

Transcript of Interview with Andrea Moreno by Paul Garza

Interviewee: Andrea Moreno

Interviewer: Paul Garza

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Location (Interviewee):

Location (Interviewer):

Transcriber: This transcript has been provided by Otter.AI with a 2nd pass for accuracy and formatting provided by Bryan Paintiff, HST580 intern, at ASU.

Abstract: Andrea Moreno is a Senior studying English and communications at St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas. Additionally, Andrea is a residence assistant (RA) on the campus and sought this role to help other students and create a sense of community. Andrea was also in this RA role when the pandemic lockdown occurred and explains the challenges that COVID put on the position and the goal to keep her residents informed and safe. Andrea also discusses how she tried to continue to be a helpful RA when all students were removed from the dorms during the lockdown, but expressed how that was challenging to do when she was at her family's home in Laredo, Texas. Then Andrea talks about how she decided to move back to campus in the fall of 2020 when St. Mary's reopened gave the option to come back. In this experience, Andrea tells how she was better able to assist residence in the dorms, but also how in person classes was just a better, more focused learning experience as opposed to the semester of online learning that was forced on everyone. Andrea ends the interview with giving her experience with going to counseling on campus to work through anxieties and issues caused by the lockdown and COVID life in general.

Paul Garza 00:00

Hi Andy, can you introduce yourself to the audience, please? So tell us who you are. What year you are, what are you studying? When did you first become an RA? Stuff like that.

Andrea Moreno 00:18

Okay, well, my name is Andrea Moreno, most people here, refer to me as Andy. I am a senior English major, communications minor. I'm from Laredo, Texas, and I became an RA, my sophomore year, so about two and a half years ago.

Paul Garza 00:43

Okay, is there anything else you're involved in on campus?

Andrea Moreno 00:47

I am also a tour guide for the Office of Admission.

Paul Garza 00:53

Okay, thank you for sharing, Andy. So, I know you're saying you're a senior, but what year did or what year did you start at St. Mary's? And I guess, when was your first semester?

Andrea Moreno 01:05

My first semester was fall 2018.

Paul Garza 01:09

Okay, and then, so how would you describe that experience your first year, your first semester entering SMU?

Andrea Moreno 01:17

My first year was definitely a lot of firsts. So it was my first time being away from home. First time being out on my own. Definitely was a big learning curve, trying to learn how to be independent. And while I was very fortunate enough, to be able to go home fairly often, and to have a very stable connection with my family, it was you know, pretty jarring, just being by myself for the first time especially because like, I didn't have roommates, I came in with only a couple of friends. And it was just trying to navigate a new environment. And trying to kind of juggle, you know, this new experience that I was having, and still trying to keep a part of me that was back at home, I still had a lot of friends back home and my band was back home and just so many parts of me were still tied to Laredo, but I wanted to make sure that I wasn't holding myself back either. So I think that was probably one of the biggest struggles I had my freshman year. But I definitely did learn a lot and it did help me when I you know, for my later years here in undergrad.

Paul Garza 02:44

Okay, yes. And as you said, you're a senior now. So I think it's obvious that you have grown as a person you have adjusted and learned how to be a student, as an RA, also being a tour guide here on campus. So you definitely learned how to maneuver your way about living here. So can you describe to us your experience as an RA and getting into that position? Why were you interested? How did you feel once you became an RA and actually had to start being in that role?

Andrea Moreno 03:15

Yeah, um, I absolutely love being an RA. I think the reason why I had originally gotten interested in the position was because I fortunately had a great RA my freshman year. And I thought a lot of the things that aligned with the RA role, like, you know, creating community and having programming and being a resource for the residents was something that really appealed to me. I really just thought that I had like the right personality for the role. And I thought that I could potentially be a really good fit for residence life. I'm also not going to lie, free housing did sound really appealing, especially because I'm

here almost entirely through loans, that was going to take off a huge burden from my financial situation if I were to have free housing, so there was just a lot of factors that went into it that I thought I would be able to successfully be a part of this office and up for this role if I were to get it.

Paul Garza 04:35

Okay, thank you for sharing and yes, I would say across college campuses everywhere being a resident assistant and the financial relief that it brings is definitely something very compelling to many students. And given this is an oral history or an interview regarding COVID-19 and our campus here at St. Mary's University. I want to ask next, how was the transition, your transition to go going virtual spring 2020?

Andrea Moreno 05:02

Um, it was incredibly scary and jarring. Not only was myself and many other people trying to navigate this new virus that we were experiencing what that meant how that was going to affect us in the short and long term. The conversation came up, like how is my role as an RA going to be affected? How am I going to be an effective RA when I'm no longer going to be living next door to my residents. So transitioning to virtual was very hard for many reasons, but also very hard as an RA, just trying to be there for my residents as much as I could. A lot of them, you know, expressed the same kind of worry and anxiety that I did, as well as a lot of my residents just did not respond back to me, and not necessarily that I could really blame them, there was just so many things that we were trying to deal with and focus on and I don't think many of the residents priority was making sure that they kept up with their RA. So that was another thing too, just definitely not, trying to be there for my residents as much as I could under the circumstances that we were all in was incredibly difficult. I think especially because I was fortunate enough to have an experience as an RA pre COVID, I kind of knew just how close knit and how the restrictions that we currently do have, because the pandemic, mean, in terms of how they were before these were in place, why they're in place, why it's important. But also kind of just trying to come to terms with you know, that these changes may or may not be permanent, how we're going to adjust to them, how we are going to enforce them. It was just very different. And it happened in a very short amount of time. So it did take a lot of energy to try to implement those as quickly as I could for my residents.

Paul Garza 07:23

Okay, thank you. And that's interesting to see that as a residences. And you also shared most of the same anxieties and questions that I did fall 2019 and spring 2020. Before I was a resident assistant, regarding the pandemic, and just wondering just a bunch of what ifs. Wondering [inaudible] would we ever come back stuff like that. So do you mind sharing where you were when you got the notification that we would not, that residents would not be returning to campus after spring break?

Andrea Moreno 07:53

Yeah, I want to say, if I remember correctly, I was at home, I actually was not able to stay on campus with the rest of the ResLife staff. Because Laredo was one of the first cities in Texas to go on lockdown.

And at the time, we didn't really know what that meant was I able to leave my house, was I able to leave the city? And so to kind of avoid any confusion or any complications, I basically had to come back from, you know, the extended spring break. And then very quickly leave to go to Laredo, so I could be with my family. So I unfortunately could not be helping out with the rest of the ResLife staff, while they were helping the residents move out. Because I was already in lockdown by the time these residents were moving out. So I remember being at home, and just seeing how that was going to affect the residents and myself. And just trying to figure out how I was going to finish the semester from my house. Because one of the reasons why I had gone to St. Mary's in the first place was because I knew myself and I know that I get so invested with my family that they were going to in you know, in some ways become a distraction to my learning. And so trying to see like how I was gonna, how I was going to be able to finish off the semester from my house where I have five other people there with me, and you know, we're all stuck. None of us can go anywhere. And I have to help out and I have to help my siblings and I have to, you know, go do the grocery runs. And it was just a lot. So when I did find out that that was going to be the case, it was just a million things going on in my head and just trying to help out the best that I could, but with the restrictions that I had.

Paul Garza 10:19

Okay, so it sounds like being back at home before you were able to sort of get any idea of what was going to happen was a very anxious filled time. And as you were home, you sound like you, you had a lot of your own duties there that you had to be responsible, really, and just being there, because that's also something that I think is shared when you come to college as a, as a first generation student, or just a student in general is learning to be away from family, like you said, and then when having to go home abruptly again, and be surrounded by those family and learning to manage school on top of being a family member, a sister or daughter, a cousin and stuff like that.

Andrea Moreno 11:02

Yeah, I think one of the things too, was that, you know, for that year and a half, that I was at St. Mary's, before the pandemic, anytime I would go back home, I associated that time was like rest, or like vacation or break, you know, because I would go home, on weekends, I wouldn't do homework, or I'd go home during the breaks, and I would relax. So it was definitely a big adjustment to go home when I now associated that area with rest, and to incorporate it with my school life, again, like how it was in high school and growing up was a pretty big adjustment for me.

Paul Garza 11:46

Yes. So going back to your duties, but this time, specifically as an RA, how did your duties change and your responsibilities changed from being on campus to going home during spring 2020? And do you feel like you were able to still serve as a resource to your residents?

Andrea Moreno 12:04

I definitely felt like I wasn't as helpful as I probably could have been just because with the restrictions that we had the most I could really do was offer, either, you know, a listening ear for, you know, to refer to any resources that we had on campus. But, you know, I wasn't there to see them every day I wasn't there, you know, to do my availability with them. And like I had said earlier, like, a good portion of my residents never even would not respond to my emails after we had gone home from the from the extended spring break. So I did feel like I couldn't do as much as I wanted. But most of the things or more most of the reasons that I felt that way were purely from external factors, and not necessarily things on either myself or, or on the Office of Residence Life, it was just all of us trying to figure out what was going on, and trying to just be there for each other. While you know, most of us were already starting to feel that Zoom fatigue, we're incredibly anxious, we're dealing with other matters. And you know, some people were dealing with the virus itself. So it was just trying to be there for them to the best of my ability while I was at home while they were at home. While we didn't have the convenience and the luxury of being on campus. It definitely did at times feel like I wasn't doing enough.

Paul Garza 13:46

Yes, and I think that's valid. But at the end of the day, like everyone was having to deal with a pandemic. And it was everyone had to struggle in their own ways, individually. And some of us struggled in the same way. But I'm glad to hear that you did try and did work with the Office of Residence Life to still continue to try and be that resource for residents. So with that, how did you feel helped by the Office of Residence Life as a student staff and still as a resident who had to be sent home?

Andrea Moreno 14:16

Yeah, so I was very fortunate to be able to reach out to the office whenever I felt stumped. Whenever I didn't know how to address a certain situation. You know, whatever resident told me that they had the virus, what am I supposed to say then? You know, just how am I supposed to respond to students with their anxieties about something that was so unknown? The Office of Residence Life was really there for me to answer any questions that I had. They were there to make sure that I was doing okay not only as an RA, but just as a person checking in on me to make sure that I was all right that I was safe and I was in an okay situation. They were, you know, constantly checking up on me keeping us updated with any information that they were getting from the university or from the city of San Antonio. And they were just constantly in communication with us so that we never felt like we were out in the dark.

Paul Garza 15:19

That's really good to hear that they were also able to still serve as a resource to you when you are you're trying to do actively do your part and serve other students. So I know during fall 2020 was the first time St. Mary's was reopening dorm halls to students. And they were given the option to come back as an RA or as a student, did you come back fall 2020?

Andrea Moreno 15:44

I did, I came back as an RA.

Paul Garza 15:47

Okay, and so how did you feel about being able to come back and transitioning from being at home back to a dorm?

Andrea Moreno 15:55

You know, obviously, I was excited to come back. I had missed living in San Antonio. I had missed the university. But I mean, there was still that level of anxiousness of just what does it mean to come back now that we are currently in a pandemic? What is the university going to do or the office of residents I'm going to do to make sure that we are being as safe as possible while we're back? How is my you know, role as an RA going to be affected? How am I going to continue to try to build community when we're trying to not have that many in person social interactions, just to keep things as safe as possible? What does it mean to do an entire semester and an entire school year online, while still at the university. So what does that look like it just had, it just posed a lot of questions. But I knew that I had to come back not only to help in my role as an RA, but also to get the most out of my education because it was really hard to do my work from home, I just did not have an adequate learning area at my house. That's just how it was. I didn't have the private space that I do here on campus at home. So a lot of my work was interrupted, I would constantly lose focus. And you know, outside factors to were, would play into place. So I knew I had to come back in order to ensure a better quality of education. But it did still leave me with a lot of questions and a lot of anxiety.

Paul Garza 17:49

Yes, and fast forward a couple more semesters after fall 2020. And we're here now in fall 2021. So as you continue to serve as a resident assistant for St. Mary's, how do you feel being having had the experience of being a resident assistant and just being a student here on campus for several semesters, and having participated in what we would call a normal school year. How do you think that plays into how you are able to serve students now?

Andrea Moreno 18:18

I think having the experience of being a student as and an RA, both pre and post pandemic, has really just helped me have a greater sense of appreciation for the university and the community. I think I'm a lot better adjusted to life post pandemic. And definitely I was, you know, even a year ago from now, being able to experience the residence halls with, you know, our COVID policies and restrictions. I definitely was able to adjust and learn how to live with these mandates. And, you know, luckily, we've been able to keep a healthy and safe environment for the residents. And I think that I'm very fortunate to be able to be coming to the University in person. And after experiencing a year online, I do believe that in person learning is just the learning model that helps me more than an online learning model. I know online learning works for many people, but it was very difficult for me to participate in an online learning model. For many reasons, but I noticed myself getting burnt out a lot quicker. I was getting very much getting zoom fatigue. I was just incredibly lonely. It felt very isolating, and I am definitely a

person that thrives in community I am very extroverted. So, being able to be on campus and to see people, and to know that we're doing it in a safe way just brings me a lot of peace of mind. And so being able to experience that is, I'm very grateful for.

Paul Garza 20:18

Alrighty. Thank you. And right before we conclude this interview, I want to ask, as an RA what do you think the most useful campus resource is right now? For anyone dealing with anything during the pandemic and being here on campus?

Andrea Moreno 20:34

I think the resource that I have probably utilized, the most that has helped me is definitely the Counseling Center. I started seeing the counseling center the first semester going into the pandemic, so fall 2020. And being able to talk to one of the counselors on a regular basis as was really a very helpful experience for me, they helped me understand what I was feeling what I was going through, help me with ways that I could cope with my feelings and what I was going through. And being able to just talk about it with someone was very helpful for me. And so that is one of the first campus resources that I recommend for my residents whenever they feel like they may need a little bit of that extra help. Because I know from personal experience, they helped me tremendously.

Paul Garza 21:43

Alrighty, thank you so much for sharing that and for sharing your inspiring experience during the pandemic and for sharing this wonderful campus resource that's available to all students at St. Mary's. And that does conclude our interview. So thank you again for giving me your time and sharing about your experience as a student and as a resident assistant during the pandemic.

Andrea Moreno 22:04

Thank you