

STUDENT STORIES OF NAVIGATING THE MAZE

MOISES



“I began to doubt myself sometimes, especially when I wasn’t in school... I was thinking, ‘Maybe school isn’t for me, maybe I should just go into work or a trade school.’ ... [But] I always kind of went back to pursuing an education and getting a degree.”

—MOISES

Moises is a Mexican American, first-generation college student. He grew up in a middle-class household in West Lawn and cares a lot about his parent’s wellbeing. He is currently working two jobs to pay for his college expenses and help his parents. Ever since the beginning of college, Moises has been interested in becoming a special education teacher and continues to work towards this goal.

CHOOSING A COLLEGE DURING HIGH SCHOOL

When deciding between colleges, Moises prioritized financial considerations. “Although ... my dad makes enough money to help me out, it just would be really tight on the budget, so I was more focused on trying to get ... scholarships and maybe working too so I would be the one paying for school.” In the end, Moises chose to attend a local private four-year university where he could be a commuter student.

CHALLENGES AT HIS FIRST COLLEGE

Within the first two weeks, he began to weigh the benefits and drawbacks of staying at the university. Moises had taken academically challenging IB classes during high school, and he felt like he had already learned some of the content in his introductory college classes. “A lot of the classes that I was taking, like I kind of already knew the content and I kind of already took the courses, and so I talked to some friends that were at a community college... they weren’t paying anything.”

TRANSFERRING TO A TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

Moises discussed the idea of transferring to a two-year college with his family. “At first my parents were like ‘No, just stay,’ but I told them that in two years I’d probably be going back ... to the university again... I think it’s just a better decision to save some money and probably take the same classes.” Following these conversations, Moises decided to transfer to a local two-year college.

Moises thought his transfer process was easy because he felt supported by the college counselor at his original university: “I remember her saying, ‘Whenever you feel like you want to come back, you’re always welcome. And that ... just felt so good knowing that she understood my situation and where she wasn’t insisting on telling me to stay or anything.’”

However, Moises wished that he transferred to his two-year college sooner. The two-year college offered eight-week courses half-way through the semester, and Moises regretted

not enrolling in them to get a head start at his new institution.

Because Moises could not immediately begin taking courses at his two-year college, Moises worked throughout the rest of the fall semester to save money. He wished that his high school had a way of staying connected to recent graduates, noting that his friends who attended different high schools “had a Facebook group where even after high school, the teachers, they would post stuff for kids who weren’t going to college and they offered jobs or trade school options ... and they just kept their students up-to-date. They would have events for them to come back and speak to the students or if they needed help with FAFSA as college students.”

In the winter of 2020, Moises began taking classes at his two-year college with a full-ride institutional scholarship. He liked his new campus, and he developed positive relationships with his professors. “I remember that when I would talk to some of them about leaving [my previous four-year college], they were just very intrigued about how it kind of sucks that situations happen this way... they knew a lot of kids, a lot of students that had a similar situation to me.”

On the other hand, Moises’ relationship with his counselors at his two-year college were not as strong as his relationship with his counselor at his four-year college. He explained that at his two-year college, students did not have one consistent counselor who would get to know them.

“The admissions counselors’ offices were in a big room by the main office in their own cubicles, and then just felt like, not intimidating, but you would have to wait and they would call you in,” Moises explained. “Maybe if they would come and greet you and then walk into their office, then maybe it would have been better and more welcoming.”

In addition, he felt frustrated because every time he met with a new counselor, he would have to describe his background, situation, goals, and aspirations all over again. However, because he had developed strong relationships with his professors through consistently reaching out to them and attending office hours, he was able to lean on them for support.

By the end of the spring semester of his second year, Moises received his associate degree and was on the dean’s list.

TRANSFERRING BACK TO A DIFFERENT FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE

Moises began applying to four-year colleges, but he described the college choice process as difficult because many colleges would not accept all of his transfer credits. During this time, Moises decided to reach out to a specific type of counselor at his two-year college: a college transfer counselor. This counselor helped him send transcripts, look over transfer requirements, and work on applications. By reaching out directly to this counselor’s email address, he found consistent support.

Moises visited a four-year college that would accept all of his credits. While on campus, he met with a new counselor, he would have to describe his background, situation, goals, and

aspirations all over again. However, because he had developed strong relationships with his professors through consistently reaching out to them and attending office hours, he was able to lean on them for support.

By the end of his second year, Moises received his associate degree and was on the dean's list.

TRANSFERRING BACK TO A DIFFERENT FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE

Moises began applying to four-year colleges, but he described the college choice process as difficult because many colleges would not accept all of his transfer credits. During this time, Moises decided to reach out to a specific type of counselor at his two-year college: a college transfer counselor. This counselor helped him send transcripts, look over transfer requirements, and work on applications. By reaching out directly to this counselor's email address, he found consistent support.

Moises visited a four-year college that would accept all of his credits. While on campus, he met with a counselor at this college and explained his financial situation. The counselor explained that he was actually eligible for an additional scholarship because of his circumstances, which would fully cover his cost of tuition.

Moises explained, "I went to go visit and while at the visit, they saw I didn't qualify for FAFSA. While I was on the tour, I came back and one of the counselors had called the financial aid office and they gave me a free grant for like \$2,000. So right then and there, being there and getting to know the counselors and seeing how much they were invested in me, they just made the decision very easy."

Another part of what made the decision easy for Moises is that he could commute to campus, and nearly three in four students who attended the college commuted to campus as well. Following his visit, Moises enrolled in this private four-year college and began studying special education.

WHAT WORKED FOR MOISES

- 1. *Maintaining a consistent relationship with a college counselor.*** By reaching out to his college transfer counselor directly and consistently, he benefitted more from their relationship than he had in the past with counselors whom he only saw once or twice.
- 2. *Attending colleges where most of the students were commuters.*** At his first four-year college, Moises described feeling like he didn't fit in because most of his peers lived on campus. At his two-year college, professors reassured him that he was not alone in this situation. He noted that one of the reasons he chose to attend his current four-year college was because a majority of their students were commuters.
- 3. *Receiving financial aid that covered the cost of tuition.*** Moises felt stressed at his first four-year college because he had to take out loans to afford it. Once he transferred to his two-year college, he received a full-ride scholarship, persisted, and received his associate degree. In addition, one of the reasons he chose his current four-year college was a counselor's ability to provide him with more financial aid.