

Geovanni "Geo" Cuevas '14
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
SpeakOut
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Transcribed by Toben Traver

[BARBARA]

OLACHEA: Hello, this is an interview for SpeakOut, Dartmouth College's project recording queer oral history at Dartmouth. It is October 20th, 2018, and I am Barbara Olachea [Class of 2019], the interviewer. I'm currently at Dartmouth's Rauner Special Collections Library in Hanover, NH. And it is 9:22 am.

Geo, if you could introduce yourself?

CUEVAS: Hi. My name is Geovanni Cuevas, I'm currently at my house in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles [California]. It is currently 6:23 [am] here.

OLACHEA: Great. If you could start by telling me about your background. Where were you born, and how was it growing up?

CUEVAS: Sure. I was born in Los Angeles. I grew up in South Central LA [Los Angeles], and I spent most of my time between South Central LA and Inglewood, California, which is where my grandmother lived. I grew up mostly in a single-parent household with, like, a revolving door of stepfathers, and I have four younger siblings. I'm the oldest of five. So, their fathers were, like, involved in my life at various points. And growing up I moved around a lot with my mom and my siblings, and that led me to go to a bunch of different elementary schools.

We finally settled in one particular area of LA, around the Vermont and Slauson area, for anyone who's familiar with that, and I went to a school that was called Budlong [Avenue] Elementary School, where I had wonderful teachers. I was in the, like, honor's track, so that meant that I had really great teachers. They were all, now that I think of it, African-American [unintelligible], and they kind of, like, grilled to me at a very young age to value my education, and so—like, I scored really highly on tests and stuff so I got into a magnet program and I got bussed out to middle school in North Hollywood, and I went to the same middle school that Judy Garland and Mila Kunis went to, which is kind of cool.

And it was the sort of school where I took ballet instead of PE [Physical Education] cause I was in the magnet program, and that was pretty interesting too. And then when it came time to go to high school, I went to a small charter school that is currently in Lincoln Heights, LA—not too far from where I am now. But it originally started in, like, a church in Koreatown [LA], and then it moved on to, like, the renovated Econolodge—like, a motel, next to like a grocery store—before finally settling in like a—what used to be like a hospital. Or, a school in a hospital for teenage girls, but now is a renovated high school. In Lincoln Heights. [crosstalk] So that’s kind of a brief sketch.

OLACHEA: So, it sounds like— Yeah [chuckles]. It sounds like you moved around a lot. How do you think that influenced you in terms of finding community, and sort of— I guess, discovering yourself and your identities, and what you valued?

CUEVAS: Hmm. I think that moving around a lot is really common in the narrative of, like, urban kids and their education. A lot of kids have to, like, travel a lot to get to resources like schools and libraries, and that was definitely part of my story. In terms of finding community, I met—my community mostly came from those who were invested in my educational journey, [unintelligible] like teachers and mentors, and, you know, my friends at school. Those were definitely—made my community.

OLACHEA: You mentioned you were in a single parent household. How was that growing up? Were there any challenges you faced? What—if you don’t mind me asking—what did your—

CUEVAS: Sure.

OLACHEA: —parents do? Yeah, your parent.

CUEVAS: Oh, so like what did they do for a living?

OLACHEA: Yeah.

CUEVAS: Yeah, so—never mind my father. My father actually—he has his own interesting story and I’m happy to go into that if you’d like, but—my mom worked for clinics. They were like these clinics that did outreach for particularly pregnant women and undocumented pregnant women, and just women in the community, and so my mother would solicit their—like, the patient and have them come

into the—to the clinics and she called that “marketing”. So, my mother was a marketer for clinics [chuckles]. And that’s what she did for most of her time that I’m with her, and then—oh, shoot, one second.

[Pause]

OLACHEA: When you transitioned to high school, were there any changes you went through sort of in terms of—I guess your high school experience compared to your earlier childhood education?

CUEVAS: So, just in general, my high school was very different from my middle school experience. I think that in middle school I—I went to a very large middle school. The way we socialized in that environment was very distinct from the way that I socialized in a small, intimate charter school. So, I think my friendships were a lot stronger in high school, and I also took school a lot more seriously. I participated in, like a study abroad program my junior year of high school. So, I spent my whole junior year of high school in Spain by myself, and that was a pretty big deal, and that shaped my—my high school experience for sure.

OLACHEA: How was that—being abroad, compared to the US [United States]?

CUEVAS: Oh, it was quite liberating. So, you know, one of the effects of growing up in a single parent household was that my mom was dependent on me as the oldest child to kind of share the—the burden. Like taking care of my siblings and stuff. And, not only that, but being, like a first generation American, my mother often didn’t know quite how to navigate certain spaces, bureaucracy. And so at a very early age I had, like—I had to read, like, legal documents, and fill them out, you know, and—and I had to like learn how to advise her—how to make certain decisions with regard to our family and stuff, and so being able to take a break from that and go to Spain, and for the first time be by myself and have my own room and be able to explore the world was—was pretty great.

OLACHEA: When you returned from your trip abroad, did that influence your decision to go to a different college out-of-state for your post-secondary education?

CUEVAS: [Laughs] Yeah. I kind of, like, looked at a map and—and went as far away from home as possible and ended up in New Hampshire. That was by design, for sure. I think that I made the decision that if I

were to succeed, and really give myself the best shot possible to graduate from college I would need to be kind of removed from my family situation, because it was beginning to be overwhelming in some respects. I didn't quite know it at the time, but my mom was certainly—going through some things mentally, and in retrospect, she was—you know, her mental state was deteriorating, and that affected her relationship to me, and my relationship to my siblings. So, removing myself from home was—was a priority in—in where I attended college, and so Dartmouth seemed like the best place for that.

OLACHEA: You mentioned sort of a growing awareness of—I guess yourself in relation to, I guess you could say society, but how aware were you for your sexuality, or your ethnicity, or any I guess part of your identity, in general? In high school.

CUEVAS: In high school I was definitely aware of my ethnic identity. I definitely identified as a Chicano in high school. And in, I think, my community there was a lot of humor around race, and so it was a big part of—not just my daily interactions, but like, also the media I consumed, so it was constantly consuming, like, you know, Chicano rap, or listening to stations with Chicano followings, and stuff, so—I was definitely aware of that.

In terms of my sexuality, I considered myself heterosexual pretty much until I got to Dartmouth, and then, my freshman year at Dartmouth, I realized very quickly that that was not—that was not the case. And for whatever reason I just never found—I guess I suppressed it. I don't know why I never discuss- I never discovered it. It could be possible that, you know, I just wasn't interested in other men when I was in high school, but you know throughout my experience in Spain I had pretty solid heterosexual experiences [chuckles], and throughout my other time in high school it was the same, and it wasn't until I got to college that I started forming stronger bonds with men. And I guess I was also in—an environment that, you know, was more accepting of that too.

OLACHEA: So, in your transition to Dartmouth, could you speak more broadly about what that was like when you came to campus your freshman year, and then, I guess in comparison to after that. Any initial impressions about sort of how you felt fitting in on campus, or anything along those lines?

CUEVAS: With respect—with respect to my sexuality?

OLACHEA: It could be that—or just in general, you could speak broadly.

CUEVAS: Well, broadly speaking, you know my transition to Dartmouth was a lot about being a first-generation college student. Being one of the first in my family to move away for college—and to go to college at all [chuckles]. That was a big deal. So, when I got to campus, you know, I did the whole [Dartmouth Outing Club First Year] Trips thing, and that was cool—and I also did FYSEP, which is the First Year Student Enrichment Program at Dartmouth—a program directed, you know, at first generation college students, and I think I was the first official class of—of mentees of the FYSEP program, so that was actually pretty special.

And the core FYSEP group had a pretty, I think, unique bond. We all lived pretty closely to each other on campus too, so that was a big part of my experience and then of course—in terms of, like, my sexuality I remember hooking up with one of the girls [chuckles] in—in the FYSEP program, and that being like a very big deal in—in my—that—the girls in my friend group. That was, you know, one of the kind of big dramatic things that happened during my freshman year, and you know that was pretty interesting when I considered how [unintelligible] my Dartmouth experiences— [recording glitch; unintelligible]

OLACHEA: I guess, what would you say changed after freshman year, in terms of your involvement in different communities, or just in general?

CUEVAS: Well, I think in terms of, like, my Dartmouth history I was just more involved with the particular organizations, so I—I joined my fraternity La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity, Incorporated in—during my sophomore year, and I was also a regular at the Tabard which is a very accepting space for marginalized communities on campus. At least it was during my experience there, and it was clear during my initial—during my first initial times at the house while looking at their, like, composite that that was true throughout different decades at Dartmouth.

OLACHEA: Was there a specific moment when you were introduced to that space, or your other affiliated organization? Were you deliberately seeking out spaces where you felt that you would be welcomed in?

CUEVAS: Oh, I don't think I was specifically seeking it out. I—I got into some issues with my mom my freshman summer, and I tried to come

back home and I was home for, like, two weeks, and it was clearly not working out. So I ended up going back to Dartmouth and I found a place to stay and I ended up working at Novak [Café] that summer—and I did a “Hanover FSP” [Note: Hanover Foreign Study Program—a phrase students use to mean a term spent on campus in Hanover, but not taking classes] with Novak, and I spent a lot of time at Tabard, cause my coworkers were Tabards. And that’s how I was introduced to the space, and I discovered its history, and I discovered—you know, what it meant to campus, and I kinda just fell in love with the place.

And—I think, I don’t know if you were trying to ask me, like, when I discovered that I wasn’t necessarily straight at Dartmouth, but that definitely happened my freshman year, and it was because of, like, a very specific relationship that developed during my freshman year that I’d rather not go into, but it was one instance that kinda like led to a lot of reflection and eventually I came to a conclusion that I was very solidly bisexual. [chuckles]

OLACHEA: What were you studying your freshman year?

CUEVAS: My freshman year I studied French and theater. I wanted to go on the French FSP [Foreign Study Program], so I began studying French 1 as soon as I got to Dartmouth. I studied acting during my first two terms at Dartmouth, because I—I did acting in Highschool—I did Shakespeare a lot, and I wanted to learn more about the craft, so I took James [G.] Rice’s Acting 1 class. Then I took Carol Dunne’s Acting 2 class that she co-taught with her husband, [Timothy] Peter Hackett [Class of 1975]. And then I also, you know, did the whole writing program at Dartmouth. I did Writing 2-3, and then the [First-Year] Seminar. It was on landscapes and confinement, which was a prison class. I also took Public Policy my freshman year, I took full classes my freshman winter which was pretty—crazy. But, that was one of the best times I had at Dartmouth. What else did I study? Yeah, I think that’s all I can recall right now, but—[crosstalk] that covers most of it.

OLACHEA: Yeah. So I noticed that, based on the information you gave me about yourself, you have sort of an artistic inclination in terms of these activities that you just mentioned—and I don’t want to put words in your mouth, but would you say that they were sort of an artistic outlet, and then on the other hand, you interest in policy and, I’m sure—and you can correct me if this isn’t the case, but just growing up and—and, you know, your mom working with immigrant

communities to some extent, and that—maybe that sort of tying in to your interest in public policy?

CUEVAS: Well—my interest in policy is definitely rooted in my high school experience. I went to a small charter school in Lincoln heights called Los Angeles Leadership Academy. It was founded by this guy named Roger Lowenstein, who went to the University of Michigan Law School, and was a civil rights lawyer—retired now, decided to found a school. I was like the third graduating class from the school—but he was like, kind of like a radical thinker—a leftist thinker, and, you know, my high school had pictures of [Ernesto] "Che" [Guevara] on the wall, you know, my eleventh grade history textbook was Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* [1980], so you know I had a very politically oriented education during high school, and I'm very grateful for that.

And I think that definitely kind of oriented me towards studying history at Dartmouth, and policy, and government, and those sorts of things. And like I mentioned I also did theater in high school, so that's why I studied that at Dartmouth. The French I picked up because I—I plan to get a PhD [Doctor of Philosophy] and I still do at some point, and I know that a lot of PhD programs, like require you to learn and—learn another language, and I already knew Spanish, but I wanted to like learn *another* one so I could look at really old [chuckles] stuff and understand it, basically [unintelligible].

OLACHEA: So, during your time as you, sort of spent more time at Dartmouth how did you develop in terms of your involvement in activism, which you mentioned having played a large part? Sort of again tying it back to your background from high school.

CUEVAS: Yeah, absolutely, like in high school I—I remember, you know when Arizona had [Senate Bill] "SB" 1070, I think it was. It was like a House—it was like a Senate bill that would require everyone to carry, like ID [Identification] proving that they were born in the United States, or whatever. I know that there was, like, walk-outs that I participated in, and there was also like a Labor Day march in middle school that I did, but in college, politics and activism didn't really become important to me until after the Dimensions [of Dartmouth] protest that a lot of my friends participated in, a lot of Tabards participated in—former-Tabards, actually, shouldn't say they're Tabards now. And I think that—that really shifted a lot of attitudes at Dartmouth. I think we're feeling its consequences today on campus. And so, to kind of flesh that out, the Dimensions protest

was something that happened, I think, in the spring 2013, and there was like a Dimensions show that’s traditionally held for—is it prospective students, or is it people that have already been admitted? Can you clarify that for me? Kind of forget.

OLACHEA: Yeah, it was—it was for students that have been admitted and sort of checking the campus out.

CUEVAS: Right, and so—students that have been admitted and checking the campus out, and they have the show for them, and there was a group of students who were wanting to bring attention to certain issues at Dartmouth, and they kept chanting “Dartmouth has a problem, Dartmouth has a problem”, and they were referring to sexual assault, and homophobia, transphobia, racism at Dartmouth. And so that was a big deal, and after that point I just started paying closer attention to stuff that happened at Dartmouth, and I just started showing up, you know whenever I heard of meetings, whenever I heard of any important discussions, whenever I, you know, I heard of things happening I kinda just made sure that I was there. And then I relayed that information back to me organizations, to my community, and I offered our resources to further the cause.

OLACHEA: So, there’s quite a bit of issues that you were interviewed about in the research I did, but I kind of want to focus on—so, what kind of discussions were being held on campus, in terms of—I know there was a Freedom Budget?

CUEVAS: Yeah.

OLACHEA: I don’t know if it was around the same time as this protest?

CUEVAS: No, nonono it wasn’t. So, the timeline, I think, really starts with the Occupy movement at Dartmouth [Occupy Dartmouth], which was before the protests, but also a very important moment. And that, I think was probably like ‘12s. It might have been ‘11s too, but the ‘12s and the ‘13s freshman were part of the Occupy movement, and a lot of, I think, those led the energy that was definitely behind the Dimensions protests. And then from the Dimensions protest, the following year was when the Freedom Budget was proposed, and that’s because there was a—another action, I think there was like a list of—oh yeah, that was the Freedom Budget. It was the Freedom Budget that was proposed, and then after the administration did not respond to the Freedom Budget, there was the movement to occupy President [Philip J.] Hanlon’s [Class of

1977] office. But those things were separated by about a year, [crosstalk] if I remember correctly.

OLACHEA: Could you specify a bit more some of the main points of the Freedom Budget, and who—who collaborated on it?

CUEVAS: Sure. So, I believe that the authors of the Freedom Budget were—are, I know that they are, the leaders of the class of 2014, and other classes who kind of got together and wanted to make specific demands of the administration with regard to faculty retention, and also resources dedicated to ethnic studies at Dartmouth, and protections for undocumented students. So, it was this kind of like a “quilt”, you know, if you would, of communities coming together and—and making demands of the administration where they felt that, you know, their community needs weren’t being served. And so there was a, like a request for a Chicano Studies program, and there was money being asked for to support communities at Dartmouth, like the Latino community and the Native community, etcetera.

OLACHEA: In terms of overlap between students who fit into some of these identities—you know, just the LGBTQ community, students of color, undocumented students—what do you think was lacking in terms of support for, from—like, in the form of resources offered at the college?

CUEVAS: Like specifically for students whose identities overlapped? Or in general?

OLACHEA: You could speak to both, if you like.

CUEVAS: Well, I think that in general the Dartmouth community lacks—a core group of staff of color. I think that one of the things that happened when I first got to Dartmouth was that a lot of people left, and there was this mass exodus, we’ll call it, of both faculty of color and within staff of color that didn’t go unnoticed by the students. And I think that we do know those issues [unintelligible] produced a lot of conversations about that at the time, but I remember people like [unintelligible] and [unintelligible] being important people that left, that people didn’t want to leave, and that people thought they were important to the community that was still at Dartmouth. And I think that one of the ways that is key to supporting a community at a—community like Dartmouth is providing, kind of like staff and faculty that will be there in the long term, because the students revolve,

you know, in and out, and they’re, like, always gonna be changing, but the faculty and staff, kind of need to have a core group, because they’re the ones that are gonna be doing a lot of the supporting, for the students.

And I think that this is something that has been talked about, although I can’t cite to the literature specifically, but I do know that it’s a thing that’s been explored, that faculty of color, kind of, you know, because there—there are these other responsibilities related to supporting students that aren’t necessarily academic in nature. And so, you know, through the sheer lack of bodies that Dartmouth is putting in support services, the fact that OPAL’s [Office of Pluralism and Leadership] shrinking, the fact that now we have, you know these deans having responsibilities to communities, [unintelligible] shrinking resources available to these communities at Dartmouth.

OLACHEA: So in addition to that, just in terms of the sheer number of—both faculty who look like these students and have similar experiences, and staff members through resources like OPAL, what do you think are other ways in which the college can embrace the inclusion of—of marginalized communities on campus?

CUEVAS: I think that the com- —the— well, I think that the college is really missing an opportunity now to recognize the diversity in the Upper Valley [Note: The Upper Valley is a roughly defined region of Connecticut River valley centered on Hanover and Lebanon in New Hampshire, and Hartford in Vermont], and I think that one of the ways that they could promote, you know, diversity and—and kind of embrace, you know the inclusion of all of these different identities is to reach out to the local community in the Upper Valley and see what’s out there. I think that, you know, they’ll find immigrant communities, I think they’ll find, you know, people of color, I think they’ll find queer people, I think they’ll find, you know a bunch of really interesting, diverse, identities, and in creating spaces for them in the Upper Valley we—in general, I think we’ll have effect on the way that those people and those community members are perceived at Dartmouth. Because at the end of the day, you know, the faculty and the staff are community members of both, you know. They are residents of the Upper Valley.

OLACHEA: Mm-hmm. I guess speaking broadly in—in terms of extending out from campus to other communities—you might not be able to recall exactly what was happening, but during your time in undergrad,

how much would you say you were influenced by external movements occurring outside of campus, and sort of like any reverberations onto campus in terms of, I guess, things occurring with the focus on, like Black Lives Matter, or undocumented communities.

CUEVAS: Oh sure, so I believe that Dartmouth is always at present a reflection of what’s going on in the world. You know, like, I remember early on in my Dartmouth career Osama bin Laden was killed, and there were mass-celebrations on Frat Row [Webster Avenue in Hanover, NH], and, you know, there were people running around and— in American flags, and yelling and screaming. And there was even, I remember, someone running around with a confederate flag, [chuckles] through the Choates [Choate Cluster].

And, you know, Dartmouth has always been influenced by the outside, or what’s going on outside of Dartmouth. For example, the Occupy Movement, as I mentioned. It has—was represented at Dartmouth, and that’s something that took place nationally. And, yeah, Black Lives Matter—when it first started, it was so poorly received in my communities at Dartmouth and the Upper Valley that I felt this responsibility to be a loud advocate in support of that issue in particular, so when there were community organized vigils on the [College] Green, I would show up. I would often not be so quiet, the way that one would normally act at a vigil. I would be screaming and encouraging cars to honk [unintelligible].

But yeah—to answer your question, I was very influenced by what was going on in the world. I like to say that, kind of jokingly, that the world’s on fire now, and when people are reading newspapers, I’ll go up to them and I’ll be like, “Hey, is the world still on fire?” Everyone knows exactly what I’m talking about every time and they always say, “Yes”. So, in regards to that, definitely played a big role in what I decided to put my energy into at Dartmouth.

OLACHEA: I guess looping back a little to focusing specifically on the queer community, would you say that Dartmouth—and you can define “community” in any way that you see fit—but, would you say that they were not accepting to everybody in terms of fitting into a certain type, or did you yourself ever feel excluded in some way?

CUEVAS: I never felt excluded. I think that I had a privilege of passing, I guess, at Dartmouth. I don’t know, I never really had people identify me as queer. I—I kind of always had to come out in that regard—

which I don't always do, and some people like me will have complicated feelings about—about that. And bisexuals, I don't know, I think are not always universally received with open arms, but that's a whole separate conversation in of itself. At Dartmouth, in particular in the Dartmouth context, there is a need for formal representation that's always kind of sought, so like do we have a [unintelligible] that specifically wants to serve the needs in this community or, you know, do we—do we have programming [unintelligible], do we have advisors, etcetera.

So, I never felt really excluded from those sources, but I never also felt outright invited to them, and I'm sure if I showed up, I would be, you know, welcome. I was sometimes told about things like [unintelligible] events that were specifically for LGBT people. But, you know Tabard was where I sought community whenever I felt that I needed it with regards to, like queer people, whenever I wasn't necessarily feeling all that [unintelligible], and I just needed a place that accepted me, you know. And it was never really in the context of my sexuality, but that was definitely something that was a big part of that community, and still is, I would hope. Cause people worked hard to make that so, so.

OLACHEA: In terms of another role you took on on campus, you were a Sexual Health Peer Advisor?

CUEVAS: Yeah I was a Sexpert. I did Sexpert training my—

OLACHEA: [crosstalk] Could you, sort of expand on that? Yeah.

CUEVAS: —Yeah. I don't know if the Sexpert program still exists at Dartmouth, but when I was there it was run by this wonderful woman named Kari Jo Grant, and I did my Sexpert training with a really fun group my Freshman spring. And, what you do is, you kind of like read this giant book together on sexuality and sexual health and it covers a lot of topics, and you learn how to talk about it and how to facilitate discussions about it, and you learn how to program around sex and sexual health. And I—I didn't really continue my formal participation with the organization after that. I, however, did always make myself available to my Tabard community and the [unintelligible] community, and my LUL [La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity, Inc.] community, I'd make myself available to them around issues of sex and sexuality, cause I know that it's not very easy for people to talk to, but I think I can help take

down some barriers that people may have and stigmas that people may hold.

OLACHEA: Could you, I guess, give me an example of what kind of stigma there—I mean, and I guess in general you could say it’s a taboo topic, but—would you say in particular maybe in the Latinx community, or like in other identity-based communities, would you say did there tend to be more I guess reluctance to be open about sexuality?

CUEVAS: I believe that there are definitely tendencies to be less open about sexuality in predominantly male spaces, so I think in the fraternity is the space where I, as you would, used Sexpert training the most, because sexual violence is such a big part of sexual health and education around sexual activity, so— Interacting with my [unintelligible] head [unintelligible] sometimes would get to the point where I had to step in and say “Hey that wasn’t okay,” or “Hey, actually this isn’t true,” or, you know, yeah. I think it’s pretty self-explanatory how that can get controversial sometimes [chuckles].

OLACHEA: Yeah

CUEVAS: But I do think that certain stigmas are held, especially in the Latino male community, and luckily, we start to change that. I think it’s less—we feel that less at Dartmouth cause there’s just fewer of us, and I think that at Dartmouth we may be more accepting within the Latino community of sexual minorities, if you would, but I don’t—I don’t want to say it’s true either, cause I’m sure that people experience discrimination and not feel accepted.

OLACHEA: So, you studied history. Is there any particular reason why you chose that major?

CUEVAS: [Laughs] Well, I don’t want to sound too trite, but I really wanted to go to London [the United Kingdom], and I didn’t want to be a music or a theater major, and I also didn’t want to do Econ [Economics], cause it just wasn’t something that I wanted to do at the time. [Both laugh] So I did history, cause they had an FSP in London that was pretty dope.

OLACHEA: Nice.

CUEVAS: Yeah.

OLACHEA: I guess towards the later half of your career at Dartmouth, was there any—I guess defining experience or defining moment as a person of color, as a queer student?

CUEVAS: Oh—a defining moment as a person of color?

OLACHEA: Or—just in general, I guess. It could be at any point?

CUEVAS: Yeah. I guess we could—yeah, we could talk about the—the incident at Brown [University] as a—as a pretty defining moment. That was wild, and scary, and very interesting on the whole. I was assaulted by a Brown campus police officer when I went for a conference at Brown University with the Latino community at Dartmouth. We sent delegates to an Inter-Ivy Latino Leadership Conference [Latinx Ivy League Conference] that happens every year, and its hosted at a different campus every year.

That year it was hosted in Providence [Rhode Island], and after we got settled in, I walked around with some Brown students, and the plan was to go check out this party that was being hosted in our honor, cause we were all guests of the college. And as we were waiting to get in, I witness this kind of, like, drunk white boy stumble out of the party, and he was accosted by a security guard, or a policeman, cause he was armed—all the police there had guns. And, he patted him down in a way that I thought was pretty inappropriate, kinda grabbed his junk and starred him down. And I called him out for it, and then the cop quickly turned his attention to me. Told me to leave and not to come back, and was clearly making my friends uncomfortable, so I left—but I told the officer that this is where I was staying, cause the house that the party was in happened to be the same place that my host was in. So, I told him that I’m living here, so I’m clearly coming back. So, after I got into the back of the building, the policeman saw me, wrestled me to the ground. And then the whole conference then turned into a conversation around the safety of—of black and brown students at these predominantly white institutions where we’re supposed to feel safe, but you don’t necessarily always feel safe.

OLACHEA: Had you had any experiences before this sort of around the same issue at Dartmouth in terms of not feeling safe in a space?

CUEVAS: I have memories of, you know, S&S [Department of Safety and Security] kind of looking at me funny sometimes, but I don’t know. It happened late at night, and I was kind of warned by upperclassmen

when I got there. My mentor—one of my mentors is [unintelligible]—he’s an ’11. He was my FYCEP mentor, and he, I remember very distinctly telling me, “You know, sometimes they will just, like, look at you a little longer.” He felt that—he had experience this, and he had heard other people talk about it too. But I never heard of any assaults or anything like that happen—and certainly not to the extent that I heard other students at Brown and other Ivies, you know talk about their lack of feeling safe.

I don’t think that Dartmouth students really appreciate how safe we might be. You know, we may not feel it, I think, relative to having—like I just can’t imagine S&S carrying guns, you know? I can’t—I think people would flip their shit, not to—I don’t know if I can cuss on this thing, but—I think that people would lose their minds if S&S had guns all of a sudden, and that would immediately change how safe I feel on campus if S&S had guns. So, at least in that respect, I definitely think that Dartmouth students are just a bit safer.

OLACHEA: So, what were the aftereffects of that event in terms of the response from Brown, and the response from Dartmouth?

CUEVAS: Well the leaders at the conference all decided to make demands around these issues to their respective intuitions. And with regard to Dartmouth, I got back and immediately used my platform with LUL and Tabard to host a community meeting that was live streamed—so most of this is, like, available I think still on the internet. And administrators came to that meeting, and we had hard conversations around this issue, and... I think that the—I think a couple days before the conference happened, the library protest at Baker-Berry [Baker-Berry Library] happened at Dartmouth, which was another big event, and defining moment, I think, in my time at Dartmouth. I had never seen so many people, and so many people energized around issues of social justice, and race.

OLACHEA: So, it sounds like you went through quite a bit of—I guess you could say emotional labor when engaging in activism on campus or off campus. Do you think that affected you in anyway?

CUEVAS: I’m sure it did [chuckles]. I don’t know if I spent too much time thinking about how, and the myriad ways that it probably did.

OLACHEA: You also mentioned—or, I guess demonstrated an awareness of different pockets of communities, not necessarily on Dartmouth’s

campus, and—and maybe Dartmouth tapping into those resources as well? You lived off campus for a period of time, right?

CUEVAS: I did. While I was at Dartmouth, I took a year and a half off from classes, because I decided that I needed to learn how to live on my own, and you know, getting used to, like, how to support myself without Dartmouth being there to pay my rent and pay my food. So, I kind of shackled up with a partner at the time, and we lived in the Vermont, and after that was over, I lived on my own in Hanover and West Leb [West Lebanon, New Hampshire]. I was around—I was around for a while [chuckles].

OLACHEA: How—how was that? Like, I guess in comparison to being a student on campus?

CUEVAS: There’s definitely a bubble that the Dartmouth community enjoys, and Dartmouth owns a lot of real estate, so that bubble may seem quite large, but there’s a—I think a clear, let’s say, demarcation between “Dartmouth” and “Not Dartmouth” people. And, I don’t really know how else to describe it other than classist, so you know, when I was at Dartmouth I always kind of felt like I was looked down on by the other students when I was working at DDS [Dartmouth Dining Services], for example, because I don’t think it was always clear that I *was* a student when I had the uniform on. And that became even more so a feeling that I had when I started working in the food service industry in the Upper Valley, cause you know when people saw me at Boloco, and they didn’t quite think, *Hey, that’s the guy that’s gonna be sitting next to me in my class a year from now*. So, I think that I experienced a lot of classism at Dartmouth, and that was very clear to me when I became a member of the Upper Valley community and not just a member of the Dartmouth community.

OLACHEA: So now that you’ve left campus after graduation, and you’ve had time to sort of think about all your experiences, how do you think your perception and impressions of—of your experiences have changed over time?

CUEVAS: Ooh, have changed over time? I believe less in change from within, I guess. I think that was the general theme when I was a Freshman, I was very interested in learning the history of organizations at Dartmouth that were centered on the Latino experience, so [La] Alianza [Latina] and MEChA [El Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano/a de Aztlan], I was very invested in how these organizations came to

be about, and then I was further invested in them because I thought they were tools to change campus and to influence campus, and that’s why I joined LUL, my fraternity. And I think that over time, I am less convinced that those organizations will play a big role in— in making campus safer and more accepting for students of color and sexual minorities at Dartmouth.

OLACHEA: As an alum, and having these sort of connections with your brotherhood and, I guess just your—your, just your network of student you met while at the college, do you have, like, resources that you can still tap into, and do you feel like you can contribute to Dartmouth still? Or, I mean, I guess just by the act of having agreed to do SpeakOut, and you can confirm this or not, but do you still feel like a connection to the college?

CUEVAS: Absolutely. I spent seven years there, basically, cause I stayed there after I graduated too, so like, I have a bond that I think is inescapable, it would be kind of dumb of me to suppress it. I miss it, I’m not gonna lie. I really look forward to going back in June if I’m able to make it to my reunion, because the place itself is really pretty, and I miss it. And, in terms of resources that I could tap into, I certainly feel that I have a community. I’m involved with DALA, which is the Dartmouth Association of Latino Alumni. We host events, you know—I think that my friends are really my biggest asset, and they’re also the thing that I value and treasure the most in Dartmouth. So, they’re always gonna be there, and I’m always going to be able to enjoy having them not just as professional resources, but as personal ones that I can just chill and watch TV with.

OLACHEA: So, I guess pushing a bit more on that, how do you think that— because this is obviously a big selling point for any student who goes to Dartmouth, is having that accessibility to the doors that will open for you, with connections. How, viable do you think that is for certain communities?

CUEVAS: You know I think that a “selling point” is exactly what it is, and as consumers who are looking at this from a perspective of “I’ve already graduated, I’ve already kind of drank the Kool-Aide” [unintelligible] the Dartmouth stuff, it’s our responsibility to encourage new consumers, like incoming freshman, to think about that fact that this is just one avenue to door opening, and that for a lot of other students it will be one of a thousand avenues that they have available to them. And so really, it’s just about creating

different avenues, and trying to establish life-long connections everywhere you go and really valuing your relationship.

This is something that I think is talked a lot about business school—in business school, right? That it’s better to have ten really close friends somewhere than like a thousand really kind of okay friends. And really developing those meaningful relationships regardless of whether or not you go to Dartmouth, or somewhere else, or if you go to Dartmouth, just make sure you try to develop those relationships in other communities outside of Dartmouth so that you can always have those doors available to you. Yeah, that’s it.

OLACHEA: So, I guess one more question, then I’ll ask if you have anything to add. Why did you decide to do SpeakOut?

CUEVAS: Well, I’ve learned this term called “bisexual erasure” recently, and I wanted to make sure that at least my particular story wasn’t erased. I do think that I don’t necessarily talk about it very often, and I think this is one of the first times that I’ve talked about it in a public way. So, it’s definitely important for me to be visible, so that other people might find the strength to be visible one day too.

OLACHEA: Is there anything I missed that you want to talk about?

CUEVAS: I don’t—I don’t think so. No. [chuckles]

OLACHEA: Okay.

CUEVAS: Did you cover everything you wanted to talk about.

OLACHEA: I think so.

CUEVAS: Okay

OLACHEA: Thank you so much again for contributing to the project.

CUEVAS: Yeah, absolutely. I hope it turns out well.

[End of interview]