

To&Through Student Stories



Meet Alejandro

Alejandro is a Mexican-American first-generation college student who grew up on the South and West sides of Chicago. He graduated from North-Grand High School in 2025 and is currently entering his 2nd year at North Park University, where he is studying business and marketing.

Elementary School

One of Alejandro's biggest challenges in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) was transferring elementary schools four times. Although it was difficult, Alejandro is grateful for that challenge. "I had a lot of experience of jumping from [one] school to another school and that just forced me to be the first one to start a conversation since I was always a new kid."

In 7th grade, Alejandro moved from the South side to the West side of Chicago. Due to COVID, he started the year online as a new student at Ella Flagg Elementary School. He didn't walk inside a school building again until 9th grade at Instituto Justice and Leadership Academy (IJLA).

High School

The transition from online to in-person school was socially awkward and academically difficult for Alejandro. "I don't think you put the same type of [effort] into school when

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you're online. I think you slack off a lot...**Freshman year you feel the impact of like ‘Oh yeah, this is real. You actually gotta try now.’”**

In 11th grade, Alejandro decided to transfer to North-Grand High School. “I decided to move to a high school that [was] closer to me.”

When he started thinking about his life after graduation, he thought about his families’ businesses. Alejandro worked at his dad’s construction company and his stepdad’s landscaping company. He led online advertising, helped recruit clients, and worked alongside his dad in construction during his summer break. “I learned a lot from that, and that’s what intrigued me into following a profession that was hands-on.” Alejandro did an electrician apprenticeship program with the [UA Local 137](#).

Later in his 11th-grade school year, his school took students on a tour to North Park University (North Park). His best friend Mouhamed decided he was going to enroll at North Park. This inspired Alejandro to return for a campus visit with his mom. Only this visit was different. “I booked an appointment with a business professor. I wanted to see his perspective and how the school works.” Alejandro walked around campus with the professor, where he was able to ask questions about the professor’s career and the business major. Alejandro left campus wondering whether studying business might support his passions better than further trade training.

Alejandro considered his post-secondary options as different ways of investing in his future skills and earnings. “At the apprenticeship, I was gonna start at \$20 an hour. Every 6 months they raise it up a little bit until you become a journeyman electrician.” Although making money right after high school was enticing, he considered that getting his degree might “be better in the long run.”

Even though Alejandro was interested in college, he wasn’t sure how he was going to be able to afford it. His counselor, Ms. G, was one of his greatest supporters. “Ms. G, she helped me a lot in school. She helped me write an essay for my scholarship... She revised it, and she’s the one who even told me about the scholarship.”

When spring arrived, the decision on what to do after graduation became clear. “One of my best friends, he influenced me to go to North Park University. He wanted to go there...Then, I did my research. I applied to universities because it was something that

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everybody had to do, and I ended up liking it and applying for a scholarship. I got the scholarship, and I was so deep in, I was like, ‘I can't refuse it.’”

College

Alejandro is currently a commuter student entering his 2nd year at North Park. Inspired by his time working for his dad and stepdad, Alejandro is currently interested in studying business, finance, and marketing.

The transition from high school to college pushed Alejandro to manage his time better. “The hardest thing would be that you have a sense of bigger responsibility now. Since you're in college now and just managing your time better.” Now he also prioritizes his grades. “Since you have to pay [for] university, I would say you have to lock in.” One of the best parts of going to North Park is that his best friend Mouhamed is there too.

Since he has been on campus, Alejandro started to explore the field of business by getting involved in North Park's investment finance club and interning at the business office on campus. He plans to do more internships throughout his time in college. One of his long-term goals is to build up his professional network.

What worked for Alejandro

- **Exploring post-secondary options both at home and at school.** Alejandro's explored his post-secondary options at home and at school. Through his families' businesses, he did online marketing, customer service, and hands-on labor. His school affirmed his passion and connected him to an electrician apprenticeship program that had a clear career trajectory after high school. Alejandro's school also helped him explore his full range of post-secondary interests, including college, while working with him to make college financially accessible. When he ultimately chose college, a scholarship was already in place to support that decision. Alejandro was able to explore and make an informed decision that best suited his professional dreams.
- **Receiving a campus tour from a university professor.** Getting a one-on-one tour with the business professor helped Alejandro imagine what it would be like to study business at North Park. The professor took him on a more in-depth tour of campus and answered all

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of Alejandro's questions related to the business programs. This experience helped inform Alejandro about his college option. "I got along with the professor I went with, so he kinda influenced me too."

Alejandro's Hopes for the Field

High Schools

- **Connect students with a mentorship program.** Alejandro was a part of a mentorship program in junior year. "They give you words of advice on what to do and what not to do." He found that their advice helped him learn more about different professional careers. He wishes that schools could offer mentorship programs like this earlier, such as in sophomore year, to help students get ahead on planning for their futures.

Universities

- **Involve professors in recruitment efforts.** Alejandro recommends that universities send professors to talk with seniors in high school, so prospective students can talk with them directly. "I went out of my way to go and talk to a professor and hear his opinion," he noted, "so I think it would have been more effective if [professors] were already there when they were doing the recruitment." In his experience, talking with a professor strongly shaped his ideas about whether college in general, and a business major in particular, would be worthwhile.