

Season 6 Episode 2

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Hey College Bound listeners. My name is Cece Guarnuccio and I'm a current junior here at the University of Notre Dame. We are so excited to bring you a new episode in our podcast, The Post Notre Dame Experience: A conversation with Notre Dame graduates about what their life has been like after graduation. Whether that was attending graduate school, going into the workforce, or moving abroad, we are ready to share with you the endless possibilities that are at your hands, when you graduate from Notre Dame.

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Last episode, we were joined by Dr. Lauren Michels, who shared with us her journey as she went from pursuing a neuroscience degree to where she is today at medical school, focusing on podiatry. We highly encourage you to check it out if you haven't already! Today, we are joined by Luis Alejandro Lazalde de, who'll be sharing with us what he's been up to since graduating from Notre Dame in 2017.

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Hi, Luis!

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All right, hey Cece, how's it going?

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Good. Thank you so much for joining us. As all Notre Dame conversations start when a Notre Dame student is involved. We'd love to hear your Notre Dame introduction. So your name, your major, your hometown, the dorm that you lived in while on campus and where you're at now, what you're doing

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Right on. So my name is Luis Lazalde originally from El Paso, Texas. I graduated 2017, which is, I guess part of the Notre Dame instruction once you're outside of school. And when I was on campus, I lived in Zahm for my first three years. And then fourth year I was an R.A. in Dunne. So that's where I live then. Nice to hear and let you know that I still have been in a place that's still around.

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And where are you at now? What are you doing now in your post-graduate life?

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Yeah. So I am in Austin, Texas. I work for Samsung. I'm a chemical engineer currently and, yeah, I've only been here for about, let me say, like six months or so, maybe a little bit over them. But yeah, it's been a good job. I love the city. Austin's great. There's a lot of means of people moving to Austin. So one of those guys and yeah, it's been. It's been super cool. Really, really blessed and really excited about it.

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Awesome. So kind of going off this chemical engineer I believe at Notre Dame, you said you studied chemical engineering. How would you say that your experience at Notre Dame prepared you for your post graduate work? Would you say there were any maybe clubs or experiences, courses that really stood out in particular that have helped you now where you're at today?

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Yeah. So I would say the biggest thing that Notre Dame teaches you, I think as especially as a STEM person entering the work world is a lot of the like soft skills that you need. A lot of, you know, engineers are known for being very introverted and not, you know, just kind of buried in the numbers. But I think the best part about Notre Dame is that it kind of forces you to get out of that shell, right. With your experiences in the dorm, with your clubs, with all that involvement. So that being said, while I was on campus, you know, I was very involved with the stuff in my dorm community, right, like most kids are. I was also involved a lot with like Latino ministry and stuff and like Filipino clubs. I did a lot with the Office of Admissions, actually. I'm not sure if it's still around, but I was a student recruitment coordinator for spring vis, I believe it like merged with another visit weekend and also cause, not 100% sure what the wait wait looks like now but I did help a lot with that. A lot of my time was spent under the dome when the Office of Admissions was still under the dome, which was kind of fun. And that being said, you know, just a lot of like interaction planning meetings, right? A lot of like communicating. Oh, and I'd say another big one is being an R.A. Not only following the rules and making sure that rules are great, but also, you know, building community, talking with kids, getting them together. And yeah, just leading a dorm community is a really big part of what you can see in the work world. You have to learn how to talk to different people, people with different, you know, skill sets with different interests, how do you interact with everyone? And that being said, I think that Notre Dame prepares you really well for that since you have to talk to so many folks and you know, all over the country, you're professors with, you know, your clubs and stuff. So yeah, I'd say that's a big one.

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And the technical side, I'd say a big part of it, like chemical engineering, is, you know, kind of got this reputation of being hard. And I don't I'm not going to say that it's not because it really was [laughs] a big part of the thing that I learned in class, especially when it comes to chemical engineering, was, you know, misery loves company. [laughs] I one thing I really got out of Notre Dame that I really loved was this idea that, like, you don't have to suffer alone. You know, you talk to a lot of your coworkers, you know, not your coworkers, students, you know, your classmates. You could see I've been in the working world a little bit too long. Talk to a lot of your classmates, right? See who gets office hours, like who is able to get to do the homework a little bit better, collaborate. And that really is a big part of engineering, in my opinion, is because like one person, even though they're brilliant, doesn't have all the answers. You got to talk to everyone but put everything together. And I think I see a lot of that in the workplace. So yeah, I

would say, you know, Notre Dame is just great for this kind of stuff. As you might expect to hear someone who went to Notre Dame say.

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Awesome, that's great to hear that kind of collaboration continues outside of Notre Dame, because one of the things I loved at Notre Dame, my time here is that collaboration, the community and the lack of competitiveness that really exists here that you might find at other top schools or in top workplaces. So good to know that carries over once you're done. You also kind of highlighted that beyond, you know, pursuing your chemical engineering major, you really were involved within a lot outside of academics or maybe even just interacting with people from different interest areas and all that.

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You yourself kind of had some very interests. If I remember correctly, with a minor in theology, which is kind of a very different field of study than chemical engineering, what kind of drew you to pursuing those two fields of study and how would you say those have carried into your postgraduate life and impacted the work you're doing?

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I love that question because I really think there's this kind of idea that scientists gravitate towards where you can't silo yourself into one way of thinking, right? So I feel like with this kind of idea of like left brain, right brain. And so if you're only ever using your left brain, which is like technical side and kind of like math, thinking skills, I think there's a really important part missing when you only focus on one side of the coin, as it were. And that's why I think when I was really going through school, I was interested in pursuing some kind of other, you know, way of thinking, which is, which is what you get a lot of with like philosophy and theology. I think that's one of the best things. It's kind of contentious, right? But I think it's one of the better things I think Notre Dame does, forcing you to take those two semesters of philosophy, two semesters of theology, because it really kind of forces you to think a little differently, especially if you're a STEM person. Right? What I really appreciated about theology and the minor that I got Notre Dame was, there's a broad range of theology classes that are out there.

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That being said, as most folks who probably listen to this might know, Notre Dame's theology department is probably one of the best in the world. And I was traveling from Madrid to Ireland and I was on a plane, next to this lady who she was a theology professor, funny enough, and I was like, Oh, yeah, I went to Notre Dame and she's like, Oh, really? Like, I was there for a conference and like, you know, I presented this paper and this is that. And so it is really world renowned. So I think it's one of those things that you kind of want to take advantage of while you're right there.

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And that being said, again, with the range of classes that you took, I took a class on Islam, which is really interesting, especially if you've grown up Catholic like I did. It's great to get a different perspective on the faith and like the folks who you hear about in the faith, right? There is a class that I took on the Church and Empire, which was really fascinating, kind of a historical church history kind of look of the way the church developed from its, you know, meager beginnings to a, you know, a worldwide religion, right. So I

would say that was something that's really interesting, because a lot of the effects that you see from things like religion and the way that people think and the way that people like believe reverberate even throughout, you know, now to this time into the interpersonal reactions and interactions that you have, you see a lot of these things. You may not see it right away, but the way that you present things or the way that you think about things is really apparent in the way that you know, you know your race or your faith and that kind of thing.

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And you see a lot of that in especially as engineers. Engineers tend to be very want to only think about numbers, want to only think that things are true and this and this and lay in that. But in reality, a lot of a lot of it can be subjective in the same way that, you know some might say effects are. So that being said, I think it's really great to think about not just your technical things as only being technical, but, you know, put on a theological lens, right? You know, like, oh, well, this person might say X, Y, Z, but this other person might say, you know, ABC and really that kind of melding of the two kind of, you know, left brain, right brain is really fascinating to me and I've felt has been something that I've been really blessed and able to apply in my life after graduation. So, yeah, it's really cool.

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I myself am a marketing and film, television and theater major. I So that's kind of combining that business with the arts and letters little different than chemical engineering and theology, but I definitely have a good appreciation for finding a balance between numbers and those critical thinking skills. So another question for you. As I'd imagine, we have some prospective students listening to this podcast. What advice would you have for a prospective student who's looking to go into the chemical engineering major and maybe those who are also looking to have that interdisciplinary focus that you had at Notre Dame?

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One thing that was really great about the way that I entered Notre Dame and my time there was I had the opportunity during high school to have a couple different classes, count toward basics classes, you know, kind of like you're writing and rhetoric and like all those kind of ones would say if you're able to as a prospective student who, you know, you see your high school offers these dual credit classes and stuff, and you're really interested in having a more broad range of classes, at Notre Dame, I would say try and get into those classes to get some, you know, credits, dual credits out of the way, because that really does go a long way in college curriculum, right? Like you've only got a certain amount of like credits and the interesting thing about chemical engineering and just like STEM majors in general, right? Is that your curriculum is really focused. You know, as a chemical engineer, all chemical engineer is going to take like thermo one and two, you're going to have to take like physics one and two, you're going to have to take all these other things. So if you can get some of those other basic classes out of the way via like something like dual credit, I think that be really helpful for you, especially if you want to pursue something with a lot more range like I did. That's the way I was able to get that theology minor was because I had some classes that freed up my schedule through that bill credit stuff.

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Coming to Notre Dame in general, I will say I'm from El Paso, Texas, as I mentioned previously, so I am from the desert. Notre Dame is not the desert. In fact, it is quite literally the opposite of a desert. So I will

say just kind of be prepared for what you're getting into. It will be cold, it will be dreary. You may not see the sun until May, which is just like fine, like it's just like the Midwest permacloud. Just know what you're getting yourself into, and that's okay. It was really great to make friends who are also from like, you know, similar backgrounds. Like, you know, I had friends from Texas and California and stuff who we all kind of like, oh, you know, like this is too cold and oh, this is like too crazy and stuff. And we would all drudge our way to class. But I mean, the first couple of times it was really fun to build snowmen and have snowball fights on the quad. Like the first snowball fight was like super fun. I always look forward to that just now. If you're from a place that's not the Midwest, it is like you should look up what the Midwest is like, especially in the winter.

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Other things to kind of look forward to. I would say a big thing about Notre Dame and just be like open, I guess. It's really big and really cool place to explore. Like there's so many different classes and stuff out there that you can potentially get into and yeah, just be open to what comes your way. Like, for example, I mentioned that theology minor, right? I also took like tap dancing senior year, which is like super cool, you know, and really wild and wacky and just like, look, look for what classes are out there because there's so much opportunity. And quite frankly, you're in one of the, like best, you know, research institutions in the world, best theology department. You have some of the top, you know, talents and minds of your peers throughout the country, right? Like, who are your friends and who are your dorm mates? So really take advantage of all those folks that are around you while you have that opportunity. Because let me tell you, four years passes by really fast and and quite frankly, at some of the best time of your life. And at the same time, all those folks that I knew then, like some of my best friends now, I still keep in touch with them.

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When I first moved to Austin, like literally the first people that I reached out to were Notre Dame friends that I made, you know, in 2017 and who I hadn't even really met until I just heard like, Oh, I heard this person's here. I just like reached out to them on my Instagram. And sure enough, we like, have been hanging out, you know, So like, it's stuff like that, which is really cool, that Notre Dame community. And so if you're coming in new as a, you know, prospective student and stuff, just know that it's, it's kind of an investment for a lifetime, really. Which seems kind of scary when it first does a probably like thinking about this, but it's really exciting and really cool because all the experiences you're going to have, I assure you, will be the best experiences of your life. So yeah, I would say, aside from all that, I mean, come to Notre Dame, like it's so much fun, it's super cool and bring a coat [laughs]

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A parka investment is always a good first purchase. One of my two favorite things about Notre Dame is, one, when you're on campus for the first snowfall and you can see all the kids from the warm states see snow for the first time, a lot of them. And they're so happy. It's very fun to watch. And then two, any time you're out wearing a Notre Dame gear and somebody says, Go Irish, the community is everywhere. The Notre Dame network is vast and you're going to get called out for it and a really good way, which is always fun.

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I might tell you. So I actually just finished, this weekend I was in California. I was traveling out with some friends from St Louis, which is where I worked previous to Austin, and there was a woman wearing a Notre Dame T-shirt walking up from the beach, and I was walking down to the beach and I tossed her a Go Irish and she tossed one back. It's literally everywhere, like there are Notre Dame people everywhere and least expected places. I found someone at the top of the Coastal San Angelo where the Notre Dame church was once, and it is just incredible, like the literal worldwide reach that this school has and also just take advantage of that and love it. And it's so cool. It's one of my favorite things, actually. Yeah.

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Absolutely. I would also kind of love to, you know, you highlighted that you were in Saint Louis before coming to Austin. I'd love to know a little bit about your career path and the scope of your work that you're doing now just for all those chemical engineering majors listening who might want to see what opportunities are out there for them with their degree?

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Yeah, absolutely. So I might give a shout out to for all the chemical engineering friends, if you are interested in reaching out, I mean, feel free to do so. I'm on LinkedIn, you know, I'm sure Cece will drop details at some point, but I feel free. I'm always happy to talk and share my expenses. But, you know, for now what I'll say is this is actually kind of an interesting story because I always love to frame it this way because senior year I was like, really, like interested, and actually bit before then, I actually was very interested in going to like grad school for a long time. I was like, Oh, look, I'm going to be a doctor of like something or other.

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Let's rewind all the way back. When I first started, you know, freshman year, I was a mechanical engineering major, and then I was then I heard that chemical engineering you could actually go to like med school with. And I was like, Oh, that's kind of weird. Okay, cool, cool, cool. So I went ahead and signed up for chemical engineering, not only because of like the med school idea, but also because I'm stubborn. And heard that chemical engineering is the hardest major at Notre Dame. And so I was like, Oh, obviously I have to do the hardest thing. And so, yeah, it was really interesting, the health thing. I ended up taking a lot of like the pre health track classes, which just means that, you know, you take like organic chemistry Orgo in the real world people call it OChem, which is just not right.

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People also called chemical engineering ChemE, which is also not right. It's CHEG. You know you take like Orgo with like the science kids, right? You also take like biology, you take like an extra chemistry or two and that like fills up your like pre-med requirements, which is like something that you can do with as a chemical engineer, which not a lot of majors can do. So I did that and I also took like bioengineering, like electives and stuff, which is also really fascinating. But then I did research over some over like two summers, like between my sophomore year and the one between my junior year, one between my junior year, I did at Notre Dame. And honestly, like I really respect the kids who go into academia after school. It's just not for me because I am impatient. I would do like these experiments and stuff over like the time, and it just took forever and like it would always like mess up or like the results weren't great and like some of the developments that have been happening with regard to the field of medicine, right? Like, you

know, like, for example, you know, the technology that made like the COVID vaccine possible has been in development for like ten, 15 years already. And was it only until recently, like approved and like, you know, made it possible to be like a thing to even do until like super, super recently? So, like, it's just super long timeframe.

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You also have to like, you know, go to grad school. You also have to like, you know, do it whole thing. And I was just like, not about it because that's an even more money that you have to spend even longer until you make money. That's just my opinion. And again, that's why I'm saying I love I love the kids who go into it because I respect the heck out of you because I can. I just can't. So please don't let this be a discouragement from y'all who want to, you know, pursue that field. That being said, though, I pivoted between junior and senior year and started applying for industry jobs. And unfortunately, you know, kind of senior year, I was trying really hard to get a job, but I didn't have internships, right? I had research experience.

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And so it was a little difficult to get a job right out of school. So at the end of senior year, like spring semester, senior year, I just said like, screw it. Like, I'm just going to enjoy the rest of my time, you know, like I'm just going to enjoy the last semester of spring, last spring semester of senior year and just have fun, you know, which I really. We encourage you guys to do like honestly, don't stress about the future too much. Especially as a student who's currently now like in you know, if you're looking and stuff like and it's not going so great. Like honestly, just like it's going to work itself out. Like, I know it's easy for me to say as a person who's got you know, a job, but like, honestly, like very truly, like the time in this, the search that you put in, like, will work out.

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Yeah, so I just enjoyed spring semester, graduated. I got a gig actually as a like RA/TA in Rome actually after graduation. So got to go to Rome and hang out with, you know, study abroad kids there, which is a lot of fun. But then as soon as I came back, I started like applying again, you know, like I called it like being a full time unemployed. Like I literally for like wake up and like, just like, apply, apply, apply all day network, network, network. That's what I would say is networking is like the most important thing. Like you guys don't know. Never underestimate the power of networking. Literally, like LinkedIn's your friend emails or your friend. The Notre Dame Alumni Network is your friend. You should go to my.Nd.Edu and go into the database there and you can search, you know, alumni who are like in certain fields and who are in certain companies if you're interested in certain areas, super, super helpful. So that's I did did a lot of that. And sure enough, again, Notre Dame Network, I reached out to a person in Saint Louis who was in DuPont, which is the company that I work for previously, who was from Notre Dame. And I emailed him saying, you know, Hey, look, I'd love to talk about this position, whatever. Sure enough, we talked and it turned out that he was the person who was hiring for that position. So I was like, Oh, no way, this is great. You know, what a coincidence. So we had an actual formal interview over the phone. Then after that, he invited me to come out to interview in Saint Louis. The only thing that I'll knock against him is that he was a Keenan Knight and I was in Zahm. So, like, that's just, you know, a little bit of like, history there, But like, whatever went well, had the interviews and got a job offer.

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And so, yeah, after graduation, they went over to Saint Louis, had been there for about five or so years. I was working for DuPont in a segment which was basically designing sulfuric acid plants. So sulfuric acid is one of the world's largest commodity chemicals. Like everyone uses sulfuric acid in some way or another. It's used in like mining, it's used in like refining for oil and gas. It's used to make fertilizer. It's really, really big. And so a lot of countries you could actually track their like GDP versus like how much sulfuric acid they consume. So really important stuff and really cool stuff. And in fact, I was there for yeah, about five or so years the pandemic hit and then I went home to El Paso and just worked remotely from El Paso for about like a year and a half was like 2020 to about like mid 2021, which is so much fun, you know, hanging out with my family again. At that point, you have to think like I hadn't been home in El Paso since before Notre Dame. You know, like I hadn't been back to Texas for almost like a decade at that point. It was kind of crazy. So it was cool to be back with family, great times. And so, yeah, 2021 came around. I went back to St Louis for about like a year or so and then decided I kind of wanted to move back to Texas, especially after the fun that I had had, you know, during the pandemic, with my family. So then I decided to put my feelers out there, mid-last year there was an opening at Samsung and reached out, you know, there got some interviews and yeah, I've been now working here in Austin for about sevenish months or so, and it's been a ton of fun.

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Really, really enjoy it here, really enjoy the company, really enjoy the warmth also. And you can see this trend here about like my my love of weather. It's definitely a change because of my work previously in the, you know, segment of DuPont was more design focused. So it's a lot so much of what my chemical engineering friends might like remember from my process design class and like senior design, it was very much like using Aspen, doing calculations, like sizing equipment, that kind of stuff. Whereas my current job at Samsung is, you know, first of all, semiconductor environment is like way different than like, you know, other industries. You think like clean rooms, you think super small stuff like cutting edge, really expensive. This is crazy. It's also a manufacturing environment, which is something that I wasn't used to. So I've been learning a lot through that just in the time that I've been there, you know, it's been really like different, really cool to kind of like pick people's brains about how things are actually work in real life instead of just like something theoretical like I used to do. It's just really neat to, like, apply all that stuff that you learned, you know, theoretically and in class and whatnot, like in the real world and do calculations and stuff to see how it actually like affects stuff.

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For more specifics on like my Samsung job, I work in like the facilities area, so not necessarily like in the clean room and the fab is what it's called. But outside of it, basically making sure that everything in the fab you know, tool and things in the fab get the things that they need. So they need to get like water. They need to get, you know, air. And my job is to work on the scrubbers, which take all the nasty stuff which is in the fab and all those like tools and stuff, all the stuff they like, gross stuff that they make and make it clean before going back to the air and to the atmosphere.

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It's really cool. It's really rewarding to kind of like, know that you're, you know, first of a ll putting, you know, Samsung and the US, you know, in a really great position for making semiconductors. But also at

the same time, you know, you're making sure that, you know, Austin is safe and good, you know, through your efforts working on your equipment. So it's been really cool, really fun, really just excited to keep learning more.

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That sounds awesome. Well, glad you're enjoying your time at Samsung so far, that's kind of all the questions that I've had for me. Did you have any comments or last final remarks that you would like to make before we end our episode for today?

00:23:21:13 - 00:24:19:20

You know, I would just say if you're if your prospective said Notre Dame is one of the best decisions you'll make, it's one of those things where I kind of look back on my life and the trajectory that it's taken, and it literally could not have been the way it is now if it weren't for that decision that I made. And it's kind of in your hands, you know, you can hear all these really great things that, you know, I've got to say in other folks, but at the same time make the best decision That's right for you. You know, weigh everything correctly for my friends who are currently in school and, you know, about to enter the workforce and whatnot. It's a really big world out there. It's way different than college. It's really crazy, you know, like not having a dining hall and having to cook your food like, every single day and survive. But at the same time, like, it's really rewarding. There's a whole, you know, dimension of freedom you didn't know existed. And it's just really cool to kind of finally choose your own path, do what makes you happy and just continue with the rest of your life. But as I've been saying now, you know, like it wouldn't have been possible without the great tools, friends, Experiences that you had everyday.

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Awesome. Thank you so much for joining us. We appreciate your time.

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Well, that's all the time that we have for today. Thank you so much, Luis, for your time. And thank you listeners for joining us for another episode of College Bound. We hope you enjoyed getting to hear just one of the many perspectives regarding your time at Notre Dame could look like. Make sure to come back next week for another insightful experience from a Notre Dame alum and to listen to all of the past seasons of College Bound on Spotify, Apple or wherever you listen to your podcasts.

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See you next time and Go Irish!