

Transcript of Interview with Miguel Ramirez by Cristal R. Mendez

Interviewee: Miguel Ramirez

Interviewer: Cristal R. Mendez

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Location (Interviewee): Harlingen, Texas

Location (Interviewer):

Abstract: Miguel Ramirez talks about his experience of being a student at St. Mary's University during the COVID-19 pandemic. Miguel discusses how he had to adapt to changes that the pandemic caused, such as online learning and social distancing. He highlights the importance of connecting with family and friends during this time and shares a positive message that everyone should focus on taking care of themselves as well.

Cristal R. Mendez 00:04

Hi Miguel. Go ahead and tell us a little bit about yourself.

Miguel Ramirez 00:10

Hi Cristal. Um, so my name is Miguel Ramirez. I am 19 at the moment. I turn 20 in December. I live in the Rio Grande Valley, specifically in the city of Harlingen, Texas, and I am currently attending St. Mary's University remotely, of course, and my major that I'm focusing on is English Language Arts and Reading with the certification in teaching. And as of right now, I am a sophomore, so this is, of course, the beginning of my second year at St. Mary's. And the only job that I have on campus as of right now is pretty much a tutoring- a writing tutor job at the Rattler Success Center. And I'm also a part of the Marianist leadership program at St. Mary's University as well.

Cristal R. Mendez 00:58

Okay, so it looks like you wear a lot of hats. How have you been handling your life right now with school and working?

Miguel Ramirez 01:08

I say with a pandemic it's been a very interesting experience being able to manage all of those responsibilities, not just as a student, but also as a member of some of those programs as well. I feel like if anything, it's taught me more or less what I can and can't handle as a student. Of course I'm taking 15 credit classes, so that's five courses which I've been usually taking care of my past few semesters. And it's also taught me what I can handle outside of my classes as well. Um, I feel like I've been handling it the best way that I can, of course, and I feel like with a pandemic it's also taught not just myself but other students what they can and can't handle, you know? So I feel like it's a bit of a learning experience as well despite everything that's happened within the past year. So I feel like I'm handling it and not just the best way I can, but just taking it day by day because I feel like that's what the pandemic has kind of taught everyone. It's a learning experience, and no one's really alone with that learning experience. We're all dealing with this together in that sense.

Cristal R. Mendez 02:12

Oh, yeah. And so you mentioned that you live down in the valley. Have you been on campus at all?

Miguel Ramirez 02:23

So, of course, during my first year at St. Mary's as a freshman- so I was, of course--the class with- I'm going to be the class of 2023 at St. Mary's, and I started last year in fall 2019, so of course I've been on campus with those--within my first two semesters. But during the last half of my second semester at St. Mary's, which was this past March, that's when I was sent home, but I haven't been on campus within this fall semester. So I've been pretty much just been at home for the past semester, which is four hours away from St. Mary's, but I definitely have not been on campus.

Cristal R. Mendez 03:02

Okay. Would you feel comfortable with going back to campus, or how do you feel the university has handled everything? Would you feel safe if you ever had to go back? Are you glad that they sent everyone home?

Miguel Ramirez 03:18

So, I guess just going back to March when everyone was sent back home, it was definitely a shock for everyone. No one had really expected it to happen, and I was hearing it, not just at St. Mary's but from other universities as well from my friends who are attending them. So I feel like if anything, just from that I feel like it was the right choice, considering the numbers that were going up with the pandemic, of course, so I feel like I was the best choice, you know, not just for the summer. But for the last half of the spring semester as well, especially as I mentioned as everything that's been happening within the past year. But in terms of how the university has been handling the pandemic as of right now, I feel like if anything they've been doing a pretty decent job. I mean, I haven't been on campus, so I really can't confirm those details in terms of what specifically they've been doing. I mean, I know of course that masks are a requirement and social distancing is a very big thing, and that's very much the responsible thing to do at the university, especially from what I've heard about other universities, having their numbers jump within cases. But with the small numbers that I've been seeing from St. Mary's, of course, through the emails that they've been updating us with, I feel like they've been handling it the best way that they can on their end as a university. So, I feel- I feel confident in saying that they've been doing a very decent job.

Cristal R. Mendez 04:43

Okay. Good. Yeah, I think those emails really help, especially like if you're not on campus to kind of keep you connected with what they've been doing and how they've been handling it. And I do like that they send out those periodic updates about cases on campus and stuff. And yeah, I agree. It's- it's- it's been handled pretty well and cases have been pretty low, at least as far as I can tell. So, what challenges--I know you said, you know, this has been a learning lesson for you. But what specifically have you faced as a student, what challenges have you faced, especially because you've had to transition from being on campus and going online. How was that experience?

Miguel Ramirez 05:39

So of course with the world that we live in now, I did really want to go back to St. Mary's, of course I did. You know, I wanted to be able to still see my friends on campus, but I also understood that the situation has changed. And the, you know, that it's like the school has been promoting, of course, within their core values there needs to be that adaptation and change with the situations that occur. So I feel like the way I've been able to handle it, I guess, or just my perception of just the challenges that I faced--some of the challenges that I face just being at home is, of course, I'm with my family, and, you know, as much as I

love them, and I'm you know I'm grateful for their support. You know, there's- there's distractions that occur. You know, I'm not gonna lie, I'm a big movie buff myself. So whenever they're watching movies, but I'm you know I have to do coursework, I am sometimes tempted to just pause and then go watch a movie, you know, so... There's been- there's been those distractions, and also I'm taking-- I'm- usually my working space is in my room. And so my bed, it's just right behind me, and I could just lay down at any point if I really wanted to, you know? So there's that... there's also that and then, of course, television and like I said movies. I'm a very big movie buff. So I usually like to watch a lot of TV. So there's been those distractions, but other challenges that I faced, I felt, I guess, kind of separated from my friends, and I know like I'm not the only student that's had to face that, but it's just one challenge that I say that I've had. I think because of with anything with a switch from in person to online classes within the spring semester of this year, it's taught me how much I've become more social as a college student, rather than when I was in high school, but I feel like it's taught me more or less that I need some social, you know, interaction, of course, with friends. And it's, you know, it's for everyone, that everyone has to have not only time for themselves but also time with friends as well because, of course, the importance of human connections. I also miss- I also miss the in person classes as well because if anything, those connections with the professors in person is very important to learning, and if anything, I felt more confident in what I was learning in class when I was talking to the professors and confirming my questions with them, rather than remotely because I feel like another thing that I've had to work through is being able to retain the information in class because I feel like with the virtual format, there's been a term that I've heard from other professors or from other students called 'Zoom fatigue.' And I feel like that is very much real and that is very much affecting the way everyone is performing and the way everyone's remembering the important concepts with the courses. But yeah, I think, more or less, those are some of the challenges that I've been facing just missing my friends and also evaluating my own performance as well.

Cristal R. Mendez 08:45

Okay, so have you done anything to kind of fix those challenges? Are you, you know, doing anything extra to connect with your professors or to make sure that you're getting the material? And how are you staying connected with your friends?

Miguel Ramirez 09:04

Right. So when it comes to just connecting with my professors and making sure that I understand the course content, I usually email them just to double check on the course content that we've gone over. I feel like at the beginning of the semester, I had a bit of trouble realizing whether or not, you know, am I- am I going in the right direction with the amount of courses I'm taking or am I really being able to retain all this information that I'm learning within these classes. But I just review as much as I can, the notes that I've taken, I talk to my professors through email as I mentioned. And also I talk to friends, too who are taking the courses as well. So, that also helps you know having those peer connections with students, other students. But I guess when it comes to how I connected with my friends, the way I've kept in contact with them is through social media and sometimes through playing online video games as well. Like I know Among Us was very much become a big thing this year. That's been very fun to play, of course.

Cristal R. Mendez 10:04

Yeah.

Miguel Ramirez 10:07

Take note of that for the history books, of course. [laughs]

Cristal R. Mendez 10:09

Yeah. [laughs]

Miguel Ramirez 10:11

What's it called... I feel like it's through the online way of talking with people that I've very much been able to connect with professors and students.

Cristal R. Mendez 10:23

So, what would your ideal 2020 look like? Are you--has any good come out of being remote? Like, would you be okay with continuing certain things that we've had to do now, or would you want things to go completely back to normal?

Miguel Ramirez 10:45

That's a good question to think about. I guess for my ideal 2020, I would have rather been in person, of course, with classes.

Cristal R. Mendez 10:56

Oh, I'm sorry. I meant 2021. I meant for the future.

Miguel Ramirez 10:59

Oh 2021. Okay. Sorry.

Cristal R. Mendez 11:01

I said it wrong. I wrote in my question 2020, but I meant for next year—like, what- what would you change you? What would you keep, if there's anything you would keep?

Miguel Ramirez 11:11

Okay, yeah, that makes sense.

Cristal R. Mendez 11:12

I'm sorry.

Miguel Ramirez 11:13

No, it's okay. It's good. It's completely understandable, so no worries about that. Um, let me see what I keep from this crazy year... I mean, I love my family, so I'm glad that I got to be more in contact with them, of course, you know, in person, you know, in a limited in person perspective. I mean, like I said I'm a movie buff, so I got to watch a lot of TV, but I mean I do miss going to the actual movies. So I would have- I would rather have that back again, you know, being able to go to the movies and watch some big movies on the big screen. Um, I would rather have the in person classes as well because I feel like that's more helpful if anything, but I also feel like as a future teacher myself, I need to know the different kinds of teaching that goes into, you know, the different situations that occur. So being able to adapt and change to those certain situations is something that I want to keep learning as well, you know? But I do feel like I would rather not have the pandemic in 2021.

Cristal R. Mendez 12:24

Yeah. [laughs] Same.

Miguel Ramirez 12:25

So if anything, just with 2021 also, I'd rather be on campus too, you know, but realistically with everything that's going on. I also need to realize that it's important not just for the safety of myself, but the safety of my family, you know, who would come to visit me while I'm at St. Mary's and also the safety of my friends as well that I remain at home. And while I have been considering going back for next semester, I feel like I've- I'm pretty much leaning more towards staying at home, just to make sure that we're still keeping safe and that hopefully the pandemic doesn't run longer than past 2021, because I still definitely want to have my college experience at St. Mary's.

Cristal R. Mendez 13:12

Yeah. And so is the college giving you the option to go back right now? And were you living on campus?

Miguel Ramirez 13:21

So during- yes, during my freshman year at St. Mary's, I was living on campus. Um, let me see... as of right now, from what I've heard, and what I've heard from the options for applying on campus- I did email them a few days ago about the housing application and how long that was going to be open for. And they said it was going to be open for a good amount of time. I can't really remember specifically if they provided a date. I think they said it was just going to be open for everyone at the school at the moment. But that, of course, its first come first serve. You know, just depending on who applies and that the rooms are of course safely limited to one person or depending on the hall that being provided. But I think if I hadn't moved back the residence hall that I was living in was definitely one person per room given how small they were in terms for the, um, for the- what's it called... I have the word in my mind right now- in terms of just the amount of space that was provided, and just making sure that there's still that safety. And I also heard that my residence hall was shifted to being the hall for students who had cases of COVID, so I think if anything I probably wouldn't be living there, of course, if I went back, but I'd probably try to move into- trying to live in- in an, uh, let me see in a residence hall that has one person per room.

Cristal R. Mendez 14:52

Wow, I didn't even realize that—where they were putting students if they were getting COVID. Interesting. Okay. Well, I think those are all my questions. Do you have anything else you want to add or anything that you feel people who didn't live through this time should know?

Miguel Ramirez 15:14

Um, one thing I can definitely say is- I guess one thing that I've learned is, if you're with your family at the moment at the time of listening to this, or if you still have your family with you, you know, you only have one family. So, you know, try to connect with them as much as possible, try to work within the situations that you may have in the future together. Connect with your friends as much as possible, but also learn to balance between your academics and your professional life and your friends too. There's always a good balance that should be in between those things. And, you know, focus on your mental health, too, because I mean you can't- if you're, if you're always looking at your performance, then you should be looking at your mental health, too, because you can't perform without focusing on your health, especially with the time that we're living in at this moment. I very much emphasize the importance of mental health. And another thing, I guess, I would say to those who are listening, um, you know, with this

experience I've learned to take things, day by day and try to work with what I have, um, so I can just- what I can tell you is just, you know, life is a journey, you know, and it's definitely not what we expected, you know, as people living in 2020 to experience. Um, so yeah, just for anyone listening. I just say, you know, God bless you, you know, whether you're religious or not just- I hope that whatever you're trying to accomplish is what you are going for specifically, and that you take this opportunity to learn about- like to learn from my perspective about living through the pandemic and understanding you know that the world is just something that, you know, it changes, you know, every day. And that some things are very much temporary, so use the time that you have to connect to people, work on yourself, of course, and just to, you know, live life the best way that you can.

Cristal R. Mendez 17:20

Okay. Yeah. Very well said. Very insightful, positive messages. Thank you, Miguel. I'm going to press stop on the recording, but we'll say our goodbyes in a second, but thank you so much.

Miguel Ramirez 17:34

Thank you for having me. I really appreciate this.