**STUDENTS ASK THE QUESTIONS: Political Science ADT With Student Host Seris Castillo & Professor of Political Science Raul Madrid Episode 158**

00:00:00 **Raul**

Don't give up, keep at it. Work hard, have fun while you're in college, but keep at it. I think all of our students, including you, Seris, are incredibly smart. You have the skills needed to get a degree and you will get that degree. And that degree will pay off for you. As I said, previously, those that have a college degree earn on average much more than those over the course of their life, than those that don't have it.

00:00:31 **Christina**

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

00:00:33 **Sun**

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

00:00:37 **Christina**

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.

00:00:54 **Sun**

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

00:00:58 **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.

00:01:02 **Speaker 2**

She is a sociology major and she's transferring to Cal Poly, Pomona. Psychology major, English major ...

00:01:08 **Sun**

From transforming part-time into full-time.

00:01:11 **Speaker 1**

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

00:01:18 **Christina**

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

00:01:21 **Speaker 1**

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

00:01:24 **Christina**

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.

00:01:35 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

00:01:40 **Christina**

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:01:41 **Christina**

This conversation between our guest student host, Seris Castillo, and her political science professor, Raul Madrid, is candid, honest, and full of good guidance. Seris shares a little of their own experience as a part of the Latinx community and being a first-generational student as they explore what a career path and political science might look like. Enjoy!

00:02:11 **Seris**

Welcome back, everyone. This is the Magic Mountie Podcast, I am guest hosting. My name is Seris Castillo. I am a current student here at Mt. SAC. I am a Latino student who took Latino politics with Professor Madrid for my fall semester.

00:02:29 **Seris**

And here, joining me, we have Raul Madrid, or as I know you as Professor Madrid. I'm happy you came to me to host this podcast episode. And we know each other just because, like I said before, I took your class in fall semester. And so, I just wanted to know more about your experiences in the field as well as how to get started as a student or how to get other students started as well.

00:02:59 **Raul**

Well, thanks for doing this, Seris. It was a great pleasure having you in the fall in the POLI 25 course, Latino politics in the United States. I think we formed a pretty good bond there, and I'm just so happy that you're here hosting this event with us.

00:03:15 **Raul**

You know, my journey as a student started a long time ago, but it was kind of a non-traditional route. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to teach, but I wasn't sure how to get there, the steps that were needed. And I eventually went on to become an English major.

00:03:38 **Raul**

And Seris, I know you have a great fondness for literature, so we share that in common as well. And I graduated with a degree in English. Eventually, got a master's degree in English, but I found myself constantly going back to writing about politics.

00:03:55 **Raul**

And so, I decided I wanted to major in political science, I wanted to get an advanced degree in political science. And I went on to do that, getting a master's degree and a PhD as well. So, my route was very non-traditional, it didn't have one path. I took the road less well-taken. And I think many of our students here at Mt. SAC do the same.

00:04:21 **Raul**

Not everybody knows what they want to be or what they want to do when they're entering college at 17 or 18-years-old. Some of us don't learn what we want to do until way later in life. And so, my advice to students is to get acquainted with a whole bunch of different disciplines. Take your GE courses and really take the time to learn in each one of those courses.

00:04:47 **Raul**

Do all the readings, think about how you might use what you're learning in your courses and other areas of your life, and I promise you, as you're going through that process, you'll find something that you really truly enjoy. And for me, it was politics and it was writing and research, and I knew I wanted to teach. And so, here I am here at Mt. SAC doing all of those things and just so happy to be here and working with students just like you.

00:05:20 **Seris**

Yeah, and I know you stated that like you first became an English major, and then like you decided to either change your major or decided to take political science as your major. I know that in a lot of immigrant families, we tend to focus more on like the unit and it's very important for us to have the acceptance of at least the parents, if not everybody in that family - speaking from personal experience, me being a Latina.

00:05:49 **Seris**

And I just wanted to know, like did your parents or other family members know about you either changing your major or choosing political science as your major? And how was that? Like if your family did support you, how did you think that would've helped you better versus like if your family didn't support you?

00:06:11 **Raul**

Yeah. You know, I'm very lucky to have a supportive family unit. My family was fully supportive of me getting some kind of degree in college. That's what they wanted. They wanted me to go on and get some kind of degree. They didn't really care what I wanted to do, or the major that I ended up in, they just wanted to make sure that I got a degree.

00:06:31 **Raul**

And so, I think in that respect, they're very pleased with where I am now. But for many families, that's not always the case. And it's not that parents don't want their child to go on and get a bachelor's degree, or even more than that. Oftentimes, it's, as you said, with people of color and immigrant families in general, it's hard for families to lose that source of income that's coming into the household.

00:07:01 **Raul**

When students are in school, they're forsaking for hours out of the day, time that they could be spending at work. And ultimately, as I kind of preach in our class, Seris, it pays off to get your degree. But during those four years or often longer, the family is going without that money. And so, it could be a very strenuous situation and you don't have to not work while you're in college.

00:07:27 **Raul**

I worked my whole way through, but I had the supporting nature of my family. I was able to live at home and things like that. But I worked all the way through college. And I think for many of our students, if not most of our students, they're working as well. And I just want to say it's completely possible to graduate with your degree, to move on from Mt. SAC to a four-year institution or whatever your goal is. And it's totally possible to do it while you work.

00:07:59 **Seris**

Yeah, and I think another factor that a lot of immigrant families are afraid of is the fact that if you're going for a degree in political science, automatically, it's like, well, what is that degree really for, there's not a lot of political consciousness, especially in the Latinx community.

00:08:19 **Seris**

So, I know that probably a lot of Latinas' family would tend to struggle in terms of like, oh, well, how are you going to make money after like you go off from home and stuff like that. And I know you did talk about your journey. And so, do you remember how you ever like got started in terms of like getting classes and stuff like that?

00:08:43 **Raul**

Yeah. So, let me just say the good news is that whatever you decide to major in, a college degree will take you far and beyond in terms of income over the course of your lifetime, more than somebody who has a high school diploma in hand. A college degree is incredibly valuable.

00:09:05 **Raul**

You know, in terms of my journey, I'm a first-generation college student. I didn't really know the kinds of classes that I should have been taking. I didn't know that there were even counselors available to me. For me, I kind of just got lucky. And it's one of the reasons why I preach this in my classes all the time. And you've heard it ad nauseam, Seris.

00:09:29 **Raul**

You heard me talking about taking the classes that you need to take to get out of college. I didn't know how to do that. I got lucky and I took an English course as an undergraduate with a professor who I think saw something in me, who I think noticed that I had some ability to get through this, but looked directionless.

00:09:55 **Raul**

And that professor asked me to join him for office hours and at office hours, he said just that. That I have potential but it didn't seem like I knew what I was doing. And so, he sat down and worked with me and explained to me the kinds of classes, the kind of pathways that I would need to take in order to get a degree in English, and that kind of spawned my eventual journey.

00:10:25 **Raul**

Here at Mt. SAC, we have guided pathways where students are able to take an assortment of courses, and guided pathways as the name suggests, kind of guides you through the types of classes that you would need in order to transfer out with an AA degree in whatever discipline you're interested in. So, here in political science, we have a guided pathway that guides you through the courses that you would need to take in order to transfer out with a political science AA degree.

00:10:58 **Seris**

And could you speak more about like what entails in those guided pathways and if you necessarily have to major in political science or stuff like that.

00:11:10 **Raul**

So, you don't have to major in political science. I will just say that political science is really cool, so you should try it. But if you decide to major in political science, there's a pathway for you. Most of our students end up taking POLI 1. Initially, that's the introduction to American government and politics course, and most of our students start there.

00:11:32 **Raul**

I teach that class and we run the gamut of different things that political science is all about. We start by explaining the different subdisciplines within the political science discipline. And we have classes in all of those sub-disciplines here at Mt. SAC.

00:11:50 **Raul**

If you're in the honors program, you could take POLI 1H which is our honors course in political science. It's a fantastic course, but students can go on to take other classes. As you took my POLI 25 Latino politics in the United States class, Seris - there's that class, there's a political theory class, there's an international relations class. There's an environmental politics class. There's an African-American politics class.

00:12:22 **Raul**

There's just a whole bunch of political science classes that you could take. And if you're going to major in political science, I would advise to take those classes and route to getting your AA.

00:12:35 **Seris**

Right, right. And unfortunately, there's no like major or at least a degree in terms of going to Latinx politics in general, right?

00:12:47 **Raul**

Well, so in political science, we have Latino politics and that's kind of a subdiscipline within the larger discipline. There are scholars out there who make a living studying Latino politics. At the American Association of Political Science, there's a whole wing of folks who study just that.

00:13:10 **Raul**

But broadly speaking, in political science, we have what's called race and ethnic politics. And so, that would encompass Latino politics, African-American politics, even native American politics. And so, you're able to get a sense of, or you're able to study how these different racial and ethnic groups interact with the American government.

00:13:35 **Raul**

And so, when I was going through the graduate program, I found that to be incredibly interesting and I ended up writing a dissertation all about it.

00:13:46 **Seris**

Right. And now, as students try to hopefully find a career in politics, branching away from college and university, how would you say is the workforce at least currently? And can you talk about the wages in it?

00:14:03 **Raul**

Sure. Yeah, I mean right now, I think as you look around, there's a whole bunch of opportunities available regardless of your fields. I saw today, there was a report that suggested that we are at maximum employment. And so, you see employers trying to get people to work for them, oftentimes giving them more money than they previously would have.

00:14:32 **Raul**

And so, I think the job market right now is for students who have a political science, bachelor's degree in hand, I think it's pretty good. You're able to work in city government, in state government, even at the federal level. And there's a whole bunch of different agencies at every level of government, whether it be state, local, or federal. You're also able to go on and work for think tanks, for research specialists, especially if you do decide to go on and get a master's degree or higher.

00:15:11 **Raul**

One of the things that those who major in political science as an undergraduate end up doing, is they go on to study law. And that makes a great deal of sense for people who want to be lawyers to major in political science, you get to understand what government does. You get to understand how individuals interact with government. And so, it makes sense for many people to go on and study law.

00:15:40 **Raul**

I should also say that interestingly enough, so do English majors. English majors often go on and study law because they have to have the ability to argue, to formulate arguments, and to write. And so, I'll just plug my English side discipline there as well.

00:15:58 **Seris**

Of course. In the beginning, we've said that, although it's not like that all Latinas people care about - a big importance is in terms of money and income; would you say that it's very profitable? Especially right now, how you said that employment's very high to go into the political science career. And do you think that this like increase of income is going to continue?

00:16:27 **Raul**

Well, I saw a report recently that suggested that those that that have a political science degree, on average, make in the six figures. And I don't know how that works out on a state-by-state basis. My guess is that those states that it's much more expensive to live in like California, New York - states like that, you'll end up earning more money because the cost of living is so much higher.

00:16:53 **Raul**

And it's also true that many political science majors end up living in Washington, DC, and Washington DC has a high cost of living. And so, the compensation is also much higher.

00:17:06 **Raul**

I would say that I generally believe that those who major in political science can end up having a relatively good life in terms of income. Political science helps to teach you how to think critically, how to write, how to formulate arguments. And all of those things are incredibly beneficial to you on the job market.

00:17:29 **Raul**

Folks who have the ability to think critically are going to figure out how to get well-paying jobs, they're going to figure out how to impress their bosses. And here at Mt. SAC, I think we do a great job in our political science department of training students to have critical thinking skills so that when they enter the market, they're able to find hopefully, a well-paying job.

00:17:55 **Seris**

And I want to actually discuss more about the market, more so ... not the community, but the workspace environment of it. I know that oftentimes as people of color enter the workforce, there's a lot of hurdles, whether it be not outward racism, but very hidden racism. And so, I wanted to know if you faced any personal struggles or roadblock by the industry, whether it was in purpose or something that was just brought up by the institution.

00:18:30 **Raul**

Well, there are different forms of biases that people have. There's implicit biases. And often, we hear about news reporting. There are also explicit biases that individuals often demonstrate. I have in the past faced many forms of implicit bias, often in the form of microaggressions. And microaggressions are things that people say that sound innocuous, but for a person of color, they know exactly what that person is trying to say.

00:19:07 **Raul**

So, they may say things like, "Oh gosh, you write really well." Or they may say things like, "Oh gosh, your English is really good." And what did they expect? They expected that I couldn't write well or that I don't speak English well, because of the color of my skin, those are microaggressions. And I think that people of color will face that throughout their careers, they'll face that in route to their careers, they'll face that in everyday life.

00:19:37 **Raul**

And I think for people of color, we often just get used to it. And I know that one of the things that we ought to be doing is teaching people what these forms of biases are, whether implicit or explicit, what microaggressions are, so that well-intentioned people don't do those kinds of things.

00:20:01 **Raul**

And we're able to just be normal people as we are out in the wild, as I like to say. But yes, the sad truth is that those things still exist and we have to endure.

00:20:20 **Seris**

And oftentimes, we are constantly enduring and there might be low points either for students or people who are actively working in the political science, which doesn't help when a lot of politics can be more so geared towards affecting people of color in a negative light, more so than positive. How would you say you've handled at least in terms of keeping your mental health good or keeping that motivation in continuing politics?

00:20:54 **Raul**

You know, as I said, we have to endure and we have to find avenues for keeping ourselves sane. And for me, in college and not so much after having children, but prior to having children, I used to do quite a bit of running. I would go out and exercise a lot with kids. That's a lot harder to do, but I used to go out for runs frequently.

00:21:22 **Raul**

I find great joy in sports. And so, that helps me to take my mind off things. Though, sometimes, it could be quite depressing. Like when the Dodgers come up short in the world series, that would hurt quite a bit. But I always tell students that I think it's really important for you to take your academics seriously, but to not neglect your mental health; to do things that make you happy, to sit down and watch a Netflix show, and your homework will get done.

00:21:55 **Raul**

You'll find time to do your homework, you'll find time to study. But when you're feeling down and out, you take time for you, because if you don't take that time, you will burn out. And so, take that time, go for a walk, exercise, take a 10-minute break where you just sit on your phone and watch YouTube. Or I think, I mean, Seris, you know this much better than I am because you're much more hip.

00:22:23 **Raul**

But young people probably like to go on TikTok. I don't know if that's a thing young people still do, but whatever it is that makes you enjoy your time, I would say to do that; circle back and do your homework later, but to take time for yourself.

00:22:38 **Seris**

Yeah, depending on TikTok algorithm, might not want to be there, a lot of heartaches and stuff on there. So, now that we've talked about what Mt. SAC can help you in terms of degree transfer and talked about like the environment, what would you say a student actively in taking like their bachelor's and master's, what could they do to start building their career or once they graduate, how can they actively start it?

00:23:10 **Raul**

So, I think internships are incredibly important. These days, it's often hard to find a job initially straight out of college. And so, if you have an internship while in college or even post-college, it helps you to get your foot in the door just in terms of establishing yourself in your career.

00:23:31 **Raul**

So, I think internships are really, really, really important. And hopefully, it's a paid internship so that you get compensated for your time and your efforts. But internships are really important. And then once you're in the field, I think it's also really important to network, to do your best to meet and talk to others.

00:23:54 **Raul**

I don't know if you know this, Seris, but I'm a shy person. I'm an introvert. And so, it's hard for me to network, but I often have to push myself outside of my comfort zone and talk to others and get to know them. And sometimes, those things pay off. I don't think that I would be here at Mt. SAC without having formed a network that got me here, without having been an adjunct professor here prior to being full-time.

00:24:26 **Raul**

I got to know people at Mt. SAC and eventually, established, my career here. And so, I will always tell students that it's really important for you to push yourself outside of your comfort zone and to talk with others, to network, and to not be too humble.

00:24:42 **Raul**

When you're out there and you're talking to others, it's also a time for you to share with them the things that you are really good at because when they're out looking for somebody who's good at that one thing, they'll think of you.

00:24:58 **Seris**

Right. So, kind of in that discussion that you were having, we've breached on like stuff that you should do, kind of like show-pony yourself and talk to a lot of people. What are like absolute do-not, like this is possibly the worst thing you could do as like entering the workforce and stuff like that?

00:25:17 **Raul**

I've never heard that term "show-pony" before, but I like it and I'll steal it and I'll use it. So, what are the things that you don't want to do? There's a lot. And so, I could think back to our conversation about implicit and explicit biases; don't do those things.

00:25:35 **Raul**

But you also want to make sure that you don't burn bridges while you're out in your career. These days when people are out in the field, they'll often have not just one job like they like maybe my parents did or my grandparents did. They established themselves in that one job and they work in that job for the rest of their life. People don't do that anymore. People will work 2, 3, 4, 5 jobs before they retire.

00:26:06 **Raul**

So, on your way out of one job, do not burn the bridge because oftentimes, you're going back for a letter of reference from them. And oftentimes, you're going to meet that person who you previously worked with at another job.

00:26:20 **Raul**

Political science is a really small field, as are the other disciplines out there. Social work for example, is a very small field and people get to know one another, and you don't want to go out there and burn bridges because eventually, you're going to circle back to that person. And you want to be friendly with them. You want to be able to have a cordial conversation with them. So, that's the one thing I would say is don't burn bridges

00:26:49 **Seris**

Kind of on an ending and final question, is there anything you would've told your past self who is barely starting out, that something you would tell current students and current post-graduates?

00:27:05 **Raul**

Yeah. Well, here's what I say to our students often - I often tell them don't give up, keep at it. Work hard, have fun while you're in college, but keep at it. I think all of our students, including you, Seris, are incredibly smart. You have the skills needed to get a degree and you will get that degree. And that degree will pay off for you.

00:27:29 **Raul**

As I said, previously, those that have a college degree earn on average much more than those over the course of their life, than those that don't have it. And so, please just keep at it. Times will get hard, times will get tough, but persevere. You don't have to have the highest IQ in the world to get a bachelor's degree. You don't even have to have the highest IQ in the world to get a PhD. All you have to do is keep going, persevere.

00:28:02 **Seris**

Right, thank you. And I think that's all the questions I have for you here today. Thank you so much for agreeing to do this and for having me as your host.

00:28:13 **Raul**

Thank you, Seris. You did a fantastic job and I'm so happy again that you decided to do this. Thanks for having me.

00:28:23 **Christina**

Transferring from Mt. SAC to university to earn your bachelor's degree has countless benefits and opens the door to many opportunities. Learn how to do so with an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science Transfer Degree like we highlighted in this episode by using transfer resources, such as the Counseling Department or the Transfer Center. Just go to mtsac.edu/counseling or mtsac.edu/transfer.

00:28:43 **Christina**

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast, and don't forget to share your favorite episodes.