**Championing Transfer Success with Student Voices**

**Episode 133**

Alejandro:

As I was there, I just saw a lot of my friends transfer out. And it really made me question, "Wait, is it my time to transfer?" Am I actually going to do this? I'm scared, I'm nervous, specially being the first one in my whole entire family to go to college; from my dad's and mom's side, not just one side, the entire one. And having that pressure as well, not direct pressure where everyone's, "Hey, if you do this, you're going to mess up." But the pressure of, "Hey, keep it up. Doing great." But that's still felt like a backpack. And many of us students, first generation low income college students, we walk around with these backpacks full of stuff. Full of our family's history, trauma, the experience, micro-aggressions and everything. And it's full of beautiful and good things in that backpack, but I felt that pressure.

Christina Barsi:

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

Sun Ezell:

And I'm Sun Ezell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi:

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak. By bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

Sun Ezell:

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC; from the classroom to completion.

Speaker 1:

And I know I'm going to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

Speaker 2:

She's a Sociology major and transferring to Cal Poly Pomona... Psychology major, English major...

Sun Ezell:

From transforming part-time into full-time.

Speaker 3:

I really like the time that we spend with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter...

Christina Barsi:

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

Speaker 4:

To think of the natural environment around us as a library...

Christina Barsi:

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni and producer of this podcast.

Sun Ezell:

And I'm Sun Ezell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy coordinator.

Christina Barsi:

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

Christina Barsi:

Creating success is a community effort. And the same goes for students looking toward creating a plan to transfer after Mt. SAC. Listen in on what we captured from this year's transfer symposium, as we hear from a myriad of first generational students share their own transfer stories. But first a few tips and ways we can better support student success in the classroom with Jesse Lopez enjoy.

Jesse Lopez:

So my name is Jesse. I'm a counselor here at Mt. SAC. I've been at Mt. SAC for about eight years now. I was a student at Mt. SAC, I graduated from Gary High School and Pomona. Transitioned into the Summer Bridge Program, was a part of different programs like the Honors Program, worked on campus, and was able to come back and be a part of the team as a classified staff, as an adjunct faculty and now as a full time faculty member. For me, I think a lot of it is trying to make understanding of what the data is trying to tell us, and how to use that to make sure that those equity gaps that we're seeing. The small gaps here that we're seeing and some larger ones, that we can address them both personally in our professional work settings, but institutionally as well.

Jesse Lopez:

So there are some basic things that we can kind of do. But for me, the things that stood out was the usage of certain resources. And I can tell you from my experiences as a student, half of the staff, or more than that, of that I refer students to now I never even knew existed. And I tried as much as I could to get involved. I had a lot of different types of mentors, but for better or worse, Mt. SAC has tons of resources which is great. You have a lot to pick from, from students, but it's making sure that we understand the importance of those, that we're not scared to go and ask for help. There's a lot of variables there. But in particular, I did notice the usage of transfer center. And so working as a faculty member now, more closely with transfer, we can see the direct impact that conversations have on students.

Jesse Lopez:

And it doesn't even have to be things that are tangible, like grants or money. It's things that are psychosocial in nature, that gets students really inspired to think about transfer as a goal. And so when we're thinking about looking at educational goals, there is a preference, there seems like there is an overall preference of transfer as opposed to getting a degree or working on a certificate. And I think I want to kind of make a disclaimer on that is that, I think for us as educators, all of us, we want to make sure that students are making conscientious choices. That they understand the choices that are available to them. And a lot of times from students in our areas, the choice is the first thing that they see. It's not something that they have reflected on necessarily.

Jesse Lopez:

So we have a lot of students who might want to work in certain fields or do certain career paths because that's what's basically in front of them. So for foster youth, going back to that foster youth demographic, when we see students in the REACH program, we noticed that a lot of them want to work in service oriented fields. And that's because their first exposure to professionals, for better or worse might be social workers and folk clinicians. And they may love the experience and want to continue to do that, or they may really feel, "Man, these folks aren't necessarily supporting me the way I would want to. I would want to be this in a better fashion." So a lot of times, it's that immediate exposure.

Jesse Lopez:

But for us as a college and even anecdotally, having conversations with students about transfer in general. Depending on your role on campus, if you're a professor, counselor, classified specialists, coordinator, a manager; just start off with looking at just the basic ways in which we interact with students. I know from personal experience and professional that it can have a direct impact on how they see the outlook of their future. And so it's not necessarily putting priority on transfer, say, "This is what you should do." But more so kind of having that dialogue with them, and really allowing them to dream and to think about themselves in different ways. And a lot of times when we come from first generation backgrounds, it's tough to be able to think ourselves in ways that we're not necessarily exposed to.

Jesse Lopez:

So just for me, personally, my first year at Mt. SAC I had a counselor, her name was Chen Tan. And we were at a field trip, and it was just a basic conversation that we had. But I remembered, I was talking to my colleagues about this, I remember vividly interested in what I was saying. And I never met her, this is the first time I met her. And I was saying that I wanted to transfer and she's, "I'm so excited to see what you're going to do." And in my head that made me feel, "Oh, then I probably could do it." She's not surprised or second guessing me. She's really wanting to watch the rest of my movie. And just that conversation that was over 15 years ago, I still remember that. And that was some of the stuff that I think for us, that we can do when we talk to students, is have that conversation about, "Hey, what are you excited about doing? What are you looking to do?" In your classrooms there's professors, talking about some of the trials and tribulations that you might have experienced, showing a little bit about humanity.

Jesse Lopez:

A lot of times students will see us as these kind of, not necessarily inhuman, but these super superheroes in a sense. That we're very smart or that we have everything put together. And I think showing a little bit of humanity, expressing how difficult transitions can be, and aspirations can be. Life throws wrenches at us in a lot of different ways. And I think for students to be able to see that and to see that you still able to persist. Having that relationship with students can be a big difference, especially if we're looking at the equity populations on campus.

Jesse Lopez:

And so things that we can do in the classroom, I would say, for our syllabus we can have contact information for special programs. So I work with the REACH program, and I also have taught classes with Dream and Bridge. Those programs along with Access and EOPS, a lot of students may not know that the exists, because of the variety of programs. They may not know if they can qualify. So maybe even having some detailed or some descriptions of special programs on your syllabus. I know that syllabi can be extensive, and we don't want to overwhelm students, but maybe a page of resources, where we can have the Transfer Center, highlight programs. And maybe any programs that you participated in as a student; a quick anecdote about what you enjoyed as a student and what helped you. These things can both make the student feel connected. But also too, to provide valuable resources I think would be awesome.

Jesse Lopez:

In your classes themselves, we're talking about curriculum, having assignments. I know professors during transfer season have students do writing assignments for their personal insight questions for the UCs. And it's not even about practicing and getting ready for the UC, but it's about saying, "Hey, this is normal." Normalizing the idea that transfer is something you can do. Because a lot of districts and schools, especially me from coming from Pomona Unified, those conversations are not necessarily had. And the way in which they're had can be a little bit problematic. And so for students just to get exposed to the, "Hey, this is what we're doing. This is what I'm going to do." It's the equivalent of having a non first gen student tell you, "Yeah, I'm going to go to college. My parents always told me I'm going to go to college. That's not a issue, that's just ingrained at what we do, that's the next step." And I think having that continual dialogue in the classroom, it can be really, really impactful.

Jesse Lopez:

Going back to classified and managers and working outside of the classroom, I think even for myself being cognizant of working with students. And for me, we see students everyday back to back, and sometimes that can get a little bit more routine. We can get stuck in a little bit of a mental rut, or we can kind of see students as more just checking off. I got to finish this list of assignments or list of duties. And I have to consciously tell myself and remind myself when I work with students how much my life has changed from the ability to transfer, the ability to get a degree, advanced my education. I was the first in my family to get a degree, to go to college. But I'm looking at how that paves the road; I have a brother in law who's at Mt. SAC, who's transferring now, I have tons of students that I've worked with, and we all do. And it's so amazing to be able to see the impact, both financially and psychologically. To be able to enjoy one's life in a different way to see the world in a different way.

Jesse Lopez:

And this is what the conversations that I have with students, when we're talking about being with them in the trenches. I think these are the kind of conversations when we're looking at equity in particular, these are the kind of conversations we want to have with students about what they're going through, making sure that they're feeling like they do belong. Talking about this idea of comparison, we see this a lot with students. Seeing the transfer timelines, and having to get out and finish in a certain timeframe. I think for all of us, having those conversations about normalizing goals, publicizing and marketing, different types of resources, and really being a source of support. I've noticed that the major impact that I've had with students is not my intellectual ability to be able to know various career outputs or pathways, it's really just connecting. Making sure that they know that this is normal, their feelings are normal, the fears are definitely normal. And the journey is definitely one of the most fruitful parts of the experience and having them realize that as they go, especially when students transfer, we'll see this at Mt. SAC, the type of narratives we shift as a college can be impactful. There's some universities that will say, "Four years is the goal. And they'll push that, and they'll give you even incentives to finish.

Jesse Lopez:

I think for us, as a culture and individually is to incentivize the idea of having positive goals, thinking about how I'm going to impact the world in a positive way, thinking a little bit more abstract. And this can be difficult for first gen students, because it's hard for us to think abstract when we don't have food, or we don't have basic needs. So this abstract concepts that we talked about of having passion, or finding your passion, or finding careers that matter to you, they're kind of secondary. It's, "I got to get a job. I got to make sure I make some money. I got to make sure take care of my family, health and basic things." And so I think for us overall, I think it's definitely a way for us just to be able to connect on a different level, talk about resources as a college, and then really individually connect with students.

Jesse Lopez:

I think that's the best thing that we can do to address some of these equity issues personally. And institutionally, we have the resources, we really, really do. In transfer, I know that they're conscientious of looking at equity populations. And even when students apply for particular events, they look and give points for students that are coming from disproportionate backgrounds, to make sure that that level playing field is there. And we want to make sure that in general, that students know that we have resources, that people dedicate their lives to be able to support them and really excited to do that. And I think the more which we get exposed in that way, especially in this remote environment, the better that our numbers are going to continue to grow. And I'm not a numbers guy, I don't necessarily gravitate towards that, I gravitate towards the feeling of the student. And I do like numbers in the sense that I like understanding them. But I think with regards to understanding our successes, I think for us, because we don't work necessarily in a research setting, I think for us being able to almost do our own assessment of our own skills, is to see how we impacted that student. If the student leaves feeling better than when they walked into your office or your classroom or in the building, I think for all of us, that's one way for us to close those gaps.

Jesse Lopez:

And as we continue, be conscientious about where those gaps lie. And so foster youth, possibly male students on campus, being proactive and trying to be involved in different programs that really look to push those students up, and having real conversations about what life can look like after graduation, after transfer. And it's not just about the outcome, but really understanding where they can develop, who they can develop into, and in really sharing your personal experience... really thinking about how we work with students individually, because that's the majority of our roles right on campus.

Jesse Lopez:

And for some of the managers that are here, is definitely supporting programs, events, such as this symposium that try to expose and to show the gaps and the needs for students on campus, so that we can be cognizant when we work with that student population of how to address them, see where those issues lie, and no matter what this is going to be a continual learning process. We're going to continue to get better, but overall, we want to make sure that students who want to transfer and even students who are not even aware of transfer, have the opportunity to dream and believe that they can. And so for that note, I'm really excited to be a part of transfer, to be a part of the Mt. SAC community, a place that has dramatically changed my life for the better. And so I'm just really thankful to be able to kind of share that info and continue to make Mt. SAC's culture stronger for students, especially for the students that are disproportionately impacted.

Elmer:

Many of us never dreamt that we could have actually transfer, because many of us are first generation, many of us struggled in many different ways. Myself for example, I'm an immigrant, went to Bassett High School, graduated, went to Mount SAC. And I really feel that because of the Bridge Program, I was able to actually find myself and transfer. So today we're going to get to hear amazing stories of our students who either have transfer or will be transferring. And we're so excited and thankful for them to be here, because it is truly their voices that guide our practice. So thank you, thank you so much for being here.

Shonnardo Bodie:

My name is Shonnardo Bodie. My identities are, I'm a first generation college student, also I'm not a citizen, but I will be getting sworn in as a citizen within the next two months. I transferred from Mt. SAC in 2018, Spring. My involvement at Mt. Sac, I mean, any club you could think of I was probably a part of it. I could go down the list. But I also transferred to [inaudible 00:16:13] University on a track scholarship before I arrived and in my aspirations for right now is to become an athletic counselor. Thankful to Mt. SAC alumnis, I got a couple of role models in here. So I'm thankful for you all, and then my major is Public Health.

Elmer:

Thank you so much. Thank you Bodie.

Ajana:

... everyone, my name is Ajana, pronouns she/her. I'm transgender, first generation college student, non traditional, Chiricahua Apache, Mexican Filipino, and I'm 54 years old. I graduated Mt. SAC in 2019. While I was at Mt. SAC, I was involved in a lot of things. I was a part of the Native American Inner Tribal Student Alliance, Poulter Shot Club, Phi Theta Kappa, Honors Program, EOPS, Equity Center, did stuff with the Transfer Center. I transferred to UCLA, and so I have a BA in Gender Studies, and a minor in LGBTQ Studies. And I graduated magna cum laude, and I'm going to apply to Yale, Harvard, UCLA, and Stanford law schools.

Elmer:

Awesome. Thank you. Thank you for sharing that. It's amazing.

Ray:

My name is Ray John Banes, but I go by Ray. My identity, I am a first generation college student, and my pronouns are he/him. So I transferred back in 2020, so right at the peak of the pandemic. I look back at that I'm, "Wow, I did that." I'm still in awe with that. My involvement in the Mt. SAC, I was a part... I worked with HSO, so I got to work with students that were coming in. I was part of El Centro, Arise, ASPIRE, MMI. My university... So originally I transferred out of Mt. SAC 2020 to UC Santa Cruz. I did a year online. I was supposed to be doing fall this year, but during the transfer experience, I decided to re-transfer again to Arizona State. So I'm there now. And last but not least, my major; so right now I'm in between majors. I'm double majoring in Sociology and Communications, but I want to mainly focus on Communications.

Elmer:

Awesome. Thank you Ray.

Claudina Evans:

First, I really want to thank everybody for being here as a student. I also work on campus, so as a fellow employee, I'm so proud that I'm part of this community that is so involved in the future of the students here on campus. So with that said, my name is Claudina Evans. My identities, I am a non-traditional student, multi-ethnic, I'm a first generation and I'm also a caretaker. My transfer year, if everything goes good and COVID plays nice, it will be fall 2022, but it could be spring 2023. My involvement on campus is, I am involved in multiple clubs on campus and registered student organizations. I'm an EAGLE, I'm in the Transfer Club, I'm in the Horticulture Club. I've been different officers in the Mt. SAC Astronomical Society, and I am also involved in the LEAD program. I have completed both of my LEAD certificates, the personal and the organizational leadership certificates. I have been in Honors, and I just started Aces this semester. I was introduced to that through the Transfer Application Bootcamp actually.

Claudina Evans:

As I said before, I'm also employed on campus. I started as a work study student, then became a student assistant and then now I'm in Student Support Services, and I work in the Earth Sciences and Astronomy department. My transfer aspirations are to beat COVID and transfer, and get my bachelor's degree. I'm not sure exactly where I'm going to be going yet, it looks like it's probably going to be Cal Poly Pomona. And after my Bachelor's I would like to hopefully go for Masters, I'm not sure in what subject area yet. Because as a student at Mt. SAC, I am going for my AAS. I have a dual AAS path for Horse Ranch Management, and Registered Veterinary Technology. But I will be transferring because those are both concluding for me here at Mt. SAC. I'm actually going to transfer as a Philosophy major. So I look forward to starting on a new path. That's why I don't know if my masters will take me in a different direction in the sciences.

Elmer:

Well, thank you. Thank you so much Claudina, that is amazing. You're doing a lot. And I know you're going to continue to do amazing things just like everybody else. So thank you.

Alejandro:

Yeah, how's it going everyone? It's good to be back. Good to see everyone again. First of all, it's an honor and privilege to be in this panel with these amazing group of phenomenal students, community organizers of people that care for the community, for themselves and the generations to come. So my name is Alejandro Xipecoatl Juarez, I use [inaudible 00:21:18]/his pronouns. My identities are first generation of continuation high school graduate. And I think that's something that isn't it a mainstream identity in higher education, just like there's many identities; undocumented student, formerly incarcerated or veteran student, but I'm a alternative high school graduate student. Just because that's important, because we have a different educational experience, because we were pushed out, kicked out from a traditional high school and seen as we are not... "We don't want you here, we want you in another school." So I'm an alternative high school, I just really need to plugin that identity just because it's not amplified.

Alejandro:

I'm a man of color. I'm an indigenous student, I'm a Chicano, as well as I'm on system impacted student. My family was impacted by incarceration, by these cruel policies that lock our people up and do not put care first, they put us in cages. I'm also a [inaudible 00:22:16]. A [inaudible 00:22:16] is an identity in the Chicano Latino community, which I think is also meant to recognize where you come from. And most importantly, I'm a student, I'm a son, and I'm a student of life. So that's my identity. My transfer class is... I started Mt. SAC in 2014. Thanks to the help of Jesse Lopez, who is right here, shout out to Jesse the come back king. He brought me in for my continuation into Mt. SAC. And I started Summer 2014 with Summer Bridge, and I graduated 2018. So four years after.

Alejandro:

Yeah, transferred with a associate's degree in Sociology and Social Behavioral Sciences and a certificate in Child Development. And I transferred to UCLA let's go, shout out to Lopita. Lopita was a big support and rock for me, as well as Elmer, as well as a lot of people here that are here right now. Like Melissa, Cynthia, Blanca, I saw many of you out here. But the ultimate help and the person that bridge that was Alfred Herrera and Santiago Bernard, who are here right now, who are present, who are also here. So man, I'm honored and blessed to be with all these people that have supported me along this way, so wanted to give them the support.

Alejandro:

Made it to UCLA, and while at Mt. SAC, I was involved and started Mecha [Foreign Language 00:23:40] after it been inactive for eight years. I was involved in IDEAS, along side with my sister Karen, who's also here. Without IDEAS there was no Mecha, without Mecha there wasn't ideas, which is the undocumented support group. I got involved in student government, we took over student government because it did not represent the students, it did not represent non sex diverse population at that time. So we took it over, we created a slate and we passed a lot of really amazing stuff like a gender and ethnic studies degree, which we now have. Multicultural Center, as well as a more sustainable campus and a sanctuary campus and a lot of really good policies.

Alejandro:

I already graduated, like I said, so my transfer place where I want to go, I made it. I made it to UCLA, but I do want to get my Master's. I'm shooting for the PhD, I'm taking names, I'm taking degrees, bringing them back home, bring home the gold. So I definitely want to go in for my Master's, but I'm taking a gap year, because I deserve a gap year because I need rest. Because I deserve that. So I'm going to take two years off, and I'm working right now for community org called Inner City Struggle in the east side of Los Angeles where we do equity work in terms of housing, education, and youth organizing and development and civic engagement, and that's pretty much it. Thank you.

Elmer:

Thank you. Thank you.

Lupita:

So we want to know, what was or has been a key moment in your transfer journey or your story that was or has been, because some of you haven't transferred just yet, imperative for you for your transfer success?

Ajana:

Like I said, I'm 54 years old. When I went back to school, I wasn't even sure I could succeed. Probably one of the hardest classes I was in with Alex, and that was Stats. I mean, it was crazy because I didn't graduate high school, so I never even thought that I could even... I didn't even know one plus one. That's the Math class, I started out Mt. SAC where you stand up in the class and say, one plus one is two, two plus two is four. And so taking that step, plus I worked my butt off, and I got an A in that class. And so that kind of started that dream of, "Wow, this isn't so bad after all." And then the collaboration with the... because we worked in groups. And then luckily I had Alex, because we always push each other. We joked, we made it fun. We were struggling, but yet we still found ways to succeed.

Ajana:

So everyone I was surrounded with, they were always talking about transferring. So all my groups of friends, they were all talking about transferring, and I'm, "I don't even know if I can even transfer, or where would I go? Where can I make it?" Because I started getting A's at Mount SAC. And I was, "Will I be able to take this and succeed at wherever I transferred to?" So I utilize many of the resources that were available in the Transfer Center for example. I remember one of the key moments was when I signed up for the Northern California tour, and it trade changed my dream of transferring. And so we visited UC Santa Cruz, San Francisco State, UC Berkeley and UC Davis. And that each campus that I was on, I would imagine myself being a student there. And then when we returned from the tour, I researched the majors and the classes that were offered at each campus. I spent days just looking at all the classes, "Okay, if I went here, what would be my class schedule?" I even went as far as doing it per quarter or semester, depending on the campus.

Ajana:

And so that really made a big impact on my dream of transferring, but I still thought it was impossible, especially to go to a place like UCLA and I got accepted to everywhere that I applied to. Four Cal States, and then my UCS were, I tagged the Davis because I said, "Okay, if I'm going to tag somewhere, what has the better program for me?" And that would be a guarantee. So I tagged a Davis, I applied to Berkeley, UCLA, and UC San Diego. And then I got into all of those.

Ajana:

And what really helped, was I applied for the CCCP Scholars Program at UCLA. And I joined a Native Pacific Islander Scholars Program. And I lived at UCLA for five days. And so I was introduced to admissions, financial aid, help with the personal insight questions, and there was just a lot. And folks from the native and Pacific Islander community, they gathered and they encouraged me to continue on the path that I was on in academia. So just utilizing programs is something that I always say, ample support is there. But ultimately, a student needs to utilize the help from the various resources offered to them on the campus, and online. And so asking for help is one of the most difficult things for many of us, especially in QTBIPOC community, which is queer, trans, black, indigenous people of color. But asking for help is one of the most important parts for success. So that's really what changed my dream and helped me to make impossibilities possible was just asking for help.

Lupita:

Thank you Ajana.

Alejandro:

Yeah, I would say it would be... I was at Mount SAC for four years, as I mentioned. As I was there, I just saw a lot of my friends transfer out. And it really made me question, "Wait, is it my time to transfer?" Am I actually going to do this? I'm scared, I'm nervous, especially being the first one in my whole entire family to go to college from my dad's and mom's side, not just one side, the entire one. And having that pressure as well. Not direct pressure, where everyone's, "Hey, if you do this, you're going to mess up." But the pressure of, "Hey, keep it up. Doing great." But that still felt like a backpack. And many of us students; first generation low income college students, we walk around with these backpacks full of stuff. Full of our family's history, trauma, the experience, microaggressions and everything, and it's full of beautiful and good things in that backpack. But I felt that pressure on nonetheless.

Alejandro:

Just seeing a lot of my friends transfer out, especially my best friend who, I don't know if he's here right now Fabian Pavon. Mr. Fabian Pavon from Savan, that's the man, that's the guy who really pushed me. And when he got to UCSB, he would constantly come back to Mt. SAC even though he was at UC Santa Barbara. He wouldn't make it his thing to come back to Mt. SAC, come back to Pomona, come back to La Puente, and share with us what it is to transfer and really tell it how it is. Not like someone that's going to build it up and give all the flowery stuff. He gave it to this to us really real, and I appreciate that mentorship that I got from him right to this day.

Alejandro:

When I finally had the opportunity to start thinking about transfer Lopita popped in and she said, "Hey, you should really join CCP." Which is where I met Alfred Herrera and Santee, and I was also able to do the five day residential program at UCLA and see myself at UCLA and say, "You know what, this is possible." And see people that look like me, people that speak like me, people that dress like me, talk like me, everything; knew my foods and my community and say, "Wow, they're here at UCLA. Well, I could be here too. So let's do it." And we got down and we made it happen and just graduated. I still can't believe it happened. I just graduated this past summer, and we're going to keep going up.

Shonnardo Bodie:

So I think a big part of what helped me transfer was, to be honest with you, when I was at Mt. SAC my first year, I'm tell you that I came with because unfortunately I came in from a high school, where you hear all the time not directly to me all the time. But from teachers, people that work at the school that, I mean, "If you all keep this up, you all probably go do nothing in life," and all that. So when I came to Mt. SAC, my first year and a half, I didn't do good at all. I failed damn all my classes. I was still trying to be athlete, being homesick not knowing how to adjust to different things. But the good thing about Mt. SAC, is the people don't give up on you. That's what I had to get over as far as I had been just coming to California and getting back into the school system.

Shonnardo Bodie:

And then, after that year and a half and not really doing good. I was telling my mom, we had a conversation because she was struggling, I was barely making rent, because California expensive, just hearing that, because I'm a mama's boy. So I heard my mama struggling and I'm, "You know what, I'm about to go back home." And that conversation that night, I'm sobbing on the phone. I'm, "Ma, I should just come back home. I don't even see what the point is of being in school." People probably don't believe me anyways, she was, "As bad as I want you to be home and how much you'd be able to help us." She was, "I think it's better for you to stay in school." Because my mom didn't go to college. She don't know nothing about past probably in high school. She was, "I think it's better for you to stay."

Shonnardo Bodie:

So after that year and a half of that, and then plus getting that from my mom, I was, "I see the people that is really giving the effort to push me towards getting to actually transfer out to the school." And I'm, "Okay, let me reach out." I went to Arise. I think Arise was the first program I joined, I joined ASPIRE, then after that, it was just a sort of a Rolling Stone. I started plugging into all different types of programs. I was able to be connected and be a part of MMI. I was also able to come up a student ambassador.

Shonnardo Bodie:

And then a key to was kind of like Alejandro said, it was the fact that we went to UCLA. And then everything that you hear about UCLA as far as being a real prestigious school, and just being on campus with MMI, I was, "Men, before this I would never, never thought... " I don't even know why, "I'd never thought I'd see myself being on campus like that." But I think that was a big moment. Because I was never able to win the college tours because I was always on track. So same weekend that we had a chat, it was the same week that that was going on. But just that one experience of being able to go to UCLA, and get experience with the students on campus, getting to talk to them, meet a bunch of mentors, and people that teach at a school, that if you ever need help just reach out to them. They want to be a mentor to us. So that was a big moment for me.

Lupita:

Awesome. Thank you so much for sharing that Bodie.

Ray:

As a first generation college student, I didn't really know what to expect. I couldn't really turn to family, even though I knew they supported me. I wasn't something I can openly talk to them about and ask for help as far as academics go. All they can do is just motivate me and be, "Oh you got this." But like I said, that was enough up until I knew I had [inaudible 00:34:48] stats. And I think my first time meeting with a counselor, I met with Jesse, and I had started at Mt. SAC maybe back... I graduated high school in 2012, and originally I was supposed to go to ASU, but None of my friends are leaving everyone was going to Mt. SAC. And even before transferring to ASU, right after high school I already had imposter syndrome thinking, "Oh, none of my friends are going to be there. I don't have any support." So I just didn't do school my first couple years. Then I finally went to Mt. SAC and I was, "Okay, let's try this." And after being out of school I was, "This isn't for me. I'm not a school person."

Ray:

But yeah, so I still tried it. And my GPA dropped, I failed almost all my classes. Like Bodie did, I didn't really know how to fit in to the school. I didn't know, at the time I felt college was a place to try, and if you fail there's no coming back from it. High school was a little bit different scenario, I knew how to do it for my family. Graduating high school was a must no matter what. Even in high school I wasn't a 4.0 student, but I did good because of basketball. But like I said Mt. SAC, or just in college in general, it was just a big difference, so my GPA dropped really low. And I was, "I'm just not going to do it. I'm going to go to work and I'm going to start working." Because my family was either go to school or work.

Ray:

But yeah, I started working and I thought, "Why go to school?" I'm making this money, that's what school is for, so to get this piece of paper and you'll get this good job, but at the age of 19 I was already getting good money. So I was, "What do I need to go to school for?" But I easily got bored with that. Making money isn't my passion. I want money, but it's not my passion. My passion is to pursue something I really love, I really care about, and making money that just comes along with it. So I ended up quitting my first job to find another job. And at the time, I thought it was my passion. But it really wasn't. But I transfer jobs to Universe Studios. And I was working as a wizard at the Harry Potter world. And I was, "This is my passion. This is it." Why go to school when I'm going to Hogwarts.

Ray:

So I spent some time there, within my first year I got promoted. And I was, "Yeah, this is it." I went from retail to now I'm a supervisor, what do I need school for? So I still had that in the back of my head, "I don't need school." And then I caught myself getting bored again like the first time and I really just didn't know what to do anymore. I didn't want to keep getting bored. So I applied for a position way out of my comfort zone, which was a HR position within NBC Universal. And I was so close to getting it. I got my second interview, which everyone was telling you, once you get that second interview, you're going to get in. It's to see how they're going to place you now. You passed the first test. And so I'm, "I'm going to get it." But I got that call. I thought I did really great. I got the call saying, "Hey, unfortunately we're not going to give it to you. The person that got it, their qualifications were higher met. They had a bachelor's degree." And I was, "Okay, now I see why school's important."

Ray:

And so I up quit universal, because I didn't want to go back into that feeling comfortable. I want to explore my options. And now that I apply for HR, and I saw what that was about. I was, "Oh, is that possible to get a degree in?" And so I went to Mt. SAC, I met with Jesse. And my first two semesters I was on academic probation. So I try to climb my way out, and I was, "I'm never going to get there. I wanted to only be here for the two years and then leave. I don't want to be here longer than I have to be." And I didn't think that was possible, but sitting down with Jesse, he was, "Oh, no. It's very possible." He put my class together. And it ended up working out, because I end up graduating within the two years. And within that two year span, I connected with so many people. I've connected with Alanah, Melissa, I connected with all the staff at HSL, Cynthia, Blanca, Tanya. I got lucky enough to connect with Bianca before Promise+Plus became as big as it is. And I got to be part of that all within the two years.

Ray:

So I felt my two years at Mt. SAC, it really trumped over everything I'd learned in the working field. And I got that community of home at Mt. SAC more than anywhere else other than my actual home. So that felt good and that kind of helped me prepare myself for the next the step. I started at Mt. SAC thinking school isn't for me and I'm going to get through it, to now it's, "I made school for me." It's no longer an option, it's a must. I thrive on wanting to go to school. Santa Cruz didn't work out, I didn't give up. Now I'm at ASU type of thing. And it's really crazy, because I started at ASU, or I was supposed to start at ASU and now I'm back there and I want to prove to myself more than to anybody that I'm going to finish where I started type of thing. So yeah, it's a full circle type of thing. And Mt. SAC made that all possible for me.

Lupita:

Thank you Ray for sharing that.

Claudina Evans:

So hello again. Yeah. I would say my key moment was really, it all kind of came together in the last year, because it took me a while to get started in my program as it was. So I've been at Mt. SAC for kind of a little bit. I thought when I was coming here, "Oh, it's just going to be quick two years, and then I'm going to be working full time and then be able to get my bachelor's, etc." And, of course, what's that saying, when you make plan God laughs. But I do believe things happen for a reason. And I definitely, I'm so grateful for my time that I've been able to spend here completing my two degrees, and then a couple certificates along the way. But also, back to what I was saying about getting into my program, I took about a year and a half to get into my program. So that really threw off my whole transfer plans altogether. And over the years, I kind of started to feel a little bit of imposter syndrome, I felt, "Oh, maybe this is not going to happen. Maybe my path is different. Maybe I wasn't meant to finish that path that I was on before to achieve my bachelor's."

Claudina Evans:

And then in the last year, I went to... it was a transfer presentation by the Transfer Center, I believe. And Teresa was there presenting on scholarships, and everything and I said, "You know what, this is the year I think I'm going to apply for scholarships." If there was nothing else to slay imposter syndrome is feeling the support and encouragement from all of you, that were really imperative on that path of making me feel sure in every step, making me feel empowered to take the steps. And then also, after the scholarship deadline passed, there was continued help, continued contact. And then I was contacted about the transfer application bootcamp. And I have to say, that was what cemented concrete and molded everything.

Claudina Evans:

I really can't think of anything else that has been so key and so precious to me, going from maybe I'll transfer but I was not even thinking that I was going to transfer, that I was actually going to graduate and then maybe apply to college a few years down the line. No, now I'm going to transfer. I will leave Mt. SAC and then go to a four year and continue on my path.

Lupita:

That was amazing. And thank you for sharing those details, those stories for everyone to really let us hear from you, your story, the challenges you've overcome and how Mt. SAC has supported your journey along the way.

Christina Barsi:

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