

Gloria Sosa: [00:00:00](#) Thank you for giving me the time to talk to you, Fermin. Can you please share with me your age, your preferred gender pronouns, and the years you were at Cal State?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:00:13](#) My name's Fermin. I'm 35, and my preferred gender pronouns are he, him, his, and I was at Cal State LA from 2006 to 2010.

Gloria Sosa: [00:00:26](#) And were you a student or what was your role?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:00:29](#) I was a student.

Gloria Sosa: [00:00:32](#) Can you describe your occupation?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:00:38](#) Yeah, I do media and communications for nonprofits and unions.

Gloria Sosa: [00:00:46](#) Like a private consultant or do you work for a specific organization?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:00:52](#) I'm a communications consultant. I have different clients.

Gloria Sosa: [00:00:55](#) Oh, nice. Could you share with me your family background? Where's your family from? Where were you born and raised?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:01:08](#) Yes. So my family's from El Salvador. My mom came here as a result of the Civil War in El Salvador in 1992, right after the peace accords were signed. I came over here in 1999 and I crossed three borders at Guatemala, Mexico, y Estados Unidos, to be here, to be reunited with my mom.

Gloria Sosa: [00:01:45](#) Did you come with siblings or were you coming alone?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:01:48](#) I was coming with a coyote and with other kids.

Gloria Sosa: [00:01:55](#) Your family?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:01:56](#) No, no family, [I] came alone with other people. Pretty much strangers that we kind of just met up, at a Pizza Hut, <laugh>. Then the coyote got there, and then we set on, on this journey of 3000 miles across Guatemala, Mexico, and the U.S.

Gloria Sosa: [00:02:19](#) How old were you?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:02:20](#) I was 11.

Gloria Sosa: [00:02:23](#) Do you remember?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:02:24](#) Yeah, I remember a lot. Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:02:26](#) Can you briefly, if you want, I mean, I know it might trigger some type of memories, but if you're willing to share with me, [what] was the journey like, I mean...you were very young.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:02:34](#) Absolutely. I'm somebody that...Like a couple years ago, the media started using this term unaccompanied minor.

Gloria Sosa: [00:02:44](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:02:46](#) And they frame it as if it's a new issue, but it's not.

Gloria Sosa: [00:02:50](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:02:51](#) Kids have been coming here by themselves for decades, decades and decades. And I was one of them in 1999. My aunt dropped me off at this house in El Salvador, in the capital San Salvador.

Gloria Sosa: [00:03:09](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:03:10](#) And then other kids got there too around at the same age, around 11. They were 12, 13, 10. So all of us [were] around the same age, and we took a bus from El Salvador to Guatemala, and we took all modes of transportation. We took a train. We traveled by car, we traveled by foot. We traveled by plane as well. We took a plane from, I think it was from Southern Mexico.

Gloria Sosa: [00:03:42](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:03:43](#) I think it was probably Oaxaca or something like that, to Mexico City, el Distrito Federal. And it was very interesting because one of the things that I remember was that in 1999, the Pope had just arrived in Mexico City, - Juan Pablo segundo - very, very vividly because I remember going to El Zocalo in Mexico City with some of the other kids.

Gloria Sosa: [00:04:16](#) With the group?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:04:17](#) Yeah. Because we were kind of like stuck there. We're waiting for the coyote to -

Gloria Sosa: [00:04:23](#) To make a move?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:04:24](#) Yeah. For us to keep the journey going. So they took us to El Zocalo for some reason, I remember all the vendors, all the pigeons were flying, just walking around because the Pope had just been there the week before we got there. This was January of 1999. And yeah, then we traveled by car. They took everything away from us, money, clothes. So we didn't really have anything. So we were just traveling with nothing, pretty much. Only the clothes that we had on, they told us to get rid of everything. The coyote -

Gloria Sosa: [00:05:12](#) The coyotes took your belongings from you?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:05:13](#) Mmhmm, yeah. They took everything. They didn't want us to carry anything, however, <laugh>. I remember also like, I didn't get rid of everything. I hid some Colones, which was, is the national currency of El Salvador -

Gloria Sosa: [00:05:32](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:05:32](#) - which was money in the van that we were at. And it was like maybe like 200, 300 Colones, so it was like several bills and like, you know, cuz they check you. Right. So I didn't have anything, but I had hid it in the compartment in the car. Yeah. And then when they told us to get off the car and, you know, walk, I remember taking it out and I had that money with me and I brought it over here. Like you made it <laugh> to the U.S.

Gloria Sosa: [00:06:02](#) So you brought it with you to the U.S.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:06:04](#) Yeah. But the actual crossing then became...we crossed with papers from other kids. I think that's how it was, because they told us to...we were at one of the houses in Mexico, and then they trained us essentially to...they told us to pretend that we were asleep.

Gloria Sosa: [00:06:27](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Okay.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:06:29](#) There was like a couple driving. Right. And it's like an SUV and we were in the back, I think it was two or three of us in the back. So then they told us, you know, pretend you fell asleep or if they ask you something, they taught us some words in English. Like, 'hi, how you doing?' You know, 'my name is'...so they taught us a few words to say in case one of the immigration agents would ask us questions. But they didn't. So, I arrived in San Isidro, in San Diego.

Gloria Sosa: [00:07:07](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:07:09](#) And my mom went to pick me up from my house in San Diego. In San Idisro, very close to the border. Yeah. And I had not seen my mom for about six years at that point. Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:07:22](#) So she left when you were very very young.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:07:24](#) She left when I was five. Yeah. And I stayed with an aunt and my cousins so I grew up with them. And then I was reunited with my mom when I was 11.

Gloria Sosa: [00:07:37](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:07:38](#) Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:07:38](#) How was seeing your mom again?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:07:40](#) It was very different. I mean, I had talked to her like over the phone here and there, and like, she would send like toys and, you know, remesas.

Gloria Sosa: [00:07:51](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:07:54](#) So seeing her was just different because I was already used to my aunt, you know, like [I would] call my aunt a second mom. And my mom was pregnant at that time too, so she looked different. Everything was just different. And like a new country was like...I didn't really recognize my own mom that much.

Gloria Sosa: [00:08:14](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:08:15](#) She was pregnant with my sister at that time. And everything was just new, you know, and yeah. Different.

Gloria Sosa: [00:08:26](#) Right. So did she **inform your family** when she got here?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:08:30](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative> Yeah. She was with my sister's dad.

Gloria Sosa: [00:08:38](#) When you got here your mom picked you up from San Isidro.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:08:43](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Gloria Sosa: [00:08:43](#) And then where did you move on to? LA area? Or, where?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:08:49](#) Yeah. We were like many Central American families. We lived in Pico Union at that time, in Los Angeles, by MacArthur Park, that sort of area. Uh, yeah, <laugh>.

Gloria Sosa: [00:09:04](#) So you moved there and you stayed there until when?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:09:08](#) We moved around in LA, also like the experience of so many immigrant families. I lived in Pico Union but then we moved towards... It's called Mid City, basically by like Pico and Fourth Street, Pico and Arlington, Pico and Crenshaw, around that area. Mid City in LA. So I went to middle school..well, the second semester of fifth grade, I was placed in the second semester of fifth grade. Went to middle school at Pio Pico, and then went to high school for my freshman year at LA High.

Gloria Sosa: [00:09:48](#) LA High.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:09:49](#) Yeah. But I was only there for like, about a year and a half. The second semester of 10th grade, I went back to Pico Union actually. Then I went to Belmont High School and that's where I graduated from.

Gloria Sosa: [00:10:05](#) Mhm, okay. But it was always around the same LA area, right?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:10:09](#) Yeah. LA metropolitan area. Yes.

Gloria Sosa: [00:10:12](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Very nice. Yeah. Do you remember your middle school?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:10:18](#) Pio Pico

Gloria Sosa: [00:10:19](#) Oh, Pio Pico. How was that experience of transitioning from.. yeah. Arriving and trying to, I guess, fit in with the elementary school?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:10:31](#) Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:10:32](#) Because I imagine it was really different, wasn't it?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:10:35](#) Yeah. Well, the first semester was because I went to the second semester of fifth grade, so-

Gloria Sosa: [00:10:41](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:10:43](#) - and I had a white teacher who didn't speak Spanish. And I think I was, maybe it was just me and someone else, or, I think it was just me that didn't speak English. It was like a native English speaking class -

Gloria Sosa: [00:10:58](#) Oh, wow.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:10:59](#) - that they placed me in for some reason. So I had like a tutor. She was like a teacher's assistant that would come, I think like two or three times a week to help me out to learn English. But it was very difficult because I remember kids making fun of me or asking me to like, say bad words, you know? And I felt like I didn't fit in. Because they had been kind of together since first grade or second grade, you know? And I had just come in and I was just kind of the odd kid in the class that had just come and like, not knowing English. It was very, just different, difficult to make friends, to understand the language, to adjust.

Gloria Sosa: [00:11:46](#) Mm-hmm.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:11:46](#) <affirmative>. Yeah. However when I went to the second semester when I started middle school it was much easier because then I was placed in a dual immersion program. So most of my classes were in Spanish. Like, I was taking math, science, history in Spanish, like from sixth to seventh grade. And I had two classes of English, you know, like ESL classes. So that was pretty cool. Because a lot of the other kids in that school too, had just arrived. Or they had been here, kind of like a similar experience to mine, you know. So that was...that middle school transition period was pretty cool because I felt like we had a shared experience with the other students and they were learning English too, you know? Acababan de llegar.

Gloria Sosa: [00:12:46](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. So in a sense, more welcoming, right?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:12:49](#) Right. Yeah. Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:12:54](#) Okay. Yeah. Thank you for sharing that. And so at this time during middle school, you feel more supported and, did you feel more comfortable with [the] English language? Or did you struggle with that?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:13:07](#) I mean relatively speaking, I thought I picked it up pretty quickly. I say like, in a couple of years when I was speaking, writing. So at first, the first semester was really shocking just because teachers didn't speak English, all the students were native speakers. But when they put me in the dual immersion program with Spanish classes and other kids that had a shared experience as mine, then it was a lot easier.

Gloria Sosa: [00:13:43](#) So at this time, did you know about your undocumented status?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:13:47](#) I kinda did. Yeah. I kind of..I would say I did, but it didn't really matter at this point because, I mean, I wasn't working, I wasn't

going to college, so it didn't really matter. Cause school was free <laugh>.

Gloria Sosa: [00:14:04](#) Right. You were a child. So you were camouflaged, in a sense.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:14:08](#) Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Gloria Sosa: [00:14:09](#) <affirmative>. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Sure. Okay. So when did it become a challenge? Or when did you realize that you were undocumented? I mean, you were like -

Fermin Vasquez: [00:14:18](#) I knew, I've always realized that because I knew I crossed three borders, <laugh>.

Gloria Sosa: [00:14:23](#) Yes.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:14:23](#) And it wasn't my papers, but when when it made a difference in terms of like having a paper to like pursue your dreams, I think it was right before college or, you know, when I was applying to colleges, I felt like I was starting to see if I could find a job when I was like 16. I would say 17. So I felt like at that moment, having papers could make or break you. Because it's the difference between you having access to so many resources and opportunities and scholarships and applying to any college you want, and living up to the American creed that says, you know, you could do anything if you put your mind into it. Well, I had put my mind into it, <laugh>, and I had gotten good grades, and that was not enough, because a simple eight digit number, nine digit number makes the difference between you having a wealth of opportunities in this country or not. And it's just as simple as that.

Gloria Sosa: [00:15:33](#) Right. So this happened mostly when you were in high school?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:15:38](#) Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:15:39](#) Okay. And what were some of the challenges besides getting a job and applying to the college you wanted?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:15:45](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Well yeah, those two are the main ones. And access to scholarships was the other key. I didn't have access to financial aid, didn't have access to applying to many scholarships because they require you to be a citizen or to have a social security number. And then also, -

Gloria Sosa: [00:16:06](#) What year?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:16:07](#) This was in 2005, roughly. I was like a junior in high school when you start applying to colleges.

Gloria Sosa: [00:16:14](#) Right. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And that's when everything's starting to come...

Fermin Vasquez: [00:16:19](#) To unravel-

Gloria Sosa: [00:16:20](#) - to unravel, yeah. That's the right word.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:16:22](#) Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:16:23](#) Yes. Okay. Did you have any resources to overcome the challenges? Or how did you manage?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:16:32](#) Yeah. I have a pretty interesting story about that. So, I was always going to my college counselor, they were trying to be supportive because at Belmont High School, they knew I wasn't the only undocumented student. They had seen my story many times before.

Gloria Sosa: [00:16:48](#) Before you <laugh>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:16:49](#) Yeah. So they were receiving training on different..they were connected to different organizations. And they connected me to the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, which is..stands for CHIRLA.

Gloria Sosa: [00:17:05](#) mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:17:06](#) And so I joined their youth organizing group called Wise Up! when I was a junior in high school. So I started going to those meetings, and that's how our organizing started, my organizing journey started in high school. And as a result of that, you know, we would do like fundraisers, they taught us how to lobby, how to show our stories, going to Sacramento, going to Washington DC, fighting for legalization for all 12 million undocumented people, and also for the DREAM Act.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:17:41](#) But one particular moment that I think really defines who I am was May 2006. That's when all the huge marches in Los Angeles were happening.

Gloria Sosa: [00:17:55](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:17:56](#) And I remember we organized a walkout at Belmont High School in 2006 to protest the virulent anti-immigrant legislation



that was happening. At that time it was HR 4437, I remember very vividly.

Gloria Sosa: [00:18:12](#)

Yes.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:18:13](#)

They sought to criminalize a whole generation of undocumented folks.

Gloria Sosa: [00:18:18](#)

Yes. Yeah.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:18:19](#)

So we led a walk out. In 2006, we marched from Belmont to City Hall, and we protested at the mayor's office. Uh-huh <affirmative>.

Gloria Sosa: [00:18:29](#)

And you were a senior at this time, right?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:18:30](#)

A senior, yes. And right around that time of graduation in May 2006, I was also part of CHIRLA. They had organized a huge march that was one of the biggest in the United States -

Gloria Sosa: [00:18:43](#)

Yes.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:18:43](#)

- in the history of the United States. It was like a million people walking down Wilshire Boulevard, towards the west side. And I was behind the stage because I was a young person that was gonna speak on stage, I was giving interviews to the media, sharing my story to...we're talking about CNN, ABC. And I was one of the spokespeople for the march and one of the youth leaders. And at that point, at that march, I was behind the stage, I saw a sea of hundreds of thousands of people that I could see, as far back as I could see -

Gloria Sosa: [00:19:26](#)

And the line continued.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:19:26](#)

Yeah. It continued. And I was just in the front of that, and I was giving interviews to the media and then somebody from...I think it was the communications director from CHIRLA at that time, introduced me to somebody named Erika Glazer. And I had like 60 seconds, maybe like two minutes, a minute and a half. And I just told her, 'Hey, my name is Fermin, I'm an undocumented student and my dream is to go to college. I'm here fighting for my dreams and the dreams of thousands of people like myself.' And she asked me, 'what do you wanna be?' And I was like, 'I just wanna give back to my community and pursue my dream of going to college, you know?'

Gloria Sosa: [00:20:14](#)

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:20:15](#) And I remember she looked at me and she was like, 'I'm gonna help you out.' As you know, she's the founder of the Dream Center. So that's how we met.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:20:26](#) I was the first person to meet her. And it happened at that march, I remember she looked at me, she was like, I'm gonna help you out. And then we exchanged information with the people from the staff, from CHIRLA too. A few months after that, I found out that she had started a scholarship fund for undocumented students called the Erika J. Glazer Scholarship. And I was the first one to get it. So that was like a super -

Gloria Sosa: [00:21:07](#) Accomplishment

Fermin Vasquez: [00:21:07](#) Yeah. But it comes back to the power of organizing...that's how we met. And it comes back to the power of storytelling, because I shared my story with her, you know, and she was looking for some way to give back. And I think when she started to meet, like a lot of us, it reminded her of her own immigrant background that she's talked about before. How her grandparents came here as European immigrants, you know, at some point. So that was really super great. That's how I got a full ride scholarship to Cal State LA, through the Erika Glazer Scholarship.

Gloria Sosa: [00:21:51](#) Did you choose to go to Cal State LA or how -

Fermin Vasquez: [00:21:53](#) I did.

Gloria Sosa: [00:21:54](#) You did?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:21:55](#) Why? Because the scholarship was only to Cal State LA at that point.

Gloria Sosa: [00:22:01](#) Okay.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:22:02](#) Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:22:02](#) It was kinda like chosen, but at the same time -

Fermin Vasquez: [00:22:04](#) Yeah. Chosen. Yeah. Yeah. Because I had gotten into a couple of UCs and I just couldn't pay for it.

Gloria Sosa: [00:22:15](#) Right. Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:22:16](#) So if I was gonna receive a scholarship, then -

Gloria Sosa: [00:22:21](#) - you were gonna take it.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:22:21](#) I was just gonna go there, you know?

Gloria Sosa: [00:22:23](#) Yeah. So I mean CHIRLA, and Wise Up! What was it? An organization, right?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:22:30](#) It's like a youth organization. It's the youth organizing component of CHIRLA. Wise Up!

Gloria Sosa: [00:22:34](#) Okay. So they helped you convey your story and tell it in a way that's impactful and truthful, and I guess to the point, right?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:22:44](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Gloria Sosa: [00:22:44](#) And that way you are able to convince Erika that you're the one who deserves of this help that she is trying to get out there.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:22:58](#) Yeah. Yeah. It was a...in the midst of all that chaos of a million people being there, like, what are the chances that I met her? You know?

Gloria Sosa: [00:23:08](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:23:09](#) At that point, she lives in Beverly Hills, so we were marching towards her house, <laugh>, and, uh,

Gloria Sosa: [00:23:16](#) - so what were the odds of that? Right. That..yeah.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:23:18](#) What the odds that... and I think those are some moments that sort of define me sometimes, you know? And, ever since then, I think a lot of doors opened for me after that.

Gloria Sosa: [00:23:32](#) Right. And let me ask you how did you feel at that moment when you were sharing your story with Erika?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:23:40](#) Well, I was sharing my story with a lot of people...Like I said, I was sharing it with like, CNN or ABC News, all the news outlets that were there. But I didn't know Erika at that point. It was just like sharing it with the same way I had shared it with my college counselor, with my teachers, you know, it was just another person that <laugh>, I was hoping to convince or change their heart. Right. To see the value that young people bring regardless of their immigration status. Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:24:20](#) And because it takes courage, I think, to be able to tell a story that's deep with emotions.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:24:27](#) It does. But it's something that...I think that...is why I value organizing so much. Because at that point, I already had like a year, year and a half of organizing [experience], and I've shared my story already with legislators. With a bunch of other news outlets. Like, in high school, I had a camera crew of..It's like MTV but in espanol, it's called **Mun2**. It was a channel, like the Latino spinoff of MTV. And they were following my story. They followed me to prom.

Gloria Sosa: [00:25:07](#) Really?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:25:07](#) They followed me when I went to lobby in Sacramento to talk to legislators, they went to Washington, D.C. So I had like a documentary crew, following me around in high school -

Gloria Sosa: [00:25:18](#) Oh, wow.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:25:18](#) - following my activism and sharing my story. And they created a 30 minute immigration special that was aired on national television. So I had that experience of sharing my story in a way that creates change and it creates impact.

Gloria Sosa: [00:25:37](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:25:38](#) So I felt lucky to have had like, those organizing trainings that helped me to do that.

Gloria Sosa: [00:25:45](#) **Sounds like you're a local celebrity.**

Fermin Vasquez: [00:25:47](#) <laugh> Used to be

Gloria Sosa: [00:25:48](#) Used to be, I think you still are,

Fermin Vasquez: [00:25:51](#) I'm retired from the game.

Gloria Sosa: [00:25:52](#) <laugh>. I think you still are. And that's amazing how you were featured in this documentary, right?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:26:01](#) Yeah. Different, not something that I ever expected to do, but I felt that I needed to be a voice for many that were voiceless like me before.

Gloria Sosa: [00:26:17](#) And how did they come in contact with you? How did-

Fermin Vasquez: [00:26:20](#) - through CHIRLA, yeah, yeah. So what CHIRLA were doing is, like a lot of news outlets, were looking to talk to people affected by the issue.

Gloria Sosa: [00:26:27](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>,

Fermin Vasquez: [00:26:28](#) Right? <laugh>. And so I was one of the leaders, so they would always ask me, 'Hey, do you wanna talk to NBC or do you wanna talk to Univision?' And I was like, yeah, <laugh>, let's do it. You know, because our goal is really to change hearts and mind, and especially talk to the people that sometimes don't understand what it means to be an undocumented student.

Gloria Sosa: [00:26:53](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:26:54](#) Right. And I feel like that audience...it's part of the work that we have to do to build a justification to pass immigration reform. And it's a continual goal that I've had, like all these years, is to keep bringing new people into the movement and creating this shared understanding of what it means, **expanding the definition of what it means to be an American.**

Gloria Sosa: [00:27:20](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:27:21](#) And I think it begins by sharing our stories.

Gloria Sosa: [00:27:24](#) So you found the power in sharing your story, right?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:27:29](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>,

Gloria Sosa: [00:27:31](#) So everything came down when you were part of Wise Up! And CHIRLA.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:27:36](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:27:37](#) That's when your activism, I guess, started.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:27:41](#) Yeah. Yeah. I was in high school. I was a junior in high school, when my activism started.

Gloria Sosa: [00:27:48](#) So, in a sense, did that all help you cope with all the challenges that you faced because of your status?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:27:54](#) Absolutely. I felt a lot more empowered. I felt like you could overcome challenges, you know, and I was surrounded by really great mentors that were working at these organizations. I was also part of SALEF which is the Salvadorian American Leadership and Educational Fund. I got a scholarship from them as well, but I was also part of their youth organizing group that they had at SALEF. And I met some really good mentors that helped me. I would take my personal statement, you know, [and] they would

help me to revise it. They would give me advice on these schools, to apply to these schools.

Gloria Sosa: [00:28:40](#)

Oh, okay.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:28:40](#)

There's more. They help[ed] me to find new scholarships, even outside of Erika Glazer's Scholarship. And they taught me leadership skills and provided trainings as well. So...I was involved in a lot of things in high school. I was also involved in starting a club at my own high school called The Coalition for Young Activists. Yeah. And that was like a group of undocumented students and non undocumented students. It was just a group of students, fighting for social change in their communities, for immigration reform. But we also had other issues like transportation and environmental justice. It was just an activist group that we started in my high school. Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:29:34](#)

Interesting. So just to create change, not just for immigration, but just overall.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:29:39](#)

Yeah. Because our... What's that quote? That's like...we're all interconnected, you know?

Gloria Sosa: [00:29:49](#)

Very true.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:29:50](#)

Immigration is not a single issue struggle. It's connected to how we live in our communities.

Gloria Sosa: [00:29:58](#)

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. That's true. It's not in a bubble, right, (inaudible). I totally agree. So your activism started at a very young age.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:30:09](#)

Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:30:10](#)

So moving a little forward, you were doing all these things during high school, you were a celebrity, and then you were a CHIRLA celebrity, and then you go to Cal State LA.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:30:22](#)

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Gloria Sosa: [00:30:23](#)

And tell me, how did you come across SURGE? Was it already an organization when you got to Cal State LA?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:30:31](#)

No, we started it. I was one of the founding members of it. Along with, I think it was Jose Beltran, maybe Norma. It was a group of us. I was the youngest of the founding members because I was coming from high school and they were all

transfer students. Yeah. They were all older than me. But I had a lot of experience in terms of like, organizing, you know. So I remember we had a meeting at the house of Jose Beltran, I think it was. And he was also involved with CHIRLA. Like he had been involved in Santa Monica, and I think it was Norma, or I'm not sure what, but it was a group of maybe eight students. It was like the first meeting, you know. And I had gotten connected with Jose because he was part of CHIRLA too, but with the California Dream Network, which was like the college organizing work that was happening.

- Gloria Sosa: [00:31:40](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:31:40](#) So yeah, [I] just remember, attending our first meeting and we created a simple flyer, you know, started out... <Laugh> funny how people say, like, my company started out of a garage, you know? Yeah. Yeah. I feel SURGE started out [of] a garage, [out] of a front yard at Jose Beltran's house, <laugh>. And, yeah, it was just a first meeting. And I remember we were just talking about our own stories, you know?
- Gloria Sosa: [00:32:14](#) Was it like the official meeting or the unofficial meeting?
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:32:18](#) It was the unofficial meeting before it got launched officially.
- Gloria Sosa: [00:32:22](#) So during the summer of 2016?
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:32:25](#) Yeah. 2006, not 16.
- Gloria Sosa: [00:32:29](#) Oh yes. <Laugh> 2006. Yes.
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:32:33](#) Yes. And then then we became official in the fall of 2006.
- Gloria Sosa: [00:32:40](#) So what was your role in the organizing towards SURGE?
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:32:46](#) The first year I think I was community liaison, cuz I had a lot of connections to community organizations - to CHIRLA, to SALEF, through a lot of other coalitions that were happening.
- Gloria Sosa: [00:33:03](#) mm-hmm. <affirmative>.
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:33:04](#) And I was more of a political person in the group...SURGE was kind of like broken down into two main, two or three camps I would say. You know, just the composition of the organization. There's like the political folks, the organizing people, which I would include myself there as one of the leaders of that sort of section. Then you have the folks that just wanted to do like,

fundraising, you know, they wanted to raise money for scholarships. They just wanted to keep the organization very like a support group, an emotional support group, you know, which is a good goal. And then...it was like two camps. Yeah. That's made two major camps, I would say. Or, three pues cuz there's like the fundraising money aspect, and then there's like the emotional support group, right. And then the political advocacy, organizing arm of SURGE. So I felt like I, given my experience - I fit more into the political kind of community organizing work of SURGE.

- Gloria Sosa: [00:34:16](#) Right.
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:34:17](#) Yeah. And I think **Jorge** and some other folks were doing more, like, they're fundraising, you know? And I think Jose, like Erica or Norma, they were more into like the support group, you know, sharing our stories, like-
- Gloria Sosa: [00:34:33](#) mm-hmm. <affirmative>,
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:34:33](#) it's just, uh-
- Gloria Sosa: [00:34:34](#) - creating community.
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:34:35](#) Yeah. That, that sort of thing. So that was my role that first year. I was -
- Gloria Sosa: [00:34:40](#) - and what did it look like? Like what were your duties?
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:34:45](#) Yeah, so I was the liaison to the community. So one of the main, major duties was to bring activism to the campus. So we did, I remember, we did a big major conference on campus with Bill Richardson. At that time, [during] which he was the first Latino that was running for president. And he was the governor, former governor of New Mexico.
- Gloria Sosa: [00:35:11](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:35:11](#) And [also] with Gil Cedilla, who was a State Assembly member at that point, and the sponsor of the DREAM Act.
- Gloria Sosa: [00:35:21](#) So your role-
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:35:22](#) - so we did a big conference, and my role also was to be the liaison of SURGE to the California DREAM Network which at that point was a coalition of 20, about 23 different schools across the state. So think about community colleges, [like] Cal States



and UCs. It was a coalition of a bunch of different organizations that were on campus, managed by, or supported by CHIRLA. Like, I think it still exists. <laugh>,

- Gloria Sosa: [00:35:54](#) The DREAM Network?
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:35:54](#) Yeah. The DREAM Network. So we started that California DREAM Network at that time.
- Gloria Sosa: [00:36:00](#) At Cal State LA?
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:36:01](#) Not at Cal State LA. With CHIRLA, because Cal State LA was only one representative [within] that. But it was, like I said, 23 different campuses -
- Gloria Sosa: [00:36:11](#) Oh, okay. Okay.
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:36:12](#) - across the state. And I was, you know, in charge of going to those meetings and sitting on the steering committee of the California DREAM Network and bringing all that information to the campus. Right. Like bringing it to mobilize around making calls for driver's licenses or for like Dream Act, or for immigration reform. I would bring back all that information and report to all the students at Cal State LA, like hey, you know, there's a march happening or, you know, there's a day of action. Like, let's organize us sitting in [in] the president's office, or like, let's make calls to our local elected officials, to our state or federal elected officials. So I was in charge of creating that organizing work at Cal State LA. So that was super cool. And we ended up meeting like a bunch of elected local officials, you know...[we] ended up meeting with the Speaker of the State Assembly at that point, which was Fabian Nuñez-
- Gloria Sosa: [00:37:12](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>,
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:37:12](#) -which...We did a conference with him as well, to just talk about college access for students, but also talk about the state California Dream Act. Right. And then what we could do to pass the Federal Dream Act. So it was a lot of like just organizing work happening on the ground.
- Gloria Sosa: [00:37:33](#) So that was your main role.
- Fermin Vasquez: [00:37:34](#) The first year? Yeah. The second year I was elected president of SURGE. And then my role kind of [stayed] the same, but...You know, my goal was really to transform SURGE, I think, into one of the major players around student activism on campus.

Gloria Sosa: [00:37:58](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:38:00](#) Because I felt like that was my background, you know?

Gloria Sosa: [00:38:02](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>,

Fermin Vasquez: [00:38:02](#) Cuz the first person was Jose Beltran. He was political, but not as much as me. He was more like, 'let's form a support group for undocumented students.' He was really great about recruiting new people to join in, you know. And then the second year I felt like we took more of a, 'let's become more of an activist social justice organization' [approach].

Gloria Sosa: [00:38:26](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. That's when you came on?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:38:28](#) Yeah. That's when, [I became] president. Yeah. And at that point, it was also like, you know, we're still doing a lot of fundraising. We're doing a lot of [work] being a support group for students.

Gloria Sosa: [00:38:47](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:38:48](#) And we grew a lot. I think that year we ended up winning our first award. We were the social justice organization of the year. Yeah. I think we ended up winning it like two or three times in a row, like two or three years ago.

Gloria Sosa: [00:39:04](#) Who awards that?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:39:06](#) Student government

Gloria Sosa: [00:39:07](#) At Cal State LA?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:39:08](#) Yeah. Yeah. And something else that was interesting was that some of us then became part of student government. We thought that it wasn't enough for us just to be social justice organization of the year. Right. We wanted to actually have more power within Cal State LA.

Gloria Sosa: [00:39:28](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:39:29](#) Because...the way the university work[s], right...Like the main student voice was student government there. And, you know, we were really good friends with the past two presidents, right?

Gloria Sosa: [00:39:46](#) With the school president?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:39:47](#) Yeah, with the student body president, not the school president.

Gloria Sosa: [00:39:53](#) <laugh>. Okay.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:39:53](#) We targeted the school president, but yeah. But we felt like, you know, there's no reason...If we can't vote or like run for office, well, I might as well like do something in school. So we ended up running for student government.

Gloria Sosa: [00:40:14](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:40:14](#) And we won like a few seats. So that gave us more power to be able to utilize the resources that the student government had. Like they had money to do press conferences, to do events, to do bake sales, you know, all that sort of stuff. So we got our own people in student government. You know.

Gloria Sosa: [00:40:39](#) Do you remember who?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:40:40](#) I was elected [to] campus affairs my first years. And there was Luis [inaudible] I think [he] was there. He became a rep at large. I believe it was a few different students. It's like several.

Gloria Sosa: [00:40:59](#) So being in the student government allowed SURGE to get some of those resources that previously weren't -

Fermin Vasquez: [00:41:06](#) Available. That's right. Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:41:09](#) And they weren't available because you didn't ask for them, or?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:41:14](#) No, because the people that were in power, usually they would get to choose. Right. Like give it to this organization. A lot of 'em were from either like sports -

Gloria Sosa: [00:41:25](#) Oh, okay.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:41:25](#) - or from finance. So they wanted to do more sports events or like -

Gloria Sosa: [00:41:35](#) - so they would look out for their own people.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:41:36](#) Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:41:37](#) Okay.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:41:38](#) But we were like, lets do more like activism. And so we started joining with, I think, Mujeres del Maiz was an organization, like a feminist Chicana organization

Gloria Sosa: [00:41:51](#) On campus?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:41:53](#) Uhhuh <affirmative>. And it was Chicana/Chicano studies folks, MEChA. And a couple other organizations that were specifically more focused on...Like the Black Student Union. Yeah. They were specifically focused on like social justice. And I think we were able to take over some of the composition of the student government to make it much more activist-y and just more focused on creating social change, and speaking out on the issues that were affecting all the students, especially the fee hikes that were happening at that point.

Gloria Sosa: [00:42:38](#) The what?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:42:39](#) Fee hikes. So raising the tuition price.

Gloria Sosa: [00:42:42](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Okay.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:42:43](#) It was like a 10% or like 15% like tuition hike happening.

Gloria Sosa: [00:42:48](#) mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:42:49](#) Yeah. At the Cal State level. So organizing against the budget cuts too. Cause we had Arnold Schwarzenegger as our Governor.

Gloria Sosa: [00:42:57](#) Right, right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:42:58](#) Yeah. So it was a lot of organizing against certain policies, but also for certain policies.

Gloria Sosa: [00:43:07](#) And this is in conjunction with the other -

Fermin Vasquez: [00:43:10](#) - student organizations on campus. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Gloria Sosa: [00:43:13](#) Okay.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:43:14](#) Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:43:15](#) Really interesting. So at this time, [it] sounds like SURGE is covering a lot of ground, right?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:43:20](#) It is.

Gloria Sosa: [00:43:21](#) It expands to the student government body.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:43:26](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Gloria Sosa: [00:43:26](#) And the other organizations are working together. Did any administration help SURGE?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:43:32](#) Yeah. We always had really good allies. We had Luz Burjon [who] was one of our main allies.

Gloria Sosa: [00:43:42](#) What was her role? Do you remember?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:43:43](#) She was like a counselor at EOP at that time. I think she got fired <laugh>. And then we had Steve Teixeira. He was our advisor for SURGE. And he is this brilliant organizing mind that was the Director of Student Support Services at Cal State LA.

Gloria Sosa: [00:44:06](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:44:07](#) I remember just having...he became one of my mentors, you know, when I was at Cal State LA but he had done organizing in the sixties. Right. So he gave us this really critical perspective of building a movement that was not just about our ourselves, you know, that it was not just like, 'oh, we're undocumented'. But it was like -

Gloria Sosa: [00:44:30](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:44:30](#) - at that point in SURGE we had a white guy that became really good friends [with us]. We had a couple white people. We had Asians, you know...it was not just Latinos. It was like we made a conscious effort to build an organization that had some diversity to it.

Gloria Sosa: [00:44:52](#) That was inclusive, right?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:44:52](#) Yeah. And that undocumented students were not just like...we had somebody from Panama, like Afro Latinas, you know?

Gloria Sosa: [00:45:00](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:45:00](#) It was a really good combination of folks, obviously mainly Latinos, but we had [made] a conscious effort to make sure that we had members from all different backgrounds.

Gloria Sosa: [00:45:12](#) How?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:45:14](#) Just recruiting them <laugh>. Yeah. It was just that we were more than undocumented students. I mean, we were fighting, like I said...we were collaborating with people around the fee hikes. I remember the other people were protesting the president of the campus at that point. He was the highest paid president, you know, of the Cal State system. I don't remember. A black dude was president. It's probably [in] the files.

Gloria Sosa: [00:45:44](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:45:45](#) Dr. Ross I think was, I don't remember. But, he was the highest paid president of the Cal State system. And we felt like, why are we getting all these tuition hikes? You know, and we were talking about much more than undocumented students, but then also letting people know that our role was to bring new people in, into the movement. Like, it doesn't matter if you're undocumented or not, because we need citizens to vote.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:46:15](#) We need citizens to make calls to their own elected officials. So it was about activating them in a way that...you know, it was not just like, 'oh, because I'm documented', or 'we're undocumented, you can't be part of it.' It was more like, we need you to be part of it because we're not building an undocumented people's movement. We're building a social movement, obviously driven by people who are affected by the issue, as the leadership. But there's a role for everyone to play.

Gloria Sosa: [00:46:53](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:46:54](#) And that was sort of our political analysis. I think we arrived at that based on our mentors who [we] were mentioning. We had professors of Chicano studies [and] political science supporting us. We had Frank Cornelio too, who was a key ally for us. He was in the Office of Outreach and Recruitment.

Gloria Sosa: [00:47:18](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Okay.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:47:18](#) But he was a good ally because he was really good friends with the financial aid office. So anytime we ended up opening doors on campus to ensure that undocumented students could apply for some of the on-campus scholarships, he helped us to do that.

Gloria Sosa: [00:47:35](#) When you got to Cal State LA, that was not available -

Fermin Vasquez: [00:47:39](#) No.

Gloria Sosa: [00:47:41](#) - for undocumented students?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:47:42](#) No.

Gloria Sosa: [00:47:43](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:47:43](#) Because a lot of the departments have money,

Gloria Sosa: [00:47:48](#) right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:47:49](#) - for scholarships for their own school. Like the School of Education, you know, the School of Social Sciences - like, they all have...departments have money for that. They say [its] assigned for events or for scholarships. And, the university as a whole has a bunch of scholarships too. But those were not open at that point for undocumented students. We had to work with our allies to do that. You know, and at that point, we didn't have a DREAM center -

Gloria Sosa: [00:48:20](#) Right. <laugh>,

Fermin Vasquez: [00:48:21](#) - but we had...we were paving the way for it to happen.

Gloria Sosa: [00:48:27](#) Yeah.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:48:27](#) Because we had the Erika J. Glazer scholarship, and because she also [had] donated like a million dollars right. To start -

Gloria Sosa: [00:48:38](#) Wow.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:48:39](#) - this fund. She donated it to Liberty Hill, the Liberty Hill Foundation. So the Liberty Hill Foundation got involved. And so then the ear of the school president was open[ed]. Right. So he was always looking for, as the president, as it should be, looking for new partnerships and resources to bring to the campus. So this was one avenue for him to do that. So I remember we had the whole ceremony on campus [for] the first Erika J. Glazer Scholarship recipients. The president of the school was there.

Gloria Sosa: [00:49:15](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>,

Fermin Vasquez: [00:49:16](#) Senator Gil Cedilla was there, Congress member at that time, Hilda Solis was there.

Gloria Sosa: [00:49:23](#) Mm-hmm.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:49:24](#) Senator Hector de la Torres was there, I remember all these influential community people were at the ceremony and celebrating the accomplishments and dreams of undocumented students and giving out the scholarships. Right. So it created an environment where we weren't a burden. We were actually bringing in a new powerful donor, you know, to the university. So that's the way that they looked at it. <laugh>. We looked at it as, 'oh, we're bringing resources to students', but different people say it in different lenses, you know, to the president of the school, it was important that he could probably use Erika's name and resources and the things that she was bringing to the table. Then he was making allies and political friends, because we had political folks there. So it was a multi...what do you call it? Like, a multi-strategy approach to this. So I think that that helped to open [and] sort of the pave the way for the DREAM Center to come into existing because all this money was flowing to the university, because of the scholarship fund. And then also other rich people, or like, other affluent people wanted to emulate what Erika was doing. And they wanted to donate. And they saw the potential that a lot of these young people had. And then they wanted to get involved. They see somebody do something cool and it's like, well, 'I wanna join in, how do I do it?' And Erika would talk to her other friends in her circle of influence and bring in more. So I think that that was super key to be able to expand the power of undocumented students on campus. Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:51:27](#) So, you were the first recipient of the scholarship, and then there were others the following year that were awarded that scholarship?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:51:34](#) No. So I was the first person to meet Erika. But at the first ceremony. The official ceremony. There was like a committee that was formed through CHIRLA to choose the other recipients. So I think there was like six -

Gloria Sosa: [00:51:48](#) Oh okay.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:51:49](#) - six or seven at the first like ceremony. But I was the one that didn't have to go through like an application process cuz she offered it to me because -

Gloria Sosa: [00:52:01](#) - because the donor gave it to you, right?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:52:03](#) Right. So that was...I mean, I had to submit an application, but she was like...



Gloria Sosa: [00:52:07](#) Eventually

Fermin Vasquez: [00:52:09](#) <laugh>. Yeah. But it was like, I think it was six or eight students.

Gloria Sosa: [00:52:13](#) And they all got full rides?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:52:15](#) Yes. Everybody. Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:52:17](#) Wow.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:52:18](#) Yeah. But I think a lot of the other ones, I think [they] might have been four freshmen, four transfers. They only got two-year scholarships. Cause they were transfer students.

Gloria Sosa: [00:52:27](#) Right, right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:52:29](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative> and four, I think it was, got the four years. All four years. Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:52:37](#) You're the first lucky one, then.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:52:39](#) <laugh>. Yeah. It was cool.

Gloria Sosa: [00:52:40](#) <laugh>. I bet. So I know that SURGE and you were part of a lot of things on campus, right? You brought a lot of resources, you did a lot, and you changed the structure, that inside structure, of how the resources get disbursed.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:52:57](#) mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Gloria Sosa: [00:52:58](#) Right. But in terms of the activism of SURGE, as you were part of SURGE, what was the impact outside [of] campus?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:53:06](#) Yeah. I mean, we had a big impact. I think that we were known as one of the most active student organizations in Los Angeles or probably across the state through the California Dream Network. Cause we were one of the main voices, I think along with UCLA IDEAS and Espiritu de Nuestro Futuro at Cal State Dominguez Hills and us at Cal State LA.

Gloria Sosa: [00:53:33](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:53:33](#) I think we're really the top three organizations with the most members, you know, the most activism that we were doing. So I think that that was super interesting because a lot of things happen on campus, but they don't have an impact outside of it.

Gloria Sosa: [00:53:58](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:53:58](#) But I think for us, it was always like working in coalition, not just internally with our organizations I described on campus, but also working externally, building those connections with the local elected officials, with our congress member, with our city council, with our county board supervisors and then community organizations like CHIRLA, SALEF, like Clinica Monseñor Romero, like community coalition, you know? I think that that was a really big impact.

Gloria Sosa: [00:54:34](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:54:35](#) Because then we would also share our stories. Right. And our stories had an impact outside of school too. And especially when we would talk to, like Univision, Telemundo about being known and they would write articles about any of our members and we would share our stories. I think that had like a major impact in framing the conversation in the larger immigrant rights movement.

Gloria Sosa: [00:55:08](#) But were there any specific campaigns that SURGE members and yourself helped with? Like the DREAM Act?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:55:16](#) Yeah, absolutely. It was a lot. It was just like a lot going on. You know, we were fighting for the Federal Dream Act. And yeah, some of our student members went to Washington, D.C. to lobby, to share their stories. We did a lot of...the California Dream Act as well, and getting financial aid.

Gloria Sosa: [00:55:40](#) mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:55:42](#) There was campaigns around opening up the scholarships for Latinx students at the Hispanic Scholarship Fund, or different organizations like that, that had a citizen[ship] requirement to apply for those scholarships.

Gloria Sosa: [00:55:58](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:55:58](#) So there was organizing campaigns around those organizations and calling them out. Like, why is it that, you know, we were part of this community where...why can't we have access to these scholarships that you all have? Yeah. And then we were also participating, being very active in the driver's license fight with Senator Gil Cedillo.

Gloria Sosa: [00:56:31](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [00:56:33](#) Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [00:56:34](#) Can you describe how those many campaigns look like?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:56:40](#) Yeah. So, like the structure you mean? Or what -

Gloria Sosa: [00:56:47](#) - well, how, what was it...yeah, the structure and what was the, I guess, how did it look like?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:56:55](#) What do you mean?

Gloria Sosa: [00:56:55](#) What was it like,? Did you do sit ins? Or what were the actions?

Fermin Vasquez: [00:57:00](#) Oh, oh, the actions. So I mean, the thing to understand is that there's different.. I see it as different levels, right? So there's the micro level, which is, for me, the campus level organizing, that looks like, you know, making an announcement at the meeting where we say like, 'oh, we gotta take 20 minutes', you know, 'we're gonna make calls right now to our member of Congress to let them know that we want to get the Federal Dream Act', right. We want legalization for all 12 million undocumented, people in this country including undocumented students. We would pass out flyers on campus, or we [would] make presentations in our classes to get people mobilized to make calls or [to] send an email to their elected officials. Or we did a sit-in or a vigil, we did [that] once, where we had candles and we told our stories. We'd host speakers that would come and talk to us about the organizing that was happening and undocumented students in higher education. That's on campus. Then you have the city level, right? So these are like working with the community organizations, CHIRLA, CARECEN - all of the immigrant rights [organizations]. The Korean Resource Center is another organization. So there's the community level. And that looks like...we sent a representative from Cal State LA or from SURGE, a couple representatives to be part of the student committee at the California Dream Network. And then you have the statewide coalition, right. So that's the statewide organizations [that] kind of get together and then they advocate at a statewide level in Sacramento. And then you have the national coalitions. So that's like FIRM, you know, or like the Center for Community Change, which is based in Washington, D.C., and then they also advocate at the national level. So what that looks like is, they would take one or two or three students from Cal State LA, they would fly us to Washington D.C. to go and like, give testimony, talk to the federal legislators up in Washington, D.C. So it has like multiple levels, but I think the goal is the same, right? It's like [to] pass the Federal Dream Act and there's multiple different strategies to get to that level, but

everybody sort of plays a role, you know. That's how I kind of see it breaking it down. Campus, city, state, and then national as an organizing structure. And we all kind of just fit into this, trying to build this people power movement for immigrant rights.

- Gloria Sosa: [01:00:23](#) It would be both, at each level.
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:00:25](#) Yeah. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>
- Gloria Sosa: [01:00:27](#) And SURGE was that, involved at every level.
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:00:29](#) Yeah. I was part of a lot of those things, you know, [and] other members also. We flew to Washington, D.C. We went to Sacramento. We were involved in city politics.
- Gloria Sosa: [01:00:44](#) So all sort of campaigns, not just for the DREAM Act or the students financial aid. There was different kinds of social movements.
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:00:54](#) Yeah. Because our analysis was that...for example, there was a lot of organizing also happening around the fee hikes, there was a group of students there, at Cal State LA, right? So it was part of coalition building. You know, we would ask for support on certain day of actions. 'Hey, we, we need everybody to show up at this vigil', right? Because there's a vote happening on the DREAM Act pretty soon, so we need all hands on that. And [students] would come out, you know, so it was part of us also coming out for the issues that they were fighting for. You know, there was a lot of stuff around like, women rights issues, right. So we would show up for them. It was like building this movement that was interconnecting with different issues.
- Gloria Sosa: [01:01:51](#) Okay. And what was that? What was SURGE as an organization? What was the structure like? Did it have like a hierarchical composition, or what was the structure like?
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:02:05](#) Yeah.
- Gloria Sosa: [01:02:07](#) Water break.
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:02:08](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, the structure is pretty much - we had elections every year where we elected our president, vice president, secretary, historian, campus affairs, community liaison, fundraising chair, I think chair of high school presentations, to go out into the high schools, right. To recruit

more students to come to Cal State LA or join us. Yeah, I think those were all the positions. I think so, there might be more.

- Gloria Sosa: [01:03:01](#) What was the president's role?
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:03:03](#) The president's role was to kind of be the face of the organization and [to] set the agenda, you know, run the meetings. We had a smaller steering committee for SURGE. I think it was like maybe three, four people, you know, that would just kind of get together. And before the meeting, once a week there was another planning meeting to talk about the agenda. This is what we're gonna talk about, you know? And then we'll send out an email asking our members, [if there is] anybody who had like announcements or wanted to talk about [something] specific, we would allow for that.
- Gloria Sosa: [01:03:55](#) And this was run by the president?
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:03:57](#) Yeah. It -
- Gloria Sosa: [01:03:59](#) - was the duty of the president?
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:03:59](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.
- Gloria Sosa: [01:04:00](#) So then the vice president [was] like the helper of the president?
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:04:04](#) Vice president, yeah. Was the one in charge when the president couldn't make it.
- Gloria Sosa: [01:04:08](#) Okay.
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:04:09](#) Yeah.
- Gloria Sosa: [01:04:12](#) So, what do we understand by "vice president"?
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:04:16](#) Huh?
- Gloria Sosa: [01:04:16](#) So, the vice president was what we understand to be...a vice president, to fulfill the role of the president.
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:04:22](#) Yeah.
- Gloria Sosa: [01:04:23](#) Okay. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And what about the historian? I mean, (inaudible) that one.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:04:28](#) Historian was a person that would be in charge of like taking photos at different events. Updating our social media pages -

Gloria Sosa: [01:04:39](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>

Fermin Vasquez: [01:04:41](#) <laugh> - at that point, running our Facebook -

Gloria Sosa: [01:04:44](#) <laugh>.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:04:46](#) - [they would] be in charge of taking any notes. Oh, no, sorry. Notes was secretary.

Gloria Sosa: [01:04:52](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:04:53](#) They would just be in charge of documenting different activities that we were doing and updating our social media page, creating any flyers that need to happen. Uh, but flyers, I think, we have different people sometimes, like, regular members too. Like they even didn't have a position, but they were studying graphic design. So they would make flyers.

Gloria Sosa: [01:05:25](#) ....help with that.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:05:25](#) Yeah. Yeah. Help with that.

Gloria Sosa: [01:05:27](#) And what was your major at Cal State LA?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:05:30](#) I was political science.

Gloria Sosa: [01:05:33](#) Right. I don't know why I knew.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:05:36](#) It fits, right?

Gloria Sosa: [01:05:36](#) I dunno how I had a clue. <laugh>.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:05:39](#) Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [01:05:40](#) Okay. So during your first year, you were the community liaison, <laugh>, and then you were the president. And then what about the third year?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:05:49](#) The third year, I was just a member. I stepped back. Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [01:05:53](#) Why?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:05:54](#) Um -

Gloria Sosa: [01:05:54](#) I mean, if I -

Fermin Vasquez: [01:05:54](#) - because I mean, I felt like there was... I got my papers after my second year.

Gloria Sosa: [01:06:02](#) Oh, that's great!

Fermin Vasquez: [01:06:03](#) So I ended up giving back the scholarship once I was able to apply for -

Gloria Sosa: [01:06:11](#) You did give it back?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:06:12](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. Yeah. Going into my third year. I got my papers my second year. Yeah. So -

Gloria Sosa: [01:06:19](#) Can I ask, how did you get your papers?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:06:22](#) Uh, through..well I'm Salvadorian, so it was through my mom.

Gloria Sosa: [01:06:26](#) Oh, okay.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:06:26](#) She was able to apply through a program called La CARA, which was like...it was mainly for Central Americans -

Gloria Sosa: [01:06:30](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>,

Fermin Vasquez: [01:06:30](#) - that had been affected by war and hurricanes -

Gloria Sosa: [01:06:30](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:06:30](#) So it was based on that.

Gloria Sosa: [01:06:44](#) And you gave your scholarship back. Did someone get it after you?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:06:49](#) Yeah, yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [01:06:51](#) Do you know who?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:06:53](#) Well, they were...I don't know specifically who, but...the money was thrown more into the pot. Back into the pot. And then each year they would select new students to get the scholarship.

Gloria Sosa: [01:07:06](#) Okay. So perhaps some -

Fermin Vasquez: [01:07:07](#) - it was several.

Gloria Sosa: [01:07:07](#) Maybe one more student [was] able to -

Fermin Vasquez: [01:07:09](#) Yeah, exactly. So if they were gonna give out four that year, maybe they gave out five [instead]. They were gonna give eight, maybe nine. So, yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [01:07:17](#) Oh, okay. That's great.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:07:19](#) And yeah. Cause I was gonna also transfer but then I ended up not doing it.

Gloria Sosa: [01:07:23](#) <laugh> transfer to where?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:07:24](#) To UC Berkeley. I was gonna go to UC Berkeley. Yeah. Or UCLA.

Gloria Sosa: [01:07:32](#) And why didn't you, when did you get your papers? You were -

Fermin Vasquez: [01:07:34](#) Yeah....I was gonna be a transfer student. I had applied my second year of college. I applied only to UC Berkeley, and to UCLA. And I got into both of 'em as a transfer student. But then I looked at my financial aid package and I was like, no, I'm good. I didn't wanna have student loans. Cuz at that point, even though I was gonna get financial aid, it was still like, I think 10,000 a year.

Gloria Sosa: [01:08:03](#) That you needed to [pay] out of pocket.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:08:04](#) Out of pocket. And I didn't want to get in[to] debt.

Gloria Sosa: [01:08:08](#) Right, right.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:08:09](#) Or [take out] a student loan. So I ended up staying. And then that's when I...my third year is when I joined student government. I was just a SURGE member at that point. Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [01:08:23](#) So you were more involved in the student body.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:08:27](#) Yeah. Student body. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [01:08:31](#) But at the same time, you're still pushing SURGE's agenda, right?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:08:34](#) Of course. Yeah. Yeah. I still like attend[ed] some of the meetings, help[ed] out here and there, or support[ed] the new administration.



Gloria Sosa: [01:08:44](#) <laugh>. All right. And did this continue your fourth year at Cal State LA?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:08:51](#) Yeah. Yeah. Fourth year too. My fourth year I was doing more work in the community, not so much on campus. I felt like I was about to end, you know? So I was looking for an opportunity to get my name out there and connect with potential employers, you know, <inaudible>. So I was doing more of that, I was more active like in <inaudible>

Gloria Sosa: [01:09:25](#) Right. I mean, it makes sense. So you graduated in 2010?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:09:31](#) mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Gloria Sosa: [01:09:33](#) And after that, what happened?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:09:37](#) That fall, I worked for a couple political campaigns. So I was doing...Howard Berman was Democrat for Congress. And I think, uh -

Gloria Sosa: [01:09:53](#) What was your role?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:09:54](#) - Richard Vladovic for school board. I was a field organizer.

Gloria Sosa: [01:10:00](#) Oh, okay.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:10:01](#) Yeah. And after that, my first job, sort of full-time professional job outta college was at the beginning of 2011. I started applying after I graduated college. I started applying and I became the Statewide Communications Coordinator for an organization called Californians for Justice. And they are based in Long Beach, but they're like a statewide, youth organizing, advocacy organization. So I became their Statewide Communications Coordinator. And they had offices in Oakland, Long Beach, Fresno, Riverside. I think they had like four offices across the state. Yeah. And it was all about like, student activism, youth organizing, building political power for young people of color. So we were [doing] a lot of organizing. Yeah. Pretty much merging organizing with communications and politics.

Gloria Sosa: [01:11:23](#) Nice. Okay. That's really interesting.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:11:27](#) Yeah. I learned a lot from that experience. I was there for like two years and then I went to work for a community coalition in South LA, which was started by the soon-to-be mayor of Los Angeles, Karen Bass. Yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [01:11:46](#) Interesting stuff. Interesting. So, I wanna come back a little bit to Cal State LA before we get too far down the road. So in 2010 when you graduated, there's still no Dream Center?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:12:01](#) There's still no Dream Center.

Gloria Sosa: [01:12:02](#) Still no Dream Center. Okay.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:12:05](#) No, I think it started in 2011 or 2012. Not sure.

Gloria Sosa: [01:12:08](#) Yeah. I'm not sure there, I haven't been able to go there for quite a while. Okay. So we already talked about that, how inclusive SURGE was, right? It never excluded anyone.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:12:21](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Gloria Sosa: [01:12:23](#) Was there like an intentional attempt to gain female members or queer folks as members?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:12:34](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative> Yeah. I think there was always, since the founding of SURGE, it was pretty balanced gender-wise. There was female co-founders, there was female presidents after me. Yeah. It was one of the first female presidents.

Gloria Sosa: [01:12:56](#) Is there -

Fermin Vasquez: [01:12:57](#) - Yohana? Yohana Hinojosa. And there was somebody else after that? Queer folks? Yeah. I think we had a few members that identified as LGBTQ.

Gloria Sosa: [01:13:17](#) Okay.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:13:19](#) Yeah. People from different countries. Ethnicities.

Gloria Sosa: [01:13:26](#) Nice. Yeah. It sounds like it was very inclusive, from the history of it, right?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:13:32](#) Yeah. I think so.

Gloria Sosa: [01:13:33](#) Like, so no one was kicked out for no reason, for no good reason. <laugh>, so, I'm pretty sure you learned everything, but -

Fermin Vasquez: [01:13:46](#) I mean, there's always tensions. You know, there's always like issues <inaudible>

Gloria Sosa: [01:13:50](#) Which one do you remember? I mean, not to be a chismosa, but do you remember? And you don't have to name people, but do you remember some of the tensions that were there?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:14:02](#) Yeah. I think it's the tension between what kind of organization we are. Are we a political organization or are we like a support group? Are we a fundraising organization? Cuz everybody had like different, you know...like members that just wanted to work with high school students or they just wanted to go do presentations. So it was always that tension, like, not everybody wanted to be political.

Gloria Sosa: [01:14:24](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:14:24](#) People said that I wanted to turn SURGE into a political organization. I was like, yeah, I'm fine with that. <laugh> , I think that's how we make change, you know? But there was always that sort of like difference of opinion. And I think it had to do with each leadership structure or administration every year had like a different lens, you know? So sometimes it would be more of a, let's fundraise a lot [approach], you know? Cause people are struggling to get...to stay in school. Right? Other years it was more like, let's provide a lot more emotional support, you know, therapy, that sort of self care kind of stuff.

Gloria Sosa: [01:15:17](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:15:18](#) My year was more like, let's pass the DREAM Act -

Gloria Sosa: [01:15:22](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, <laugh>,

Fermin Vasquez: [01:15:23](#) <laugh>, - let's be very...organizing as <inaudible> government. Like, that's sort of more organizing, activist-y sort of approach to the organization. So you had like those ebbs and flows, you know? And I think that that creates some tension. Some people are not down to go out and protest, you know? Which is fine.

Gloria Sosa: [01:15:49](#) Right.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:15:50](#) So they just wanna stick to themselves. Like, 'if I change my [own] life', you know, 'I could give back.' I disagree with that - but there were those students that were not....like, they'll be active to go to a bake sale or volunteer to manage [a] table on campus, right. To pass out information. That sort of thing.

Gloria Sosa: [01:16:20](#) But then you look at the bigger picture and that's when you were interested in helping and creating change at the bigger level.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:16:29](#) Exactly. Yeah. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Gloria Sosa: [01:16:34](#) And it sounds like it <laugh>, that's what I got from the story. <laugh>. So I wanna come back a little bit to talk about the administrators who helped SURGE be SURGE and succeed. You mentioned Teixeira as the advisor.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:16:53](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Gloria Sosa: [01:16:53](#) What was the role that he played?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:17:01](#) Um...sorry, [INTERRUPTION IN AUDIO]

Gloria Sosa: [01:17:11](#) So, Steve Teixeira.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:17:13](#) Steve, I think, has been one of the pillars of SURGE in every sense of the word, because he was the first one to help us lift the organization off the ground. He didn't tell us how to run the organization. He gave us his own lived experience coming from the Chicano Movement in the sixties. And [of] him, them as young people making those mistakes, you know, he gave us that macro political analysis and helped us to ask critical thinking questions of ourselves and of the environment in which we're operating in. And he was always there whenever I wanted to come and have a discussion, you know. There was a discussion, a larger debate in the community, right, happening around the DREAM Act, [and] whether we wanted to include a military option or not...Can you be legalized through community service by joining the military or [by] going to school. And there was like a big debate around that. So he helped us to crystallize our position in terms of those things. He invited us to his house, you know, to get out, to eat, to just have conversations around our stories and what we wanted to accomplish, not just for ourselves. You could always..have this concept that we were not just like, undocumented students that we were part of a bigger community of organizers and activists that were taking up the mantle, that were like a new generation of young people that were, you know, with leadership. So he would provide like a lot of that..there [were] a lot of conversations that we would have with him about immigration not being [solely] a Latino issue, and how it was seen by the media, [and] really, how it was framed by the media. And I think that's why we made a concerted effort to bring people from different ethnicities,

different identities, because we wanted to have that sort of approach to movement building that was much more inclusive and empowering, just having different voices. And I think that a lot of it came down to the conversations that we were having with him, or the topics that he would bring up. You know, and he would ask questions. Sometimes he would come to the meetings, right? And like, he would sit in the back, let us do our thing, but at the end, he would ask, you know, 'we talked about this, have you guys thought about this?' You know?

Gloria Sosa: [01:20:22](#)

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:20:22](#)

So he had like a very visionary approach to the organization. And we were so lucky to have him because I feel like he was just one of the major organizers of his generation. He was always super humble, but he never really talked about his accomplishments. But he was like there with the Chicano activism of the sixties and seventies, you know, he was like on the front lines. And then he had been at the university for decades, like two decades or something, so he knew everyone too. So <laugh>, he was like the one that was behind the scenes, organizing the administration and pulling strings and having conversations with Erika. So that bringing in Erika, bringing in like the president to like talk to each other, you know, and him like organizing with other departments. That's how we met Luz Burjon. Cause Luz was on the EOP and the director of EOP was one of his best friends that had done a lot of organizing. And then, you know, he had friends at the university with[in] the Chicano Studies department with the Black, Afro, what's it called? Afro studies or like, pan-African Studies.

Gloria Sosa: [01:22:00](#)

Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:22:01](#)

So he was making those connections with people in the administration. You know, we were doing our part with the students on campus, and he opened a lot of doors for us to resources that we could use. Like for example, as the director of Student Support Services, he made sure that undocumented students have access to tutors...like, they would do Summer Bridge in the summer. So he opened that program up, but because it was like a state funded program, <laugh>. He opened it up like somehow to undocumented students, you know, was making those connections. I was part of the Summer Bridge program, which was a program before entering college -

Gloria Sosa: [01:22:49](#)

mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:22:50](#) - that helped first generation students, helped you get acclimated to the campus. And then they did like classes on...like you take one or two classes during the summer that are college courses to help you get ready. So he did a lot of that. And I'm super grateful, you know, and then after that he stepped down as our advisor, and that's when Luz Burjon from EOP took over. She was a counselor. And she had always been involved, right. She just didn't have like an official title, but like all of the undocumented students knew her -

Gloria Sosa: [01:23:27](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:23:28](#) - because she would be the college counselor basically for a lot of our members. And we'd always send her people, you know, to her and Frank Cornelio, who after Luz, he became the advisor. We would always send them people if they have questions about scholarships on financial aid, or, you know, they couldn't get an answer from somebody at the university. Like we would always send people to them. And there were like just super awesome folks, allies, you know, that helped us to move an internal agenda forward and ensure that undocumented students had a voice -

Gloria Sosa: [01:24:12](#) mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:24:13](#) - in the decisions of the university.

Gloria Sosa: [01:24:16](#) Right. And Frank Cornelio was a counselor too?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:24:25](#) Frank Cornelio was a college recruiter, so he would go out to the high schools, and he used to manage like a group of workers for the university. We call them student liaisons, I think, which was..that was when I started working for the outreach, recruitment -

Gloria Sosa: [01:24:50](#) mm-hmm. <affirmative>.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:24:51](#) - at Cal State LA because of Frank. So we would go out to the high schools. It was my only job on campus. We would go out to the high schools to talk about the university, Cal State LA, helping students like apply to come to college, helping them with their personal statements, with their college applications, all the resources that the university was offering. So Frank really helped us to always recruit new members, or like, he would take us to different conferences or like classroom presentations. And one of us who I mentioned, we had like a chair of high school presentations which pretty much was like a chair of

recruitment pretty much. Right. Because we would go out to the high school, to the community colleges with Frank and his team, and then he would allow us to present, or there was like FAFSA conferences, you know -

Gloria Sosa: [01:25:43](#)

Right. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>,

Fermin Vasquez: [01:25:44](#)

- at the convention center. So then he would give us like a space for us to talk about SURGE. And like, even if they were not coming to Cal State LA sometimes we would connect them with another student organization, you know, at Dominguez Hills or UCLA, or at Santa Barbara, San Francisco, like in different places. So he helped us to really expand the brand of SURGE. And he had like a ton of friends too on campus. He was a very influential person, he knew a lot of people, so he would always be connecting us like, 'have you talked to...So have you talked to...' ..yeah.

Gloria Sosa: [01:26:26](#)

So well-known figures.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:26:27](#)

Yeah. We had really good advisors that were also organizers, you know, in their own way, right? So they were moving an agenda internally within the university, and we were moving an agenda within the student body, and externally that I felt like that was a really good sort of marriage between the two. Between students and faculty.

Gloria Sosa: [01:26:59](#)

Right. And to finalize this part of the oral history..So they served as mentors, right?

Fermin Vasquez: [01:27:10](#)

Absolutely.

Gloria Sosa: [01:27:11](#)

As mentors to the members, [to] the organization.

Fermin Vasquez: [01:27:15](#)

Yeah. Absolutely. They were really great mentors. Like I said, Steve to me, was one of the greatest mentors I had in my life. Not just at Cal State LA. Just every time I would have a conversation with him, I would feel a lot smarter. I was like, <laugh> man....I have not thought about that. You know, he recommend articles or books and like, just life advice, how to approach the campus life, but it was more about becoming an organizer out in the community, you know, and like taking that experience in those conversations. I mean, we're talking about race, class, and gender, you know, in the US and how like we have structural racism, right? <laugh>, like, we have classism and all the -isms and all the -phobias, xenophobia, Islamophobia, all those things. We were talking about it with

Steve. And he was a mentor to us otherwise, but I think, especially me. Cause I would always come in and just go to his office and ask questions, you know, <laugh>, We were pretty close, I think. Yeah.

- Gloria Sosa: [01:28:37](#) So in a sense he was, of the three that you mentioned, more of your mentor.
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:28:41](#) For me, yes. I think for me and Jose [it] probably was him, was the first president. Then Luis was probably more like with Yohana and like some other, or the subsequent presidents -
- Gloria Sosa: [01:28:55](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:28:56](#) - or leadership, you know.
- Gloria Sosa: [01:28:57](#) Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>.
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:28:58](#) But yeah, I, <inaudible> like no one else on that campus, I think. Yeah.
- Gloria Sosa: [01:29:08](#) That's good that you were able to have someone, right? To -
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:29:12](#) - yeah. And it was like all four years, you know,
- Gloria Sosa: [01:29:15](#) <laugh> So after you graduated from Cal State LA did that relationship kinda -
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:29:19](#) Yeah. It continued.
- Gloria Sosa: [01:29:21](#) - continues. Okay.
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:29:21](#) Absolutely. Yeah. I've seen him a few times.
- Gloria Sosa: [01:29:24](#) I mean, well, once you have, uh, such a good mentorship relationship, I think that it's worth, right? Yeah. Nourishing and just continuing that...
- Fermin Vasquez: [01:29:34](#) Yeah. I know he retired. <inaudible>
- Gloria Sosa: [01:29:37](#) Thank you. So we'll stop for today.
- New Speaker: [01:29:40](#) \*END OF INTERVIEW\*