

FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

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Hello, listeners, and welcome back to another episode of College Bound! My name is Lulu and I'm one of your hosts for this podcast. I'm a sophomore at the University of Notre Dame, studying Psychology and American Studies with a minor in Latino Studies. I'm originally from Orange County, California, but here at Notre Dame, I like to call Lyons Hall my home. We are continuing on this season exploring identity at Notre Dame. We want to explore what it means to be a student at Notre Dame with intersectional identities, so some episodes will discuss being a part of the LGBTQ+ community, or being a black student at Notre Dame, and we will also go into the Notre Dame experience as a whole with how we, as Notre Dame students, interact with the South Bend community and what to expect after graduation.

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Continuing on this new season for our second episode is being Latinx at Notre Dame, and here to talk about this with me is two of our lovely interns, Vera Leon Asilis and Irasema Hernandez Trujillo. Hello, ladies, can you introduce yourselves, please?

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Hi, I am Vera Sophia Asilis. I am from Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. I am an international student majoring in architecture and minoring in real estate, and I live in Walsh Hall

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Hi everybody! My name is Irasema Hernandez Trujillo. I am originally from Benita Juarez, Michoacan, Mexico. But now I live in Fort Wayne, Indiana. I am majoring in American Studies and Global Affairs with a minor in Latino Studies, in a concentration in Civil and Human Rights, and I live in Ryan Hall.

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Great. Thank you so much for joining me today. We're really excited to get talking about our various different experiences as we all come from different spectrums of being a Latino here at Notre Dame. So to get us started, can you ladies let us know how your academic and social experience has been like as a Latino student at Notre Dame? Maybe talk about some classes that you've taken or some clubs that you were a part of that have really made your experience better than it could have been at any other place.

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Yeah, I guess I can go ahead and start. I think for me, it's been the faculty and the professors. They have been phenomenal and translating to the classes that they've taught. So for example, I took my freshman year spring semester, I took a class that was a community-based learning class. So that means that you do half of the material in the classroom, but then another part of that component is something that you do within the community of South Bend. So I did one on immigration and the construction of memory. I had class that Professor Tatiana Botero, my queen.

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I literally to this day love her so much; like to me, she's the the ND mom for me and all my friends because she's phenomenal, but taking that class really opened my eyes not only to the necessities of the Notre Dame community, but also to the necessities of the South and community. And it's been wonderful to see and understand more about immigration from a different perspective that's not my own, being a

first generation immigrant from Mexico. It's just been phenomenal to see and embrace what it is that they offer to come to this nation, and so that's one of my favorite classes ever taken.

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And then I took another class with Profesora Botero called "Latinx Identities." And that class I took and it translated it into a summer service learning component. So I spent last summer and Homestead Miami, where I worked with a nonprofit called the Mexican American Council, and we worked with youth that were students of migrant farmworkers, and some of them were more than likely to drop out, and so we were serving as mentors and it was just like I worked a lot with Latinos and as a strong-minded Latina and somebody that's really passionate about women and children and especially with immigration, I think it was just like such a suitable thing for me to do because it really opened my eyes to the realities that occur within the Latino community.

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Yeah, and going off of that, I know a couple of my friends who took this Intro to Spanish Lit course in which they read books by very well-known Latin authors, Latin American authors such as Julia Alvarez, Juan Bosch, which I think really helps establish and make Latin American students identify more with their background and learn more about their own heritage and culture, which, usually in academic institutions, it is more common to read about American authors, and I think it's great that Notre Dame promotes this learning of different cultural backgrounds. As well as from my own personal perspective in all of my classes, when I give my own personal perspective and input on my own background, it is always very well received and professors are always very open to hear about Latin American backgrounds and how our experience and knowledge applies to whatever the content is.

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Yeah, I have to totally agree with all two of you. As a Latino Studies minor, I've had the chance to take a lot of classes that are centered around the Latinx experience, and two most recent ones is my college seminar during the fall semester of my sophomore year was American Borderlands. We talked about "borderlands," not necessarily constricted to the border with U.S. and Mexico, but also the borders that we have to cross about identity and who we are as Latinos in the U.S. and just getting to hear multiple perspectives about Latindad who here in the U.S., not only in Mexico, really broadened my perspective on what the borders are.

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That class also allowed us to see Latino communities that through the LGBTQ community or even just through nontypical Latino lifestyles, and it really was interesting to get to see how diverse the community is within itself and my other classroom teaching for the spring semester of my sophomore year is Latinx Muralism, and it's actually we're contributing to a project created by the professor in which we'll be traveling to the Pilsen murals in Chicago and contributing to this website that he's creating, that will allow us to take a tour of the Pilsen murals electronically and get to know that history of the Latino artists and the people who are living there and what how much they have contributed to these murals and how much they make a huge part of their culture there in Pilsen and how it really livens the community.

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So I can agree with all of you has a wide variety of classes that allow us to really explore who we are as Latino students and what we want to explore. All three of us have gotten very different perspectives on these classes, which is great, and it really highlights how we are getting to experience every possible perspective, even when you don't expect that you can get every possible perspective.

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And to add one last thing to that, learning about the actual history of not just America, but of our own countries, because, you know, like in regular like grade school textbooks, they don't really teach us, like, maybe we spend like a day or two talking about, you know, the the Chicano movement, all these things, but really, as an American Studies major, I've been able to really dive into different histories and how it's been contributed to how we've developed as individuals. So, yeah, incredible.

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All right. So moving on, can you can we all talk about our experiences within clubs or other organizations that we're involved in that are centered around the Latino community or that have allowed us to help the Latino community within South Bend?

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Yes! I am involved with the Latino Honors Society, which is a club, and one of their opportunities that they offer to Latino students is the opportunity to volunteer in the local South Bend community as a tutor, helping local South Bend Latin Americans learn English and helping them with their English language skills. They also create a network, among other Latino students, and that's just one of the few examples of how this club has offered a way for Latino students at Notre Dame to feel as a part of a big family.

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Yeah, and just to add to that, one of the things I was worried about coming to Notre Dame was that I wasn't going to feel welcome and I wasn't going to be very involved because I wasn't sure just because coming from a predominantly Latino neighborhood, I wasn't sure what the vibe was. But luckily, I've made such a great community of folks, and it's all come down to the clubs that I've participated in. So, for example, freshman year there was a position for Social Media Coordinator on the Latin Student Alliance Board, and so I took it.

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And basically, the Latin Student Alliance Board dedicates their efforts to creating events that center around the Latino community at Notre Dame. And so we host like we host Latino Formal, we host a talent show, we all these things and it's been very valuable, and now being with that community, I've had the pleasure to become the Vice President and just to host like dance nights where I'm teaching people how to dance merengue, bachata, and salsa that's been so incredible to see how embracing people are to me wanting to teach, but also people wanting to learn, so it's been incredible.

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And I'm also part of Ballet Folklórico. When I was little, since I was three years old, I've been dancing, folkloric dancing, and so it's a very traditional Mexican thing to do. And so coming to Notre Dame, that was the first thing that I wanted to join. Everybody, even people that aren't very familiar with the types of dances have wanted to learn, and it's just been a very welcoming and inclusive environment where I feel like my culture, my identity is still retained and is stronger than ever because of that program, because of that specific club.

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Another one that I really liked was also the Latino first-year retreat. So for those individuals that are a little bit more closer to God and ones that feel closer with the community of Latinos are like-minded, there's a retreat that you do as a freshman where you go out for the weekend and you stay at a specific

campsite and you just bond and you create friendships and connections and it spans through the whole semester and the whole year.

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I went back not just as a participant, but as a food coordinator, so I've been able to bring some of my food home. As the food coordinator, I've been able to cater pozole, tamales, different things that I really love and that brings me close to my culture and also reminds others that they belong and to remember where they come from. It's been really incredible to see that I've been accepted and I feel at home and the people also feel the same in the clubs that I'm in.

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Those are wonderful stories that really, really open your eyes to how many opportunities there are within your community here at Notre Dame, because even in the places where you least expect it, you'll find someone that is just like you and kind of like Irasema and Vera have been talking about they found their communities and are able to continue those friendships beyond just one event with those groups.

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Continuing on, I think one of the biggest concerns is an incoming student is that you just don't know what Notre Dame actually is like until you get here. So what did you guys expect before coming to Notre Dame,, knowing that it was a predominantly white institution?

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Yeah. So for me personally, not a lot of people from the Dominican Republic applied to Notre Dame, so my extent of the knowledge of how campus is like and life was like was limited. But I did know a couple of Dominicans that were students at Notre Dame, and I reached out to them during my application process to learn more about Notre Dame. And they connected me with other Latinos in, for example, an architecture which was which was the field that I applied for, so I got to ask a Nicaraguan girl about her experience as an architecture student.

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It's interesting because once I was accepted to Notre Dame, I remember so many people that I didn't even know, they were all Latinos congratulating me, and these were people that I had no idea existed, but they knew of me and they knew that I got accepted, and I think that just goes to show how heartwarming the community not only is it, but also the one in the Latino community. And even before coming into Notre Dame, once I knew I was going to attend, I knew that there were Facebook groups that were for Latino students and I joined four WhatsApp groups because it's what we use to message, and I got to meet a lot of people that were also from Latin American countries.

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This way, when it came to Notre Dame for the first time on campus, it didn't feel like I was a loner by myself because I already knew that I had friends and I had people I could count on, and we had already established a relationship and a friendship. And to this day, they are my best of friends, and it's incredible how such a community was so welcoming when I was a new student, and they really did make me feel at home.

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Yeah, and I can just speak to that testimony as well. When I first got accepted into Notre Dame, I was the first Latina at my school and I was the first woman at my school to be accepted to Notre Dame. So I knew

nobody. And personally, I didn't really know about Notre Dame until I was applying. And so I mean, my idea of what Notre Dame, where we're super different than what a person that has lived Notre Dame experience was like, so I wasn't I didn't know what to expect, but I was open to everything.

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And so there was a an Instagram that was created for the class of 2024, so I put my bio and I had to like different a lot of different individuals comment, but I remember one individual who like me was born in another country but spent a lot of their lives in Indiana. Crazy enough, I connected with that person and then I met another person on the first day of class, Benjamin, shout out to my bestie and who literally is from Mexico and has lived in Indiana most of their life like me, and we literally have the same story, but we connected in our first International Relations course. And then from there, like, we've been best friends and it's like he is so similar to me and I'm so lucky that I have been able to meet him and because I been able to see how even being a first generation immigrant from Mexico, I feel really close to my kind of people. But I'm also close to a lot of different individuals who aren't just first generation, that are international, who are second generation, and that are from all different races and backgrounds.

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And that's the thing about Notre Dame. And I love random rooming because I when I met my other really close friend, Megan, who is a swimmer, incredible. I just feel like the connections that you make at Notre Dame are unforgettable, and I'm super blessed to be here.

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Yeah, I have to agree with what both of you guys have said, all three of us come have very different identities. We have Vera, who's an international student, and we have Irasema, who's a first generation immigrant here and me, who I'm a second generation immigrant and all of us coming with different experiences. I can say that we've all come to a similar consensus, which is that in that we found our place within our communities here at Notre Dame and we all have found that we've learned from each other and from our own perspectives.

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And like I said, I have gotten to know so many people like her, who's a first generation immigrant, like right now, who's an international student, and they have opened my eyes to my own culture and getting to learn through them and getting to learn from each other about our experiences, has been really enlightening and insightful and could not say that, why would be who the person that I am today without having interacted with my own community in a different light?

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Lastly, to wrap up, ladies, what is one thing that you think Notre Dame does to make the Latino community feel included?

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I think for me, it's their openness to learn and to support. I think one of the things that really is important is that we are living with these individuals with various individuals who aren't really familiar with our background, with our history the thing that makes it most memorable to me is when they take the time to listen and to learn and to advocate and to be an ally. And so I found within my own community that a lot of these individuals don't look like me or aren't like me, but still do respect me and love me for who I am because they understand, like where I come from and where I am today, and it's super powerful to see that, so that's one thing I love about Notre Dame,

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And definitely I agree with you Irasema, because personally, a lot of my peers, they aren't Latino, but they are so open and so interested in learning about my country, my culture, our typical phrases, our dances and everything, and I think that is not something that's specific to the students, but the professors, to everybody. And they are very respectful of our culture, which is shown in dining hall food options, in Spanish Mass, and in different things that they make sure that we feel welcome and that we feel invited and really represented.

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Couldn't have said it better myself. Well, thank you for joining us for another episode of College Bound. We hope you enjoyed hearing our perspectives. One more time, I'm Lulu, I'm Irasema, and I'm Vera. Thank you for joining us today and we'll see you all on the next episode.