gestures thumbs up).

<u>Valeria</u>: Wow, that is so impressive! Yeah, so was there- when it came to telling your parents like your decision? Were they- how were they impacted by you going to Berkeley?

Omar: They were- it was, I don't wanna say bittersweet, but it was- it was a bit of that because they were relieved that I didn't go- I remember like having a conversation with my dad on- we had gone to work and it was like eight- 8am. We just finished something we were just, like eating just a bit- a bit of a breakfast snack or something after like, we were putting up walls. And he was telling me like, oh, like 'mijo', like, I'm happy that you didn't go to Princeton because that would have been really far like, that's a whole other timezone and at least here in Berkeley, like you're still in California. So they were happy that I wasn't leaving as far. But I remember when it first happened, like, like on the car ride over like it was it was a very sad like, and my siblings and parents later told me that on the car ride back when they drove me up like they were crying. It was- it was a tough cause I didn't do as well my first semester because- just being homesick. But no, I think um, it was a tough transition. But, but it was- it was able to be done. I guess if that makes sense.

<u>Valeria</u>: (unintelligible) Sorry sorry I didn't mean to cut you off (laughs)

Omar: (laughs quietly) No it's okay, yeah. I was just gonna say like, I remember pulling up the email because I opened a lot of my rejection letters at school. But no, I think Berkeley was the first big acceptance that I got like and opened it at home because I didn't want to wait until Monday. I think I got it on the weekend. So I was like, I'll just open and I told my mom Hey, Mom, I'm gonna open it. So she came I opened it and there was like confetti and yeah, that (unintelligible) I got into Berkeley.

<u>Valeria</u>: I can relate to the- my sister, my older sister actually just also graduated from Berkeley. She walked on Thursday last week. And so I can relate to the part where you said that your family on their drive back was like really sad. My mom- my sister went to Riverside, which is not too far. It's like about two hours away. And then she (the sister that went to Berkeley) was the one that moved further away. So she went up to Berkeley and me- I have a twin sister and we both go to UCSD. And so my mom was like, okay, at least you didn't go all the way to Berkeley. But when- when we drove up my sister, her first year was definitely the same, like, the same feeling where we were driving back and it was just really sad. And the house felt like- a little bit empty cause she was so far away. (laughs)

Omar: (laughs quietly) It's really tough, especially like I remember like, like, there's times where I speak to my sibling. I think my sister wrote like, a really nice letter. Like to me like when I came up with she was like, basically, like, I don't want to like, I guess dodge her completely but she- she mentioned how like, I was, like, sort of a parent to her in a way, which was really nice. Like, and yeah, just I broke down.

<u>Valeria</u>: Yeah, no, you said that. Your first semester was also a little bit tough because you're so homesick. And my sister felt the same way. And I remember we would FaceTime all the time. And so (stutters) you can see like, even just like the way she would act or her voice like she was a little bit- she felt left out or not even left out. But just like she was homesick because we were all here and she was only one. She was all the way up in Berkeley. So yeah, it was- it was definitely something to get used to. But I mean, now she graduated and (hand gestures and giggles)

Omar: (laughs) Yeah, cuz I don't know, because I feel like on- cause on top of that, I think like, that was like, the first time I was like, hit with like, imposter syndrome, or like, like things like that. Because, I guess in high school, like, not that I was the overachiever that I wish I was. But at least like what, like, when you go to any university, like these are like, like, like it was for sure. Like, that's what I felt in Berkeley. This is like the top of like, every school they got accepted. Like, this is like, the best quote unquote, students.

Valeria: Mhmm.

Omar: And just to be here with people that had like 4.5, and four point sixes and who aced all their exams. Like it was just, it was a- it was a tough thing to see. And it's but I remember telling my dad, like, I don't know why I was like, fixated on this, but like, seemed like the resources that people had, like, when it comes to like- money or like, things like that. Like, I was like, wow, like, I'm just gonna complete like, different like playing field again, like, it's like, like it felt like square one, but no like, thankfully. Yeah.

<u>Valeria</u>: I bet it was intense, and also, like, really intimidating. And that's actually one of the questions that I had for you, is there anything- well, I'll ask you this question first. After graduating high school, and also graduating from BLCI, is there any struggles that you faced? After graduation? And also, I guess, beginning your academic career at Berkeley?

Omar: Yeah, I think one of the big changes was sort of, I guess, in- in high school and BLCI. Because I was involved in a number of things, which had my plateful all the time. But then once I came to Berkeley, I think it was like one of those big things like, for, I guess, like time management, like is obviously an important thing. But like, this is where it hit me the most, because you have all this free time. And I guess before in high school, and like with BLCI in general, with exams, I didn't-. I was getting- I was getting by, like A's in classes, but not even like studying fully. So I had to look completely, like redevelop my study habits. I had just seen, I don't know, like it was a bit of a, it always hurt to see like, students who just came in once, like once a week to a class and still 'acing' all the midterms. And then I was coming in every class and still like failing classes, failing like different exams. It was- it was a hard thing to get over.

Because es- especially because I'm doing my- since I graduated architecture, everybody's work is pinned up on the wall, and you have to look at everybody's work and you see who gets complimented and who doesn't. And I was usually the ones who didn't get complimented. So yeah, just it's a very tough thing. Like, yeah, to try- to try not to compare yourself.

<u>Valeria</u>: Yeah, um, is there any-. You were mentioning how you were, like, discouraged by how well your peers are performing? Was there anything that you began to do? Like, is there tutoring for that? Or is there any resources that you were able to kind of use to- like, improve your- like how you were doing or would you go to office hours? What was your game plan?

Omar: Um, I think it was a it was a mixed bag. And like, in both senses, I think because in the beginning, like, I remember coming when I first got accepted I thought I was also going to be the outspoken like, chipper student that I always was and that changed. But no, I think it took a while to get over nerves or going to office hours like I think for the for the for the few classes for the class that I failed my first semester. I do think that having- if I would have just gone office hours, I think I would have been able to pass the class. But no, I think was just a bit of mix of nerves and like there's also like students always there like, people are just busy. But no, I think like, thanks again to BLCI because BLCI was also very helpful and like I was like, getting getting tutoring services from them even after I was- I was graduated, like, alum from there. And yeah, like and I think it was it was, it was helpful. It was because of some of the coordinators that they had have just one conversation with me about just like just getting up and actually just going office hours just asking, ask asking them 'dumb' questions perse. And, yeah, that was, um, it was it was a, it was a mix of both. I think it was just, I guess game plan wise it was it was just, um, to just try to like, put away that fear of like being perceived like as 'dumb', I guess for asking a question.

<u>Valeria</u>: Okay. Then I think this is something that is really important to me because I feel like I always find it difficult to stay motivated, but in your academic career, is there anything that you found that particularly helped you so that you wouldn't lose focus or so that you would stay motivated?

Omar: Yeah, I think it's a number of things. I think the main main thing was my family, because I think if there were ever times that I felt like quitting, or if I felt like, because, like, I'm remember feeling- just cause I don't know why, but like my dad has this thing where he tells me that I'm just, I'm good at worrying, (laughs quietly) that I'm good at stressing. Which I am, but that's okay. I remember, like, having conversations with them, and I'm like, it would just hit me like, the reason I'm at school is for them. Like the reason I'm here, like the reason why I'm like losing hair and losing sleep is because of them. Like, they're, they're the only reason I'm here. They're like, I'm here to give them a better life. I'm the oldest, like if I, if I mess up, and my siblings won't have like, a great role model to live up to and like, not, not not to say that I have to succeed

In order for my parents to like, appreciate me because they've told me multiple times, like when I failed exams or like anything like that, they tell me that it's okay, it'll pass. But I think, um, yeah, my family was one of the biggest motivators, BLCI was too, cause BLCI had placed such a large investment in me. And like, just a lot of faith in me. And I just, I didn't want to let them down. I didn't- I didn't- I didn't want to let the organization that sort of like- they raised me like, um, since elementary, I didn't want to let them down, or the coordinators down. And yeah, it was just it was, it was a mix of that. And I guess, an- a little bit like, I guess a last like, bit of motivation was like my community because a lot of people from my community, like from elementary middles- like middle school, didn't go to college. And so I think it's, it's kind of it's always, it's always a good thing. Beat that statistic. In a sense.

<u>Valeria</u>: I think, yeah. I relate to what you said at first. It really resonated with me because- I think even though I have older sisters that already graduated from college, I think it's really important that I still, like do this for my parents, like my parents are my biggest motivation. I think that's one thing-. I'll share a quote that my mom always tells us, so she's like " A lo duro, dale duro".

Omar: (lightly claps and gestures in agreeance)

<u>Valeria</u>: So basically, like, even if something's hard or if something's difficult, like, don't give up. And this is something that I heard. Like, I heard my mom told my sisters when they were high school growing up, and then when I got to high school, she would tell us that and now that, like, I'm in- I'm in college like she, she tells me this all the time. And I think like if I ever lose sight of something I like, I feel like giving up that's something I look back to. And I do this for my parents and like, I just replay that in my head, "A lo duro. dale duro" so I don't like lose focus of why I'm doing this, yeah. And then, is there anything- Earlier we talked about struggles that you faced after graduating and during your academic career? Is there anything that was amplified? Or- like any new struggles- Did any new struggles come up because of COVID?

Omar: Uh, yeah, I think- So I think that's the so- the semester that- that COVID had like that COVID just started, I had some stuff going on at home. So like, with my family in Mexico, I had a few grandparents that were getting sick again. So that wasn't a great way to start the semester. But I think, cause COVID hit I think for us halfway through our semester, cause I know other students have a quarter system, but it hit us like right- right for-. For us it was like a little after the halfway point of the semester. And by that point, I was already bringing my grades back up, and COVID just (makes a fist and hits his other hand, laughs quietly) just dropped everything. I think I was close to failing- I was taking three classes that semester, I was close to failing two of them. Yeah, it was just, it was- it was just scary, because I was just worried about like, all the progress that I had made, like there was a class about construction that we were taking, intro to construction, and I was already trying so hard to get back above. I hadn't done well on the

quizzes or exams, but I also was doing some kind of projects when my grade was just hanging in the balance. And thankfully, like the prof- the professor and my GSI, my graduate student instructor, they were really helpful. They would send me emails, and be like alright your grades are up this much or it's down this much, and they were just really helpful with that. My other class wasn't as helpful, (laughs)but it's okay. But yeah, it was just COVID just I think what COVID really did for me, it just- it strained my motivation like my- my, my idea of like, Oh, I can do this. Like it just strained that up because everything just felt a lot harder. And even in remote learning classes just felt a bit more difficult. But aside from that, like yeah, like COVID just really amplified like that- that. Cause there were students that were still like 'acing' exams. And I'm like, in my head, I'm like, how are you doing this this?

Valeria: Mhmm.

Omar: But yeah, that's it.

<u>Valeria</u>: I think, you know, something that a lot of people didn't understand, like, you have different things going on at home, or, like I was one of-. Like within my friends, I think we all moved back home. So we all left our dorms. We were finishing up that quarter, and then it was just weird getting used to it. I think, like, for me, it's always been really hard to go to office hours. And I think that was even harder, because, like, I'm just, I feel like I'm more awkward and it feels more force. Like when there's two people on the screen. I don't know, again, it was weird, especially like, intimidation of them being my professor and like me, I don't know like going out there and forcing, like, I don't know, it was weird. And so for me going from, like, in person to remote was really hard. And yeah, I think that really- I also experienced that where my peers were also doing really well. And I was just struggling to just kind of keep, keep up. But it's gotten better now. But I think that's something that maybe not all people, maybe if they did experience it, they didn't talk about. So I thought a little bit out of loop when COVID first started, I was getting the hang of everything going on. And then I think this is my last question. But is there any piece of advice that you'd like to give your younger self or people who are in a similar position you were when you were younger?

Omar: (smiles and chuckles lightly) Wow, there's a lot. I would have stayed off carbs. (laughs)

Valeria: (laughs)

Omar: No, I'm kidding. I think, I think if I just have to pick up one or just a couple pieces of advice for my younger self for students coming up is just I think like as as as counterintuitive or not counterintuitive, but I like as silly as it sounds, just don't give up. Like, don't forget why you started this cause college is not easy for anyone, even like- even the students that are- like that I mentioned that were 'acing' stuff like I didn't know what's going on in their lives as well. No one

knows, like, everyone has their own hardships. So I think I'm just really just, really remembering why you're- why you're in particular, like setting and not wanting to give up. I think that's one of the biggest things. I guess another piece of advice that I would tell myself is failing is okay, and I know that's not great to say in an academic setting. But um, no, like, things happen. Like, sometimes like you have to take an exam when you're not at your fullest ability or your fullest potential. So and then like failing-, and I guess what I would also tell myself is I remember when I first when my- when I failed my first class here or like even my first exam, I was like breaking down. It's a tough thing to get through. But I think what I would have told myself again, is just failing is okay. Like there's always like, there's another chance and even if there isn't, there's a solution. Like, like, there's resources to help you graduate. And like to retain yourself. I think that would be like, my biggest advice is failing is okay and don't give up.

Valeria: Yeah, thank you for sharing that. That's actually something that I struggled with a lot. I think my- my first semester I did really good, which is surprising or my first quarter. But then my second quarter, I was struggling a little bit more. And I remember I was taking this stats class and I just- I wasn't doing well. And I was doing really bad actually, and I was like so upset. And-(stutters) I went back to my high school one time that I came back to home- that came back home to visit. And I was talking to my physics (high school) teacher. And he was like, fail- he told us that- he's like failing is okay, like don't be obsessed with- with getting A's or B's like maybe that's what you were used to in high school. And maybe that's what you're used to in some classes, but failing is okay. And I think that's something that I took to- to like to heart. Because that's something that I like, like not to, like, brag or anything, but that's something that I wasn't used to, like genuinely I wasn't used to. Like you said when you- when I was in high school also there was times that I wouldn't study and I would do like, well, I would receive an A or a B. And so getting to college and like studying all night, pulling like all nighters and not being able to get a decent grade on this. It was it was really devastating for me. So yeah, thank you for sharing that, I think that's also really important. Especially for people who didn't have like, tutors growing up, or people who who didn't have the resources that other people do when they get to college. Like, I think that- that's a really important point to keep in mind. That failing is okay. And it's like not the end of the world that, you know, like, there's like you said, there's a solution to it. But yeah, thank you. That's all the questions I had. Is there anything else you'd like to share or to discuss?

Omar: No I think that was it. Yeah, thank you.

Valeria: Thank you so much Omar.

Omar: Okay, perfect.

Valeria: (laughs)