

FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

00:00:11:15 - 00:00:32:23

Hello, listeners! Welcome back to another episode of our new season of College Bound. My name is Lulu Romero and I'll be your host for this episode of Notre Dame's College Bound podcast. A little bit about me: I'm a sophomore studying Psychology and American Studies with a minor in Latino Studies, and I'm originally from Orange County, California, but here at Notre Dame, I like to call Lyons Hall my home.

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If you are new to our podcast, first and foremost, welcome. This season we've been exploring identity at Notre Dame and have explored what it means to be a student at Notre Dame with intersectional identities. Some episodes that we have covered so far include being black at Notre Dame, being Latinx, being a part of the LGBTQ community, and so many more. If you are interested in any of these topics, I highly encourage you to listen to those episodes, which which can all be found on Spotify, Apple Music, or wherever you listen to your podcasts.

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To continue our journey here on our podcast, we will be exploring different identities at Notre Dame, and we will be addressing the conversation of being a first generation college student. Today, I have two special guests joining joining me, Miguel Coste and Allan Njomo. Hi, guys. Welcome.

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Hi there!

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Howdy, howdy, thanks for having me.

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Yeah, so I'll start. My name is Miguel Coste, I'm from Tampa, Florida, and I'm a Neuroscience major living in Alumni Hall. I'll be living off campus next year.

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I'm Allan Njomo. I am a senior. I study Business Analytics. I am a proud Stanford Hall Griffin. I'm actually working at Stanford Hall sweatshirt right now, and I am from Arlington, Texas, but I grew up in Nairobi, Kenya.

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Well, thank you so much, both of you, for joining us today and for being willing to share about your experiences as first gen college students. So we're just going to go right ahead and dive into things. Our first question that we have for you guys is what does it feel like to be the first in your family to go to college, especially at a place like Notre Dame?

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To be the first of my family to go to college is a badge of honor, a badge of pride. Not really because of the accomplishment, but because of what it means for my family; we've always viewed education as the equalizer of sorts. It's the thing that's going to take us to the next level as a family, whether here in the U.S. or in Kenya, and so to be the first to go to a college like the University of Notre Dame, it was a badge of honor because it meant being able to help my family in the future.

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Yeah, I pretty much agree with that, and it's incredibly humbling, and I'm grateful I'm the first person in my family to go to college. Even my siblings, I'm the only one who's gone, especially that it's Notre Dame, I can see the difference between me and my siblings, and I am very grateful for it.

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Yeah, I totally agree with you guys. I'm first gen myself, so really just being here is an absolute honor. And again, like both of you have said an incredibly humbling experience, and it's such an honor to be able to be the first and being able to make my set my family proud in that aspect.

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Well, moving on to the next question, what do you guys think was helpful to your success prior to arriving to Notre Dame? I know applying to college is such a daunting process, especially when you don't have any other person to guide you through it or has the experience of going through it, so what kind of resources did you guys look for or who did you talk to?

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Yeah. For me, I think the biggest thing that me helped me out was keeping an eye on my email. There are a lot of resources that were sent over to my email that I wish I took advantage of. For example, the enterprise program, we got an email about that. I got a couple of letters in the mail, didn't take advantage of that, and I've always looked back and regretted it a little bit. I know Miguel can attest to that a little bit because he's actually in the end. And Bryce program. But being able to dive into things like Building Bridges, which is an opportunity that came to me over email, being able to reach out to different people who I was connected to at Notre Dame was really instrumental in ensuring that I found success here.

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So the advice that I do have for someone who has been admitted to Notre Dame and has accepted their admission is to do what you can to reach out, but also keep an eye out on your email and what's coming into your email because there will be resources coming your way that can be instrumental towards your success here at Notre Dame.

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Yeah, pretty much agree. Checking email is huge, but also I think that my college counselor was a huge help for me and guiding the process and helping me to discern what schools are best for me and just figuring out like how I can actually make this happen for myself.

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Yeah, totally agree with Miguel. My high school counselor was the person I saw most besides my family during that time, I was always constantly going to him for questions or advice or just to debrief on how I was feeling during the whole thing. And also for me, finding that one teacher in high school that I was really close to, and that I kind of stuck around with for all four years and just talking to them and about their experiences was also really, really insightful because I feel like most of us forget that our teachers went through that at some point in their lives, and while the process may have looked different back then, like they still went through it and they probably know more than you will know at this point.

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Awesome. And well, going on to the next question, can you guys talk about any clubs or groups that are available to support first gen students like yourself here at Notre Dame? How did you guys find out about them? How did you get involved with them?

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Yeah. So the most important clubs or student groups I've found have been 1stG ND, the Questbridge chapter at Notre Dame, and then the First Gen Careers. I've actually been a part of all three on the boards. 1stG ND is more like a community-focused club to try to foster community among first gen students and provide them with the resources and point them in the right directions like the Office to Student Enrichment, Financial Aid and things like that. First Gen Careers is more for like career prep and resume reviews, and the Questbridge chapters, mainly for Questbridge students, but there's also a lot of work being done in that regard, too, in terms of building community.

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Yeah, I echo a lot of what Miguel said. I am one of the Questies but I'm not fully involved in the Questbridge chapter here at Notre Dame. I found a home in Building Bridges, which is a mentorship program through the MSPS or the Office of Multicultural Student Support Services. That service and that office has been instrumental in giving me mentors, guiding me in my career discernment, and beyond that, just having people that I know can go to whenever I encounter any issues.

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The program itself assigns you a peer mentor, a faculty mentor, and beyond that, it gives you access to a wealth of knowledge. Most first gen students have access to that, and so if you get an email from someone named Arnel Bulaoro, be sure to reply and take advantage of that opportunity.

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Also, the university started up a new program called the Transformational Leadership program, and essentially, it's to do the job of, all the first gen areas/low income areas, and it just really helps the students. It's more centralized and they actually have a space in the Main Building, which is awesome.

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You took the idea right out of me; I was going to talk about that, too! I know Notre Dame also has the Fighting Irish Scholars, I don't know too much about it, but make sure to look it up, and I don't know if any of you guys have more information on it.

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I'm actually a Fighting Irish Scholar. So the Fighting Irish Scholars program is out of the Office of Student Enrichment. It's essentially a scholarship you can apply for. You are given a stipend of a thousand dollars, which is free cash essentially. Particularly, you're able to use it for anything, preferably to sort of pad your college experience to ensure that you have the same access to college experience here at Notre Dame that other students do, whether that's football tickets or textbooks; you have free reign on how to spend that money, and then you get another thousand, which is contributed in the form of Domer Dollars.

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Once you get to campus to learn a little bit more about Domer Dollars, about \$200, but that tends to go to on-campus dining, the Bookstore, and there's a couple of restaurants around the area that accept that too, but the Fighting Irish Scholars is the program that is primarily for first generation and low income

students, and it also provides mentorship and programming geared towards ensuring that you can find a home here on campus.

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Excellent. I love that you guys are so involved in those organizations. It really speaks on how easy it is to find a group of people who are similar to you here on campus. And I guess our final question for this evening is, what advice do you guys have for students who feel unsettled or nervous about the application process or attending college, or just finding their place at whatever institution they choose to attend?

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I'd say it gets better. I was extremely nervous coming to Notre Dame. My story, essentially is that I accepted my admission here, but I came up here by myself; my dad wasn't able to join me in the trip. I didn't really know anyone up here during the application process, didn't really know what I was doing. I was just filling out things. And so it gets better. Once you see a campus, once you start meeting people, you start identifying the spaces where you will feel most home at.

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For me, it's been my dorm, but for other students as clubs, organizations, sports, or the classroom research projects. There's so much that you can do here on campus, and even though you may feel unsettled or nervous right now, once you get through that process, you will see just how much it was worth it because you will be able to find a place that you feel most at home. And if you don't, it's completely okay, too. There's resources to ensure that we support you throughout that process.

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Yeah, for sure. Allan's 100 percent right. And I'd also say, just like being nervous and unsettled, and it's very important, just like remember that the university accepted you, and that they wanted you, and they want you to be there. So just be yourself, keep doing what you've been doing and just have fun and enjoy the experience while still, you know, doing all the things you have to do.

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Those are wonderful pieces of advice. I'd have to agree with both of you and I think just being willing to take that leap of faith and take a risk of being at a place like Notre Dame is a huge accomplishment and you're here for a reason, and this place will set you up to go on to whatever career or life path that you choose, and you just have to be willing to explore that and be okay with being uncomfortable for the first few months, but I promise we all found our place so far.

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Well, that's all the time we have for today. Again, thank you so much, Miguel and Allan for joining us. I'm really grateful that you guys were able to share your experiences and offer some insight to all of our listeners. Thank you again to everyone for tuning in, and we will see you in our next episode of College Bound!