

**Liana:** Hello my name is Liana Perez and today I will be interviewing first-gen student, Jayleen Solorzano. This is for my race and oral history project. Today is Friday May 20, 2022. So let's begin, how are you today, Jayleen?

**Jayleen:** I'm doing pretty good, how are you?

**Liana:** Good. Today I wanted to ask you a little bit about yourself? So, how do you identify and could you tell me a little bit about yourself?

**Jayleen:** Um. I'm a first generation student. Um. I am. Um. Mexican-American student. I grew up in California, in a predominantly Mexican city in closer to San Francisco. Um. I mean, how do I identify? I mean I identify as a Mexican and as a woman.

**Liana:** Okay, and how was your upbringing like?

**Jayleen:** Uh? Can you repeat that?

**Liana:** How was your upbringing like?

**Jayleen:** Umm. I would say it was challenging, just. Um. Trying to figure out what to do, of figuring out how to get to where I am now and where I wanna be. Um. I definitely think it was necessary to reach out and have those support. A good support system, to able to, just stay on the right path and uh figure out what I wanted.

**Liana:** And does those experience, motivate you to pursue higher education?

**Jayleen:** uh, definitely. I feel like, like I said. I grew up in like a predominantly uh, it was like very, uh Hispanic and low-income area. A lot of agriculture. Um. I think I just saw, like people's day to day life and struggles and I like. I guess that kind of motivated me, cuz I didn't wanna live struggling everyday, I guess. Um, I think, like I just always had that embedded in me, that I wanted to go to college. I knew that, that was kind of the way to pursue. Um. I mean it was necessary to pursue a higher education, especially as a female. To be able to uh, obtain a well paying job. And, just um, open more opportunities than what's available, in like my small city.

**Liana:** Yeah, I understand. Um, so how has the journey been for you so far towards earning your degree?

**Jayleen:** Um, it's actually been pretty pleasant. Um. I started off on a basketball scholarship. Um. That was. That was kinda like how I went, the route I decided to go originally. Um. That was, you kinda automatically have a support system and like people helping you out. You have tutors available for you all the time. Um. And then, COVID hit and I just kinda had stuff going

on, so I decided to uh, um take a step back and stop playing basketball. I attend..um, attended a community college during COVID, for a year and that was. I mean, I was kinda on my own. At first, it was kinda a struggle, cuz I didn't really know like how to get from community college back into a four year. Um, but I think I had to be very persistent and like reach out to my counselors and be kinda annoying, I guess. Just like, get all the information that I needed and um make sure that I was gonna be able to do it, by the timeline that I had set for myself. And then, I guess now being here, um I guess it was different, just not being happy anymore. Just because we don't automatically have friends anymore. And um, that was kind of like my identity for a long time, so I guess just tryna find my place on this campus, and like tryna make. Like sometimes, I feel like I'm a student here, but I don't really fit in here. I don't know, it's kind of like a weird contemplation. But, I mean, I'm already gonna be a senior, so I think I've just kinda like accepted that and like are tryna enjoy it to the best of my ability and just obtain that degree.

**Liana:** I understand, I get, I can get how it is and I like your persistence. And how would you describe your experience here at UC San Diego?

**Jayleen:** Um. I feel like at this institution, Uh, we have like some of the best professors. Um, like they definitely have made an impact on me and just like um, have. I learned so much through these educators and felt. It also might be that I'm taking upper-division courses now, rather than like, just bunch of general ed courses, that we're forced to take in community college. And like, so I feel like, I'm just a lot more engaged now. And um, I feel like the education part is really good, it is very, pretty competitive. Like the professors are there to help, TAs are very helpful. Um. And then, besides that, I think im, I've been able to develop good relationships with uh some people and just like, I guess trying to, um just stay connected and, find my place.

**Liana:** That's good to hear, I'm glad that you created relationships with people. I think that's something that can really help when you're on a college campus, and you know it can kinda get a bit overwhelming at times, so I think that's good to have. Were there any major obstacles you have faced while being a first-gen?

**Jayleen:** Um, I guess like just figuring out. Like, breaking down financial aid packages, trying to decide like, if I'm gonna live on-campus, off-campus. Um, mean like my family. I'm the first one in my family to go to college, so it's like, I don't really have that support at home. Not because they don't wanna help, but because they don't really know any of the information that's necessary here. Um. I feel like..Um. I..I understand that on this campus, there is a lot of like, I know there's like..centers and like groups intended to help first-generation and like minority students, like myself. But, I guess, I haven't done my part in like actually attending the events and like tryna connect with those groups. Which I mean, it might help some students..um and then besides that, I don't know. Sometimes, I feel like I'm just not smart enough, I guess, like compared to like.

Like, you start comparing yourself to students here and you're like, Damn. I went to one of the worst high schools, probably in California. And like, I don't. I never felt like they prepared us and like allowed us to be competitive. Um. Academically, just because the standards are set so low, that if we were...um. It was kinda easy to stand out academically and not try as hard. But, you miss out on a lot of valuable knowledge.

**Liana:** Yeah I understand, what like, you could be going through when coming here and having a different background from everybody else. Um, do you find yourself experiencing imposter syndrome..um a lot?

**Jayleen:** Um. I think..um. I'll probably wait til that airplane passes. ( \*loud background noise\*) Um. I think that..um...in the beginning, I think it was worse. I mean, I live like, seven hours from here, so I was really on my own for the first time. And like again like, I didn't have basketball this time. Which is kinda like you automatically have like a group and like friends and like people looking after you. Um, I felt like, I was hanging out with people from completely different backgrounds. Especially like socially, economically. And I feel like that plays a big factor because you understand. You're like oh, damn like, your life is like that. And you start kinda like comparing yourself. But like, I don't. I think... it's not that bad...Um. I know like, at least like, when I have these conversations with some of my friends cuz I said, like I was playing basketball. I was already exposed to this alot, like the diversity and like, just like um hanging out with people who are like, not like you at all. Besides like, that one common interest. Um. So, I think at first, I was a little bit. It was a mixture of imposter syndrome and like do I really belong at a prestigious school like this or like, was like, how am I here? And I feel like so dumb, I guess. But, um I think it has gotten a lot better and I'm kinda happy with where I am. Like, just like mentally and like I feel like i'm at a pretty good place compared to where i've been in the past.

**Liana:** That's good to hear, um I could relate to you, by a lot that you said. Um. What do you think is the most difficult part about being a first-gen?

**Jayleen:** Um. I think it's that you're doing it on your own. It's like, like you're, you're creating this path for you and you're creating this path for.. your younger family members, for your community. You're trying to be like, I guess a role model and like sometimes, like I feel like, at least like my family or like my friends have always thought very highly of me. So, it's kinda like a pressure to keep that going and not be a disappointment, in a sense. Um. I think I've also always kinda held myself to high... standards...and want to accomplish, it's very isolating. And like, it's like you go home, and you kind of have to go switch and try to and fit into that. Um. And then, you um...But, then you also have to like try to uh...I guess, fit in here. Umm. So, I don't know, being first generation is definitely very interesting. Like, you wanna stay connected to like, you know, your roots, where you came from, but sometimes it's like, you have to outgrow certain things and certain people. And it's not always easy.

**Liana:** Yeah, I understand. It can be difficult to kind of adjust. Um. What advice would you give other first-gens struggling in college?

**Jayleen:** Uhh..I feel all we can say is, just to keep going. Umm...Find a good support system. Ask for help. People are there, people wanna help. Usually, staff members at colleges. Um. If you ask, they are willing to help. You might encounter a few people that are very unhelpful, and maybe rude. But, don't let that discourage you. Umm...make friendships. I feel like friends, like obviously we all go through hard times. Sometimes, we all wanna like just like give up and like are done with it. But, um... it'll all be worth it at the end.

**Liana:** Yeah, I agree. I think people should definitely keep going. You know, you've come so far. So, I think it's best to know, keep going. Um...what would you say has been most helpful in your journey as a first-gen?

**Jayleen:** I think it's helped a lot that me and my friends are on the like same boat, I guess. Like...uh...we're all like...even though we're not all at the same college. Like, we still like, stay in touch. And kinda like, relate to our, one another. And what we're going through or like, we just share our personal experiences. Like, when like, struggling together and like relating like you're not the only one. It's kinda comforting in a way. Umm...and then, I think...I honestly do think that my professors have been pretty helpful. Like if I am struggling or have questions. Umm...a lot of it is just honestly getting out of your comfort zone, which is not that easy. Like, just like, maybe like talking to at least one classmate in the class, just so that like in case you miss something or like, you know you just need something. Um...but...Yeah. I feel like...Um...for me, it was like those um... supportive staff that...I had in highschool or just like coaches. Who like, really like had that. Like, oh where are you gonna go to college? It wasn't really like, are you gonna go to college? It was more like, where are you gonna go to college? Kinda. Like the...the conversations. And I feel like for a lot of first generation students, um...they're kinda like...they go to school with majority first generation students, minorities. And like sometimes, it can be like the staff or just like the structure of the school that kinda of failing the students. Just because...these students are feeling like they can't make it or like they're not smart enough because of like the teachers' perception on it or like the quality of education or just like how low the standards are. So, I feel like...um...being a, again, first generation student is not, definitely not easy. So, I feel like ensuring that our.. education system is trying to like...um ensure that these students know their options and trying to get them there. Rather than just like kinda creating this path for them to enter the workforce as soon as they as they leave high school. Because I feel like thats, at least in my personal experience, I feel like that's what my high school did.

**Liana:** Yeah, I agree. I think, you know, it's a struggle being first-gen. So, I think it's helpful to have those people around you to kind of motivate you. And one last question. Being a first-gen, what has it taught you?

**Jayleen:** Umm...what has it taught me? I...well...I just like. I feel like that's kind of been like, a huge part of like my identity, right? But, I feel like I'm aware of...there's people that want you to succeed and there's people that...dont. Like, they don't care to see you succeed. There's people that will help you. There's people that won't. There's definitely judgment. You have to get past that. Umm...I think a lot of it is just being determined, setting your goals. Fighting through whatever adversity you face because it's gonna keep coming. I feel like just like being first-gen, you...nobodys like making the path, like creating that path for you. I know like I have friends, whose parents went to college. Like, their...um...financially secure, so like you kinda see like all the support they have and like, how like, their parents, or like their older siblings have like told them exactly what to do and kinda just easing the transition for them. And I mean that's good for them, but not like everybody has that. So...um...just I think its asking questions..um not being discouraged...uum learning how to uh just deal with like imposter syndrome and like, deal with like sometimes feeling like you don't fit in because like..I mean in our example, I mean in first generation students in college, like we made it this far. I think like it's just about keeping that going. And not letting statistics discourage you and make you feel like you can't do it.

**Liana:** Yeah, I definitely agree. You know, those first-gen students, they've come so far, so I think, you know, it's always best to keep going. Um..Well, that's the end of my questions and I wanted to thank you for letting me interview and for your time today.

**Jayleen:** Of course, no problem.

**Liana:** Okay, bye.