

Tyler L. Rivera, '16  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
SpeakOut  
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[SOPHIA M.]

WHITTEMORE: I'm Sophia Whittemore, Dartmouth Class of 2020, and today I'm here in Rauner Special Collections Library at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, interviewing Tyler [L.] Rivera from the Class of 2016. The date is October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Time is 4 p.m.

Tyler, would you like to introduce yourself and where you're currently located in terms of building, town, state slash holding this interview right now?

RIVERA: Sure thing. My name is Tyler Rivera, and like you said, I am part of the Class of 2016. I am originally from Seattle [Washington], but I am currently based in the Marshall Islands, which is a chain of islands halfway between Australia and Hawaii, where I am conducting some research on local climate change adaptation. And I am currently sitting inside of my apartment here in Majuro [pronounced MAH-juh-doh]

WHITTEMORE: And that's in the Marshall Islands, correct?

RIVERA: Yes, it is.

WHITTEMORE: Awesome. And now just a reminder: This project is to maintain an accurate oral history of the LGBTQ+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus] community at Dartmouth, so please try to remain as accurate and give a full an account as possible. And, again, Tyler, I would like to thank you so much again for participating.

RIVERA: You're welcome. And thank *you*.

WHITTEMORE: Awesome.

Now, to get a better sense of background, where did you live prior to your current location?

- RIVERA: So just before this, I was living in New York City, working in—working in New York and living in Brooklyn.
- WHITTEMORE: And before you went to Dartmouth, you grew up in a suburb— or town outside Seattle, right?
- RIVERA: Yes, I did. I technically call Federal Way, Washington, home.
- WHITTEMORE: And how did home kind of affect, like, your sense of identity growing up?
- RIVERA: I mean, in—in really just so many different ways did my childhood and my upbringing shape me into who I am today. I come from a mixed-race family, so my mom’s Filipino, and my dad is Puerto Rican, and that has certainly shaped my ability to feel a sense of belonging and a sense of connection in spaces and in different contexts, depending on the—the identities that I perceive the people I am around to have.
- So, you know, at times I can certainly feel attached to, like, an Asian-Pacific islander sense of identities. At times I can feel attached to, like, a Latinx sense of identity. At times it’s neither, and in others it’s both, and in this way, it’s, like, very context dependent how I choose to identify and when I feel most seen and most comfortable, I would say.
- I’ll also—I just add that, you know, I grew up also in a single-parent household. My parents separated when I was young, so I lived with my mom and my little brother from the age of about seven onwards and having the opportunity to witness my mom carry our family without—without ever complaining, with—you know, with the most grace and the most strength in—in the way she moved forward from, like, a very difficult point in all of our lives, and how she just has imbued incredible ethic when it comes to work and when it comes to life in me and in my younger brother, is certainly something that has, like, fundamentally shaped me in the course of my life.
- WHITTEMORE: So you said you came from a Filipinx and Latinx communities, correct?
- RIVERA: Yes.

WHITTEMORE: Were there any other communities that you felt connected to during this time?

RIVERA: I mean, I always felt connected to, like, a—like, a low-income, working-class sense of identity, with—I mean, with both of my parents growing up—my mom being a customer service representative for an airline and my dad being a veteran with the [U.S.] Army and then a truck driver following that—I've had the opportunity to see my parents work basically every single day of—of my life, and knowing that, you know, there was—there wasn't going to be, like, an end in sight to—to their—to their work—and to their output because, you know, they collectively and individually were really only making enough to—to get by, not really enough to—to save for—for any future date.

So, you know, being able to—to cultivate, like, a sense of, like, solidarity with other low-income people, other working-class people—you know, other—the other kids in my schools who were there eating free lunch, the other kids in my schools who, like, were filling out the FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid] senior year—you know, the other—the other kids who had to get part-time jobs so that they could participate in extracurricular activities, those—those kinds of communities definitely were the ones that I was—was drawn to when I was still in—in elementary through high school.

WHITTEMORE: So you were the eldest of two siblings, and you also worked while you were attending Todd Beamer High School in Federal Way, Washington. Is that correct?

RIVERA: Yeah. So I have a younger brother. His name's Jacob, and he's currently a sophomore in—at an in-state college in Washington.

And for the second point, yes, I—my first job, which I held for about three years, was at a grocery store, where I did everything from bagging groceries to pushing carts to sweeping the store and taking out the trash. It was—it was unglamorous work, but I think it—it set me on my path to where I am, because I was actually a part of a union in my first job, as the—as the courtesy clerk, is what my position was called. And I think that experience being—being a

member of the union and working this, you know, very humble job definitely shaped me in many ways.

WHITTEMORE: What were, like, certain role models that you had in high school?

RIVERA: I mean, I've already mentioned my mom, obviously.

I guess the second one would be my sophomore year English teacher. I don't know that I would necessarily call her—I guess she would be my role model. I haven't really thought of her that way, but in terms of being a person who I could look to for advice and inspiration, she definitely filled that role in my life. And I say that because when—when I got to her class, I had always known that I would one day end up going to college, like, I've been a very studious person, and I've excelled—I had excelled academically, but I hadn't really given much thought to where I might go on to college after high school.

And—and Miss Pentecost [spelling unconfirmed] was her name—she was the first person to really ask me, like, where I was thinking about going to school, and I didn't really know what to say. I honestly think I probably said that I was going to go to the University of Washington because that's what seemed like was a natural course that I would take.

And—and she was really the first person to tell me that if I wanted it, I could pursue—you know, pursue something beyond just the University of Washington, that I could go on to apply to schools that were very selective and that were very well resourced and where I would be receiving a world-class education.

And she herself was—was raised in rural Louisiana and ended up receiving financial aid to attend Columbia University and then chose to—chose to become a Teach for America corps member after she graduated, and which is how she ended up teaching at my high school in Federal Way, Washington. So I definitely looked to her for inspiration and as someone who had—who had defied odds and had, you know, blazed a path that she wasn't necessarily set up for.

WHITTEMORE: How did you first hear about Dartmouth?

RIVERA: Just by researching colleges, essentially. You know, I—I did apply early decision my senior year, and that was a total leap of faith on my part. I actually—I didn't have the chance to visit Dartmouth before I chose to apply early decision, and I was accepted, which was binding, so—so of course I attended nine months after I found out I was accepted.

But, yeah, it was a very fortuitous and opportune that I was accepted, given that, you know, I didn't know anyone who had ever gone to Dartmouth. I wasn't sure at all what it was going to be like. I was the first person from my school to ever go to Dartmouth. So I was going in with virtually no understanding of the culture, the community, the academic experience that I was getting myself into. I really just knew that it was a good school and it was in the middle of nowhere. [Chuckles.]

WHITTEMORE: Around the time period that you're thinking about or—or, like, during this process of applications and attending Dartmouth, there was a *Rolling Stones* [sic; *Rolling Stone*] article about Greek life, specifically at Dartmouth, wasn't there?

RIVERA: Yes, yeah, yeah. Oh, so that was very, I want to say troubling to—to a younger me, when I had already been accepted and when I was obviously planning on attending Dartmouth but still just knew very little about what it was going to be like. The *Rolling Stones* [sic; *Rolling Stone*] article broke, and I remember multiple of my friends texting me and sending the link to the article and saying, like, "Have you heard about this? Do you know that this is what it's going to be like?"

And it wasn't—it wasn't, like, headline news. I don't think my parents really found out, and if they did, it wasn't really, like, a—a big topic of conversation. I'm certain they would have been worried. But, yeah, it *was* definitely concerning to me that, like, I was—I was a studious nerd from a place where nobody's ever even heard of Dartmouth, and, you know, I wasn't the type of person who, like, went to high school parties or, you know, engaged in "illegal"—quote unquote—activities as a high school student.

So to hear about—about the hazing that was occurring at Dartmouth [chuckles]—yeah, definitely left me second guessing my decision at the time, and up until really I—I entered Dartmouth and began my freshman year, that feeling really lingered.

WHITTEMORE: Do you remember maybe, like, any other points that the *Rolling Stones* [sic; *Rolling Stone*] article had made or maybe what it was titled or something around it?

RIVERA: Yeah, it—I mean, it was from the perspective of—his name was Andrew Lohse [Class of 2012], and I remember that specifically because later in my time at Dartmouth, he actually re-enrolled and—and either graduated with me or graduated the year after me. But, yeah, he described the rituals that he was subjected to as a—as a pledge during his sophomore year at SAE [Sigma Alpha Epsilon]—was the fraternity that now no longer exists.

But, yeah, I just remember the, like, really, really like crude kind of disgusting practices that he described and, like, that I had no intention of getting myself into. I really wasn't going into Dartmouth anticipating that I would ever get involved in Greek life, so it's not like I was worried that I, myself, would one day fall prey to this kind of, like, cult mentality, but more so that it was the kind—that Dartmouth was the kind of community that would even allow those—those kinds of behaviors, those kinds of practices to—to take root. That was really my concern there.

WHITTEMORE: And this was around April or May of 2012, right?

RIVERA: Yes, exactly. So it was, you know, around the time when everyone who I knew was deciding where they were going to end up going, and no one else actually that I knew applied to Dartmouth, so I was, like, totally going it alone in choosing to go to college in Hanover, New Hampshire. And it really kind of gave an opportunity for my friends and my peers to—to kind of call me out and in a way, like, gaslight me about my decision to—to go to Dartmouth.

WHITTEMORE: Huh. Could you elaborate a little bit more on that? Only if you feel comfortable.

RIVERA: Yeah. I—I mean—I mean to say that, like, not only did I receive remarks from peers that called into question my acceptance on the grounds that it was made on an affirmative action basis. I specifically remember one of my—I mean, she was my friend, but I remember [chuckles] we were sitting in a movie theater, and it was during the previews, so the lights were still on, and we were just chatting, and it was a group of us, so it was more than just me and Sarah [spelling unconfirmed] was her name.

But she—she brought up that I was only accepted to Dartmouth because I, you know, am mixed race and that I was able to say that I'm Latinx, because she was Korean, and she felt that being exclusively Asian was not—was to her disadvantage when she was applying to school, which is why she didn't get into the schools that she wanted to get into, but I was able to get into Dartmouth because I said that I was Latinx on my application, in addition to being Filipino.

So, I mean, that was an added layer on top—on top of the—the way that my peers confronted me about, like, the *Rolling Stones* [sic; *Rolling Stone*] article, and—and the notion at Dartmouth was—was not the kind of, like,—was not this kind of like academically rigorous institution where I was going to be getting a, quote, like, Ivy League education but was, like, this frat school, where I was going to be hazed and drunk all the time and where I wasn't actually going to—I wasn't going to get the kind of education that I thought I was going to be getting. And that was—yeah, that was a very, like, confusing point for me.

WHITTEMORE: How did this sort of lead into your first memories of freshman fall with kind of going in with all these expectations?

RIVERA: I would say, luckily, the expectations that I had, or really the perceptions that I brought with me—they didn't negatively impact me in my time, especially as I was, like, first getting myself situated at Dartmouth. I immediately found a sense of community, a sense of place, a group of people whom I felt I could be comfortable in myself, to a certain extent, around. And I—I don't think that I allowed those perceptions to—to negatively impact to my experience as—as a freshman.

I certainly tried my best to go in with an open mind, which was aided by the fact that, you know, I didn't know a single other person who was going in as a freshman, so I really had the opportunity to make the experience my own and to be intentional and deliberate about the spaces that I hung out in, the communities that I ingrained myself in and the people that—that I associated with. So it was—it was freeing, and it didn't feel burdened by—by those kinds of presumptions that I brought.

WHITTEMORE: What were some of your earliest memories related to the college?

RIVERA: I mean, I definitely remember the first moment when I arrived in Hanover. That was with my mom and my younger brother, and we were in the, like,—I want to say it was a minivan that my mom had rented at the Boston Logan Airport [sic; Logan International Airport]. And then we drove up, and I remember cresting a hill and being able to see the top of Baker-Berry [Library] tower and just feeling overcome with joy and with privilege and with just utter happiness that I—like, I was able to break into this bubble that I, given my experiences, given my life, given how I grew up, the circumstances of my childhood was able to enter this—this rarified, this exclusive space and that I had the opportunity to make it my own.

And, you know, just knowing that, like, my—my immigrant mom, who had worked every day to provide for me and my brother was there with me, by my side, to—to help me transition into—into this new chapter of my life, and who really had the opportunity to, like, really bask in—in that joy of—of seeing her—seeing her oldest son, seeing her first born go on to—to achieve so much, you know, relatively speaking, for—for my family. That—that will stay with me forever.

I distinctly remember when we got all of my stuff set up in my doorm in the River [Cluster], in French [Hall], and I remember my mom and my brother saying goodbye. And my mom was absolutely bawling at the time, because I had never—I had never spent any significant time away from home. I wasn't a kid who went away for camp. I didn't do internships in other cities in high school. You know, I—I was at home.



And—and this was going to be the first time in which I was—I was away from home and at that, so far from home, clear on the other side of the country, time zones away. So that was scary for my mom, to—to have to leave me behind. And—and she cried a lot. And I tried my best to—you know, to kind of be strong for her and to—to show her that I was going to be okay and that she didn't have to worry.

But then, as soon as she left, as soon as she drove away, I ran upstairs to my room and with my—and I laid on top of my bed that didn't even have, like, sheets or a comforter or anything, and I cried for, like, an hour after my mom left because I was so scared about [chuckles] being alone!

So that was really, like, the first moments, the first memories that I made when I—when I got to Dartmouth.

WHITTEMORE: I guess, what was the transitional period after that like?

RIVERA: There was little crying after that, I am happy to say. I—I feel lucky that I was in the River, in the dorms called the River, in French, on the second floor, which is certainly not something that—not an experience, an emotion that I was feeling at the time. I didn't feel like it was a privilege to be in what is arguably the—the—the least luxurious accommodations and the most remote from, like—from the [Dartmouth] Green.

But it was a very special place to be, to—to spend my freshman year. I immediately found myself bonded to my—my floor mates and to the other people who were in my building. You know, there was another Filipino kid, who was also queer. His name was Francis [spelling unconfirmed], and we became very close.

I also was able to find a Filipino community during my freshman year. There were two upperclassmen at the time who kind of, like, just casually identified that me and Francis and this one other person, Will, were all Filipino students, and they basically just approached us and were, like, “Hey, you guys are Filipino, right? We're Filipino too.” And they invited us to have dinner, and that sparked the beginning of, like—of the Filipino community that continues to exist at Dartmouth to this day and that I kind of like stewarded

through my senior year and then left behind to be inherited by—by the Filipino students who are at Dartmouth now. So, you know, finding that community early on in my freshman year was—was amazing.

I also was able to find other students who were there on, you know, financial aid. That was very, very important to me freshman year because, I mean, Dartmouth—for all that—for all its efforts in recruiting students from—from across the, you know, socioeconomic spectrum, it really is a place of immense wealth and concentrated privilege, and it is unavoidable, and it—it—as—as a kid who—who was essentially on a full ride to Dartmouth and who'd grown up, you know, in the suburbs and, like, a working-class family, I just had no idea what the—what the levels of—of privilege were at Dartmouth.

And that was very jarring for me to—to be surrounded by people who had just such—such different life experiences growing up and many of whom I befriended but who—on a certain level, there were things I just couldn't relate to them about.

So being able to find a—a group of friends, a community of people who—who shared the experience of, you know, growing up, like, without money, you know, being on financial aid at Dartmouth, having to work, you know, as a freshman, finding part-time jobs to supplement what the college was providing I needed, desperately so, to have people around me who I could relate to in that way because that was just so—my socioeconomic identity was so pervasive and so material throughout my time at Dartmouth.

WHITTEMORE: You said you stewarded the Filipinx community while at Dartmouth. Does it—is it—does it follow underneath the purview of, like, maybe a student-run organization or a student community here now, or have you seen it shift?

RIVERA: No, so I don't think it's, like, a formally recognized group. It really was an informal collective, and—and in a really beautiful way. I mean, also in a way that forced us to, like, spend our own money to—you know, to like, buy snacks or buy beverages and buy food to prepare meals together—you know, find spaces that we could host, like, informal get-

togethers in, but also in a way that was, like, very—very organic. It's not like we were able to, like, advertise that this community existed; it was exclusively word of mouth.

You know, we would kind of just like find a person who—who was Filipino, and then they would tell their friends, you know, who were also Filipino, to, like,—that—that—that this informal collective of people existed. And then we would occasionally, like, cook meals together.

When I was graduating, I bequeathed all of my flare to the freshman and sophomore Filipinos who were a part of this community. And, like I said, it continues to exist today, still informally, I believe, but—but bigger, I believe, than ever in terms of the, like number of—of Filipinx students at Dartmouth.

WHITTEMORE: Did you also find yourself kind of like carving out social spaces or, like, gravitating towards any social spaces during your time at Dartmouth?

RIVERA: Like—like physical spaces?

RIVERA: Any really, like, community, social spaces, just places you felt comfortable.

RIVERA: Yeah, yeah. So, I mean, as a queer student at Dartmouth, and only an openly queer student beginning my sophomore year, it—it was definitely—it took a conscious effort to find spaces in which I felt comfortable, in which I felt I could be myself.

So, you know, freshman year, when at the time I was not—I did not openly identify as queer, it—in a way, it was almost easier because I—I—I guess I didn't feel like my, like, queerness was something that I brought with me to a particular space, a particular community. So that wasn't enabling or impeding me on finding spaces in which I felt comfortable.

I allowed myself, like, to explore and to—to really discover, like, the—the places and the communities that I felt seen, I felt heard, I felt a shared sense of identity and affinity. And, I mean, it was definitely, like, through trial and error that I, you

know, found particular, like, Greek spaces to be, like, totally hostile and not where I was going to feel comfortable. And also where I was able to find, like, a nook in the East Asian Room in Baker-Berry Library, or, like, the Common Room of my freshman year dorm, or, like, Late Night Collis [sic; Late Night @ Collis Café], or the Sarnier Underground—you know, like, just particular places where I could go to—to be myself.

So, you know, it did—it did take an intentional effort to find those places in ways that, you know, other students at Dartmouth might not have had to struggle to find, depending on your identity. So, you know, I didn't feel like everywhere was for me. I didn't feel like I—I could, you know, seamlessly and fluidly move through space and—and feel comfortable.

It was always a process. It was always context dependent. It was always a matter of my identities coming together and emerging in—in particular places and with particular people. But I—I definitely did find—find groups and find places that—that—that I loved and that, you know, I am still fond for today.

WHITTEMORE: What are some of the groups and the places that you can remember?

RIVERA: So some of the places that I just mentioned, like hanging out in the East Asian Room with my best friend Stephanie [spelling unconfirmed] basically on a daily basis, or being at—being at Novack [Café], not to study necessarily but because a lot of the students who worked at Novack were—were on financial aid, were working-class students who I could easily relate to.

Being around the—being in [The] Tabard. I was formally a member of Tabard for about two years, and then a non-dues-paying member for—for my senior year, but just being around a collective of people who were overwhelmingly queer, who were overwhelmingly people of color, who were, you know, overwhelmingly working-class, students who were financial aid—those students who I met in Tabard were—were very important to shaping my—my, like, social identity, like, my political identity, just giving me a space where I could be myself, in all of my facets and all of my vastness, in

all of my, you know, multiplicity, and where that was—that was—that was accepted and that was appreciated. That was also a very special place for me.

And then, like, just generally, like—like I said, being around, like the Filipinx community—you know, being a part of different student groups. Like, I was a member of Palaeopitus Senior Society my senior year, you know, participating in the Summer Enrichment at Dartmouth program that also benefited other low-income students, other students of color who were in high school at the time—you know, finding places where I—I—and finding communities where I could relate to others.

Oh, and one other important one was BarHop. That was really, especially my senior year,—oh, no, my junior year too, mostly my junior year, I guess—an important social space because it was a non-Greek space where I could go with my friends, not fear that, you know, I—I was going to be subjected to the—to the, like, whims of a frat brother deciding whether or not he wanted to give me a free drink, where I didn't have to feel like the space was someone else's and I was only contingently being welcomed into it.

It was a neutral space where I could go and be myself, dance, like, chat, play board games, drink with friends. That—that was a very special place, and—and that it was free also made it an accessible space for me and for other students who—you know, who couldn't afford to—to perhaps be a member of a dues—a—a fraternity or sorority or other Greek organization that required its members to pay dues, who couldn't afford to, like, go have a drink at Molly's [Restaurant] or something. So it was a very accessible in that way too for me.

WHITTEMORE: Sorry. Could you elaborate a little bit more on, like, what BarHop is?

RIVERA: Yeah. So it was a weekly social space that was organized by the college, paid for by the college and that took place on Wednesdays and I think sometimes Thursdays as well, in the Hopkins Center [for the Arts]. So they opened up the studios that were normally open to—to dance and performing arts groups for their rehearsals, and they turned it

into a social space in the evenings, where from, like, eight p.m. to two a.m., you could go.

There would be—anyone was welcome. You had to be twenty-one to drink, and they would check your ID, but anyone younger than that was obviously welcome to go; they just weren't able to—to drink any, like, alcoholic beverages. But they also had non-alcoholic beverages there as well. All of the beverages were free. They always had snacks for free. They always had activities that you could participate in for free. They had open mic nights. They had comedy nights. They had, like, painting nights, live music.

And it was really an incredible—like I said, a neutral social space that nobody could—could claim and I guess simultaneously that everyone could claim to be their own, because it was by the college and for—for all Dartmouth students.

So I'm not sure that that exists anymore, but that was a very special thing that existed my—my junior and my senior year, at least, so that would have been 2014 through 2016.

WHITTEMORE: And you said you were a member of Tabard. How did that affect kind of like your relationship towards Greek life or co-ed Greek life, et cetera?

RIVERA: You know, Tabard had a lot of really virtuous, really incredible aspects to—to it, in that it—it was radically queer in so many ways and that it openly accepted all people, because it was non-selective. Anyone could be a member of Tabard, and you could be dual affiliated with Tabard and another Greek organization. So because it openly accepted all people, it kind of naturally bred an inclusivity and a pluralism that was really starkly missing in other Greek organizations, at least from my perspective.

So it was—it was very unique in that way. I'll say it's also a Greek organization, and—and Greek life I think, you know, inherently can still be exclusive. You know, it is this—it's a physical space that some people are members of and some people aren't members of, and that some people, you know, were—were subjected to, like,—you know, to rituals, not like anything bad in any way, really. But, you know, subject to

particular, like, practices because Tabard has, like, a special culture, just like all Greek organizations.

And as you're becoming a part of that community, you have to learn the culture. And there are different practices that, like, Tabard employs to—to familiarize its membership with that—with that culture and with the history. And in so many ways, it was, like,—it was really, like, affirming, really community building practices, but also in some ways, you know, it involves—like, it involves drinking a lot of the time, and for—

And it was always optional, and I never felt pressured, but, you know, it—it did still have some of the kind of exclusive aspects of Greek life that—that kind of seem to just be inherent to—to the system.

So, you know, it—it was really wonderful and provided me a space, a Greek space where I could go and feel myself and show up all the way whenever I wanted to. But it—it wasn't perfect, in any way. And, you know, it's—it's—it's always a process, and—community building is always a process, especially because the members who make up that community are—are constantly in flux. So, you know, I think we—we tried our best to be—to set a good example for what, like, co-ed Greek life can be. But—but like I said, you know, wasn't perfect. Always a process.

WHITTEMORE: What were some other relationships you developed during this time, for, like, friendships or just anything that stands out?

RIVERA: So like I said, the process of, like, openly identifying, like, as a queer person at Dartmouth, like, it—I don't want to say naturally, because Dartmouth's, like, queer community—it—at least in my time, it was not—I want to say it wasn't extremely tight knit. It didn't have—I mean, the Triangle House was opened during my junior year, so that created a space that was, like, by and for queer students, LGBTQIAP+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning, intersex, asexual, pansexual and other marginalized orientations/identities] students. But even then, like, that was a dorm.

And there was, you know, [Dartmouth] PRIDE Week, which I was a part of my junior—my junior year in—in organizing on the executive committee. And PRIDE Week definitely, like, catalyzed, at least temporarily, a shared sense of community among any student who was a part of, like, the LGBTQ community.

But, like, it—it took a lot of effort to—to find people who were also, like,—were also queer and who I could relate to in that way. It's—there—there—there wasn't, like, a particularly strong sense of community. So, like, I—I did what I could, and I definitely made plenty of—of—of queer friends. But—but it was—it was a process. And it was—and it's inherently a process because it's a process for everyone to—to come—like, to—to come out, to openly identify how—how they want to identify and to feel safe and welcome in a community that, you know, isn't necessarily for us, and in a space, in a place that oftentimes could—could be very hostile and could be very isolating.

So that—that was definitely, like, a work in progress during my time. But I felt very lucky that, you know, even while I was there, was able to make many queer friends, who I continue to be friends with to this day. But it was not without—it was not without effort that those—those friendships that I made, you know, emerged.

WHITTEMORE: And you said you were friends with Stephanie—with Stephanie, right?

RIVERA: Yes. Yeah. Mm-hm. So Stephanie—she's my best friend. She was my freshman floor mate, and we were—were, like, basically immediately bonded and became best friends. And—and—I mean, she's still my best friend to this day. When I was living in New York for the past two years, she was my roommate. We got a cat together. She still lives in the same apartment with our cat while I'm away. And—and her friendship was—was *the* most important relationship that had at Dartmouth.

She was the first person that I ever came out to. She was the person who I could turn to to, like, talk about my identity, to talk about my experiences, to talk about, like, how I grew up. And she always made me feel seen, made me feel



valued, made me feel like I was special and important and that I deserved to be at Dartmouth because there were, you know, for all the—for all of the community building that I did, there were many times where I didn't feel like Dartmouth was for me, many times where I didn't feel like I—I had a place in—in Hanover, many times where I feel like I was just so far from everything and everyone that I had ever known and that the distance was only ma- —was—was then brought with me when I returned home because I was changing, because I wasn't at home, then to feel like a distance even *when* I was home because me and my friends and family.

I struggled with that a lot. And Stephanie always made me feel like when I was with her, I was home at Dartmouth, and I—I—I love her so much, and I just am eternally grateful that the—the housing higher beings at Dartmouth [chuckles] brought us together on French 2 freshman year, and—and the rest is history.

WHITTEMORE: So Stephanie Roth [spelling unconfirmed] was also a '16, then?

RIVERA: Yes, she was. Mm-hm, yeah.

WHITTEMORE: Awesome!

So I guess you said you were exploring, like, your identity in terms of—your queer identity at this time. What was that like?

RIVERA: It was—it was challenging. It was a struggle. So I—I said that I didn't openly identify as queer my freshman year, but that's not to say that I didn't identify; it's just that I hadn't really accepted myself and come to terms with my, like, queer identity and my sexuality. And that was extremely difficult. That was a burden that weighed on me everywhere I went. It was something that I was hyper conscious of. And that—and that got bled into, like, the kinds of classes that I took, the relationships that I established, the topics of conversation that I would engage in, how I would talk, how I would walk, how I would present myself, what social spaces I would—you know, I would hang out in.

It was constantly at the forefront of my mind. And—and that's because, like, my—my other identities that I brought with me, I—I—you know, I was very open about them. I was very open about, like, being on financial aid at Dartmouth and what that meant. I was very open about coming from a single-family house—single-parent household. I was very open about being mixed race. You know, all of my other identities, I was able to—to tap into and—and share.

But freshman year, I was not able to do that. I wasn't in a place to do that with my—with my queer identity. And so that is something that just weighed on me all year. And then I was away for the summer in between my freshman and sophomore year, naturally.

And then I also took off my sophomore year. I did an internship abroad. And that was a very introspective time for me because I had so much—I was so isolated. I was in Kuwait on an internship by myself, so there were so many language and cultural barriers that hindered my ability to—to, like, meaningfully establish, you know, connections and a sense of community while I was there.

I was also in a country where being—being gay was illegal, so that certainly added [chuckles] to—to my thought processes that I was having while I was there. But while I was there, I was very isolated, which gave me a lot of time to be reflective and introspective and contemplative. And it was at that point in my life, all by myself, when I—I came to terms with my sexuality and when I decided that I—I am queer. I always have been. I always will be. And that it was important to me to—to share that with others.

So when I returned to Dartmouth my sophomore winter is when I began the process of—of basically coming out. And my process was a non-process, if you will, because I didn't like, post on Facebook or make an Instagram about it or, like—I didn't even really go out of my way to—to share this part of myself explicitly. It was more so a matter of just not hiding it and—and openly talking about it, owning it and not—and not policing my—myself, my speech, my behavior—you know, giving myself the freedom to be me through and through.

That was revelatory for me as I went to my sophomore year, and then, I mean, that obviously carried with me through—through to where I am now.

WHITTEMORE: And I guess, again, going back to the idea of just what that process was like, you said you found other safe spaces in terms of just, like, student organizations, in terms of finding co-ed Greek spaces that felt safe. You mentioned Novack. Was that working there, or—?

RIVERA: No, no, I wasn't working there. I had friends who were also a member—who were also members of—of Tabard, and they were employed at Novack. And so, you know, just like being around students who were working because they needed to, because they couldn't afford not to—I mean, I was also working at the time. I was working at the Jones Media Center from my sophomore summer through graduation. And before that, I was working at Green Corps, which was the—which was the, like, organization that solicited donations and gifts from alumni. I was, like, basically a telemarketer for Dartmouth, calling up graduates and asking them to make donations to the college.

So, you know, I was working all throughout my time at Dartmouth. And, you know, just finding—finding—finding spaces where my—I could feel a sense of shared experience, a sense of shared identity with other students was important because, I mean, for the most part, like, there was a lot of feeling no shared experience: places like Baker Lobby [now Reiss Hall], places like King Arthur Flour Café, like the—the—what we called the dark side of FoCo [the Class of 1953 Commons]. Like, those kinds of places, I did not feel at home in. I did not feel like those were my spaces, those were my places.

So when I didn't feel like I could be myself, it meant that I—in every place, it meant that I had to search out those places where I did feel like I could be myself.

WHITTEMORE: And you took a study abroad to Kuwait, and you worked at the Center of [sic; for] Gulf Studies [at the American University of Kuwait], or—

RIVERA: Yeah, I—I was—in wasn't a study abroad program. It was an, like, internship program, and I was at the American University of Kuwait, and I had different internships placements while I was there. I worked at the student life office, I worked at the writing and rhetoric center, basically their RWIT [pronounced AR-wit; Student Center for Research, Writing and Information Technology, at Dartmouth College], and I worked at the Center for Gulf Studies as well. Mm-hm.

WHITTEMORE: And I guess how—you mentioned briefly about, like, how your experience changed I guess your sense of identity and relationship to that.

RIVERA: Mm-hm.

WHITTEMORE: How did it feel kind of, I guess, during that time period or after you came back? I guess how did it sh- —yeah. Sorry.

RIVERA: Yeah. I think—yeah,—it—it's very much related to the experience that I'm having now. I'm in the Marshall Islands, on a tiny spit of land in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, all by myself, and I'm here for four months, and to say that it's isolating does not do it justice.

But my experience that I had in Kuwait very much prepared me to be able to—to cope with the feelings that I have now, because I was very alone when I was in Kuwait. I had—I had a two-bedroom apartment all to myself, and I didn't know anyone there other than my coworkers. And I was very shy. I—I didn't—one of my regrets is not the seizing upon the opportunity to—to make more meaningful connections, so in that way—with other people, while I was there—so in that way, it's also a learning experience for me because that's exactly what I'm trying to do while I'm here, is, like, make connections with people and, like, build positive memories that I can look back on when I'm no longer here.

But being alone gave me the opportunity to really, like, become a more—a more resilient person and—and to be totally at ease with being myself, all by myself.

And I will add that up until that point, I, like, one hundred percent identified as an extrovert, but from that point on, I

think—that was kind of like a turning point for me in realizing that, like, I actually really—I like and crave the time that I have to myself and that I believe that I'm more of an introvert than I am an extrovert now.

And that was, like, a moment in which I had the opportunity to, like,—to learn about myself, which is a lot of what I was doing, like, while I was there: I was learning about myself, and that process of self-discovery was, like, invaluable to—to my sense of sense, and, like, it—it—like I said, it continues just to—to bear fruits to this day in terms of who I am.

WHITTEMORE: You also said in terms of learning about yourself that you found your political voice while at Tabard. What was student activism like at the time that you were at Dartmouth?

RIVERA: It was—it ebbed and flowed, but it—it was definitely a—a present force at Dartmouth while I was there. There was an occupation of the president's office my sophomore year, led by a group that laid out a list of demands of the administration that they called the Freedom Budget. And that, you know, that—included things like hiring tenured faculty of color, providing more institutional support to students of color, investing in the African and African-American Studies program and the Asian-American Studies [sic; Asian and Middle Eastern Studies] programs at Dartmouth, making those more robust in terms of their offerings and funding, among other things.

I wasn't a part of that, but seeing that take hold was really empowering and impactful, and that—that I think motivated me to get involved in activities in which I knew I would have the chance to build a sense of community among marginalized students at Dartmouth: queer students, students of color, working-class students.

You know, like I said, participating in the Summer Enrichment at Dartmouth program, participating in PRIDE Week, being a member of Tabard, being on Palaeopitus senior year. That gave me a platform to—to surface the kinds of needs that marginalized students had at Dartmouth with administrators and with faculty members, who—who, by

virtue of being a member of Palaeop, would listen to me and to my peers.

And then, you know, continuing to support student activists during my senior year, when there was a very visible Black Lives Matter presence, and, I mean, there—there was a lot that was unfolding. I mean, there was a backlash to—I don't even—I don't think that students who are there know this existed, but there was a—there was an anonymous chat forum called Bored@Baker that existed my freshman and sophomore year. And you could go post comments totally anonymously to this chat board, where everyone would be able to see them, and then comment on them, upload them. It was essentially, like, Yik Yak before Yik Yak existed.

And there were some, like,—some violent, some, like, anti-black, racist, homophobic comments that surfaced through Bored@Baker, and that spawned student backlash and student protests, and that was related to the Freedom Budget.

And then later, there was Yik Yak that spawned—just, like, spawned a community of hate, and there were also bias incidents that were occurring around the college that were—were very visible and that were very concerning as a student of color, as a queer student, as a working-class student, for me.

And—and that later activated the—the Black Lives Matter student mobilization that occurred my senior year. And it was very—just so—so important to me to—to watch students so—just take on so much power and so much leadership and so much vocal activism, and the way they exposed the—the difficulties of being a marginalized, a minority student at Dartmouth and—and who so eloquently proposed, you know, remedies to—to—to help tilt the scales so that more marginalized students could—could feel at home and safe at Dartmouth.

And, like, I can't—I can't say—I can't claim that I was a part of organizing those in any way, those kinds of protests that happened my senior year, but I certainly participated in them, and I certainly advocated for them as a member of Palaeop, to the extent that I was able to.

WHITTEMORE: And Palaeopitus is a senior society?

RIVERA: Yes.

WHITTEMORE: And you also said that various social spaces you encountered kind of altered what classes you took. How was your academic journey—or what was your academic journey like during your four years?

RIVERA: I mean, I came into Dartmouth thinking that I was going to be a government major, and my freshman fall, I took a government course, and I remember being so excited because I had fully planned out that I was going to be a government major and a public policy minor, and I was going to go on to—go to law school and become a senator, a U.S. senator. That was my goal at the time. And it was very ambitious.

And I absolutely hated that government class. I—I—I don't—and then I took another government class that I didn't like at all, and I took public policy courses that felt so abstract, so technocratic, so far removed from my lived experience.

And I luckily at the time also took a—a geography class that I absolutely fell in love with because it blended theory and practice in really important and eye-opening ways. It—it drew on a number of, like, different theoretical wells, whether it was, like, post-structuralist theory or Marxist theory, post-modernist theory, feminist, queer scholarship, and applied those theories to—to—to tease apart how our—our spatial arrangements are manifestations of—of unequal distributions of power.

And—and that—that spoke to me. That spoke to me as a—as a person of color. That spoke to me as a queer student, as a low-income student. And I saw myself in the work that I was doing. I mean, even my—my senior year, my geography seminar, my senior seminar was about mixed-race identity. And that naturally spoke to me and to my experiences.

So I took as many geography courses as I could, but I also didn't shy away from exploring other classes, like, taking African-American Studies, taking a history class called the

History of Capitalism. You know, I—I took French to fulfill my language requirement. And I definitely took the opportunity to explore.

I also did human-centered design and environmental studies minors, and that gave me the chance to take something, like—interesting course work.

But, you know, in terms of, like, my academic journey, it was—it was difficult to come in as a student who—who, like, didn't—who went to public school and who had never had a private tutor and who—who never—who didn't know anyone, who—even, like,—like, who—who—who couldn't look to my family for guidance or support. Like, I—I really felt like I was going it alone in terms of my academics, and—and I got a lot of support from my friends.

But I—I—I did struggle to—to—to find myself academically in terms of just, like, being able to navigate academia. That—yeah, that was definitely, like, a struggle for me, because there is a particular way that academia is structured and particular dynamics of power that you must negotiate.

And, like, I had no clue how to ask my professors for help. I had no clue how to inquire if I could maybe work on a research project or support—support, like, a professor in—in their scholarship. I had absolutely no comfort in—in going to office hours and forming—or taking my professor out to lunch or dinner.

I didn't do that one time the entire time I was at Dartmouth, because I just felt so uncomfortable by the prospect of, like, forming relationships with these people who—who—who were so, like, far removed from me and from my life and experiences. So there was a struggle in—in that academic journey as well.

WHITTEMORE: I guess were there any professors in particular departments that kind of called out to you? You mentioned government, human-centered design as well as environment studies. Was—were there any other specific, like, moments you remember for academic life?



RIVERA: I mean, I—I—I was lucky to have some great geography professors, who I continue to be in touch with today, who—who—who maybe didn't provide me with the kind of like emotional, interpersonal support that I—I could have used, and—I—I want to make clear that it's *because* I didn't reach out to them. I never sought out that support from my professors.

But academically, intellectually speaking, I had a number of professors, like my professor Colleen [A.] Fox, my professor Richard [A.] Wright, my professor Anne [R.] Kapuscinski. They all really shaped profoundly my—the—the—the lenses with which I approached the world, the way I see power, the way I tease apart the kinds of social, political, economic forces that produce inequality and injustice in the world and how I view myself as holding the power to—to dismantle those forces and those systems of oppression.

That—that was—having the opportunity to engage in that kind of literature, that kind of scholarship in—in classes like my geography classes, my environmental studies classes—that was hugely influential on me and continues to—to shape my—my passion for—for social justice, for liberation, for emancipation for people like me and is the kind of work, the kind of intellectual labor that I continue to see myself investing in moving forward and carrying with me throughout my life.

WHITTEMORE: Building off of that, what was life like after graduating from Dartmouth?

RIVERA: It was—you know, it's sad—it's sad to leave, but I can say that I was very, very excited to move to New York with my best friend and to live together and to work in New York and to just have exposure to so many different facets of life that just, like, didn't exist at Dartmouth: so much multiplicity, so much diversity—like, physically, have a more expansive space to explore. That was a very, very exciting time for me, the transition from Dartmouth to New York.

And yet it wasn't without difficulties and just, like, in terms of, like, my career because it, like,—once again, in, like, the same way that I struggled to, like, reach out to professors and navigate academia, I also struggled to navigate, like,

the—the—the professional world. I really didn't know how to go about, like, networking. I didn't know how to go about being strategic with, like, the jobs that I took. And that's something that has been a process to—to learn and to come to terms with.

So, like, I kind of just, like,—I took a job that I hated with— with a—a fashion and technology startup, as a customer experience associate, which was very much a glorified way of saying that I was answering phone calls from angry customers and writing them e-mails in response to their refund requests.

But that—you know, that job to me is very reflective of the kind of—the kind of struggle that I've had to navigate in—in creating—creating a path, carving a path for myself, because I just haven't had the—the guidance, the kind of support, the kind of role models that so many other people had going into Dartmouth and then leaving Dartmouth.

So everything I've done, I've done for myself, and it's reflected in the way that I've struggled to do it. But, you know, I—I—I very much own—right?—independence, fiercely so. And I am proud of myself for—for remaining steadfast in my pursuit of—of something more and in being unrelenting in—in my approach to life.

It would have been very easy and comfortable for me to—to move back home to Federal Way after graduating from Dartmouth and being somewhere familiar, being somewhere where I would be surrounded by people I knew and figure out life slowly.

But I figure—I feel like I've had to figure out life quickly, and I haven't always figured it out in the most linear path, and I certainly—if I could go back again, there are things I would change, but—but I—like I said, I am—I am proud of the way I've been able to do it on my own.

WHITTEMORE: How have you kind of seen like your professional life or any work you might have done with organizations kind of develop?

RIVERA: Very gradually. So I have gone back and forth on, like, what it is that I think that I want to do with my life, and as you can imagine, graduating with a geography major didn't exact set me up for a straightforward career path. So that inherently forced me to kind of figure out where I see myself in the future: the kinds of organizations that I see myself working in, the kinds of capacities that I see myself filling, the kind of like intellectual work that I want to do.

And it's—it—it has been a slow and gradual process in—in figuring that out for myself, because I—I don't think that when I graduated that's what I wanted to immediately spend my time doing. I was more excited to be in New York, to do things that I had only ever imagined doing as—as a New Yorker: seeing sights, experiencing, like, neighborhoods, like, just living my fullest life.

And I was—I was really preoccupied with that, and so, like, I didn't exactly, like, dive head-first into, like, developing myself professionally. But, you know, three—over three years out from graduation, I think I am now in a place where I can see, like, a clear vision of what I want to do and where I want to be.

And as I'm, like, currently, actually preparing my graduate school applications for master's programs in urban planning, which builds very much on my geography and human-centered design and environmental studies coursework at Dartmouth. I—

And also the kind of like work that I did as an AmeriCorps member with the mayor's office in New York for the last year and the kind of social justice work that I want to do. I feel like I finally have, like, a coherent vision of—of what I want to do and where I want to be, which—which is, like, a huge relief to me [chuckles] and my parents.

WHITTEMORE: So how would you describe the kind of work you're drawn to or planning? Social justice intersections?

RIVERA: Yes. Yeah, absolutely. It's fundamentally at the intersection of—of planning and—and justice-oriented work. So what particularly fascinated me about—about—what fascinates me about planning, rather is that urban planners have a very

significant role to play in shaping the fabric of our communities.

And when place shapes us so greatly, when, like, the neighborhood that you grow up in shapes your health indicators, shapes your educational opportunities, shapes your exposure to—to—to violence and mass incarceration, shapes, like, the kinds of, like, career, professional opportunities, like social service organizations—when that is so intimately tied to place and therefore when—and those places go on to shape us so significantly, like, planners have an immense role to play in then producing, life-particular inequalities or, conversely, ,have the power to dismantle injustices in—in our—in our communities and our built environment.

So I am super excited to kind of situate my career at the intersection of social justice and planning, and I'm hoping to spend my life working as an advocate, working as an educator, working as an organizer with—with grassroots organizations, with nonprofit organizations who are—who are dedicated to equipping people, in particular marginalized people who have historically been locked out of urban planning decisions—like redlining, like racial zoning—who have been been erased from those decisions that impact them disproportionately—

I'm excited to help, like, demystify how planning decisions work and how they go on to shape our lives, to really be able to, like, pull back the curtain and break down opaque processes and make them visible, make them accessible, make them legible to—to people like me and to people like my family, who—who—you know, who definitely don't understand urban planning, in part because there's just, like, a lack of exposure and a lack of familiarity to—to the field and to the ways in which it impacts us.

So that's—that's the kind of work that I'm excited to do, which is why I'm plan- —why I'm applying now to—to master's programs for—for next fall, of 2020.

WHITTEMORE: And as you've said before, community plays such an important part in shaping eventually who you are. After

graduating Dartmouth, what was it like kind of finding a sense of community?

RIVERA:

It's very different, because you lack the access to—to—to people on such a, like, an immediate and regular basis. Being in school is not the real world. Like, the fact that you live within a ten-minute walk of all of your best friends and all of the communities that you are a part of, all of the spaces that you call home is not how the world, the real world works.

And it's very different going from a place where I felt, like, I could call it my own. Dartmouth was my own, at least in some ways. And at some points. And going to a city that—in which it would almost—it would almost be wrong to call it my own, because I am not a member, like, a life-long member of the community because I haven't invested in—in it, because I haven't given back to it.

So, like, having to, like, start all over again was a process. Like, having to, like, re-root myself in New York was a process. But I—I started volunteering as soon as I graduated, as an alumni ambassador for Dartmouth, doing interviews, which gave me the chance to meet a lot of really, really amazing young people.

I also volunteered with the public library, helping to do math tutoring for adults who were pursuing their—their high school equivalency, and those were adults ages, like, sixteen to—to seventy. So that gave me the opportunity to meet people who—who—who *were* lifelong New Yorkers and who—who / had just as much to learn from as I had the opportunity to—to teach, in a way.

I—you know, I started attending my community board meetings, which is, like, the lowest, most local level of government in New York. I started regularly attending those meetings to—to learn about the needs, the—the values, the opportunities that exist within the community in Brooklyn that I called home.

So, you know, being at Dartmouth taught me that, you know, you—you—you have to make an active effort to—to find community. It won't just be handed to you on a silver platter. And so that's precisely the kind of approach that I took to—to

finding—to finding a sense of place once I graduated and once I moved to New York.

WHITTEMORE: Were there any alums you kept in contact with?

RIVERA: Yeah. I mean, I'm still friends with Stephanie, because she was my roommate. And to a certain extent, I—I try to, like, stay keyed into the Dartmouth community, which is—which is numerous and vast in New York City.

But I also gave myself the freedom to, like, not feel like—like I had to be tied to the Dartmouth community. I will say there are many people who—who continue to—to—who—whose identity and community revolves around Dartmouth, but I wouldn't say that's the case for me. I feel like I'm a happy alum, but I don't feel like Dartmouth is a part of who I am. It was a place—it was the college that I went to and where I became, in many ways, the person I am today, but I don't foreground Dartmouth as a part of myself.

WHITTEMORE: And finally, I guess, any closing remarks? Maybe any ways that you've seen campus culture shift over time or any ways that you feel that, you know, there have been certain changes or just any remarks in general that you can remember from your time?

RIVERA: I'll just end by saying that change at Dartmouth has always been an elusive process, and it's always been born on the backs of students who have struggled to—to make Dartmouth their own, because Dartmouth was not made for people like them, for people like me, for people like us.

So—so I am eternally grateful to have the opportunity to—to witness such incredible leadership, incredible activism, incredible agitation and resistance to accepting the status quo at Dartmouth, and I—I certainly hope that that spirit carries forward because—because Dartmouth is not monolithic. Dartmouth is not immutable. It is—it is contingent and it's always in flux, and it is made by the people who—who choose to make it.

And I hope that that same—that same tradition of activism and of leadership continues far into the future and that more people who have previously, you know, felt out of place, not

at home, isolated, erased, invisible at Dartmouth will—will have the opportunity to feel like Dartmouth is—is—is truly and deeply theirs.

WHITTEMORE: Tyler, I just want to thank you again for participating in the SpeakOut project and for sharing your story. I know that we had some technical difficulties earlier on, but, again, everything you've shared has been amazing and valuable and insightful and thoughtful, and I really do wish you the best for any future plans you undertake, because it sounds like amazing things are happening.

[End of interview.]