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Mark L. Greenburg (MG): Today is the 19th of November 2003, and this is Mark Greenburg, the director of the Florida Studies Center at the University of South Florida, and I'm with Juan Pineda who is a student at the University of South Florida and is also the president of LASA¹, the Latin American Student Association. We're here together today to talk about the—his organization and in part of history of the university and its celebration of 50 years. Juan, thank you for coming in today. I appreciate you being here.

Juan Pineda (JP): Thanks for inviting me.

MG: I want to start with a couple of questions about you before we turn and talk about LASA. Where did you grow up?

JP: I was born in Columbia and then I was brought to the United States by my grandparents, raised in Miami.

MG: Were your parents able to come with you or—

JP: Uh, my grandmother was living here, so I came with my grandfather. They're basically my parents. They took care of me since I was a little child.

¹Latin American Student Association (LASA) was established at USF in 1986. Its goal is to promote awareness and knowledge of the diversity within the Latin community, encourage and support the integration of Hispanic students into USF, and to provide educational, cultural, and social programs to LASA members and the Tampa Bay community

MG: I understand. And uh, when did you—was most of you schooling in the Miami area.

JP: Elementary school and part of middle school was in Miami.

MG: As you were—well, what did you do for high school?

JP: For high school, I did it in Miami, but I had a combination of Columbia and then back to Miami. I lived Columbia for four years.

MG: Oh, interesting. As you were thinking about graduating from high school and were looking to the next step in your life. What kind of schools were you looking at? Was college something that you always knew that you wanted to do?

JP: College was something that I wanted to do to make life better for my family, but according to some people, I wasn't going to be able to make it. They didn't believe in me, so when I went to apply to the different universities, they just basically told me, Why are you even wasting your time. But um, I had a student government teacher who told me, "Don't listen to that person, go ahead, apply to wherever you want to go." And USF was one of the opportunities that opened up to come during the summer, by a program called SSS², Student Support Services. And I was given the opportunity to start, and I really enjoyed it.

MG: Good. Had it been—did you struggle in high school or was it—what do you think attributed for the fact you didn't get any support?

JP: High school was kind of difficult because the education system in South America is completely different than the one here in the United States. What happened was that, I was used to learning in one way and then when I got here to the US, they told me, You can't use that method anymore, and you have to use our method. So that kind of um, put me back a little. I was an average student. I had a 2.9 GPA in high school and what helped me a lot was that I was very, very involved during high school. When I submitted my application to the university, that's one of the things that they took into account.

MG: What kind of things were you involved in high school?

²Student Support Services Program (SSS) is a federally funded retention program designed for students who have an academic need, are first generation college students, or come from a low-income family.

JP: I was in secretary of student government. I was co-chair for Hispanic heritage. I did one year completely Hispanic heritage, then I also was also in the class of 2002 officer, so there were many, many activities. I also participated in the activities department, that was one of my classes, and I got to do community service through them.

MG: When did you arrive at USF?

JP: I arrived at USF in the summer of 2002, on June 24th was my first day here at USF, during the summer. My grandmother came, and she dropped me off. And it was terrible because that was the day it was my birthday, and college was starting, and I had just graduated. A lot of things were going on at the same time, and it was pretty hard at the beginning.

MG: Were there other schools that you had applied to? What was it about USF that made it particularly exciting to come here?

JP: I had applied to UF [University of Florida] and UM [University of Miami], also Miami Dade [College] and FSU [Florida State University], but the reason that I applied to USF was when the person in charge to advertise for USF in the different high schools came, she made a picture of USF that was so incredible that I just had to go ahead and try it out. So, I didn't get into UF's summer program and obviously UM was kind of out of the economic proportion that my family could afford. And Miami-Dade, I didn't see it as an option because it would just be like high school once again. When I came to USF for the first time, that was the first time I had touched this campus and visited the campus, so basically I came to USF blindfolded.

MG: Interesting. Well tell me about the picture though that the person who was recruiting students—how did she describe the university?

JP: She was describing USF as a university which is multicultural and very diverse. It's a big campus and how people got along, and there were different organizations and how USF has so many things to offer and so many resources, which they can help you, which was one of the facts that really caught my eye and my attention towards this university.

MG: Good. And you arrived in June of 2002, on your birthday.

JP: On my birthday.

MG: What did you find when you got here? Tell me about your first impressions.

JP: I have to say, I was really, really nervous. Obviously being from Miami coming to Tampa, we got lost on the way. So, I was telling my mom, okay, I have to get USF one way or another. When we got here, it was amazing. I felt that I was in a city itself. It was so big. I'm like, Mom what am I going to do here? How am I going to get from one class to another? And um, they just dropped me off in Castor Hall. I met my RAs and they helped me move in, move into the room. And then, other students started arriving for the summer program. And I just started to interact. I have to say that I was very, very homesick during the summer, and I kind of felt like I wanted to leave USF and go back home, but then my advisors for Student Support Services, they were telling me, don't, don't leave. Wait until the fall. When you come back in the fall, a whole new chapter is going to open up, and you will see what the real USF is like.

MG: Well tell me about that summer program. What went on in the summer, and what sort of things were you learning and doing?

JP: In the summer program, I took some classes that I had to get out of the way in order to meet the requirements for USF. And what they were trying to do is prepare me for the load that was going to come in the fall, and kind of get to know the university better. I took the University Experience course, which was pretty good. I learned about what was in the university, what were the resources, how to go about in finding them, how to get help, which is really interesting. They just showed us around the campus and showed us how Tampa itself works. Because obviously, if you're here for the first time, you're kind of lost. And one thing that I remember, when I came to the first seminar for SSS that we had, our advisor said, "Right now, your past is high school. You're starting from scratch. So whatever you did in high school, we don't care. Now is your opportunity to prove all of those who didn't believe in you wrong." And, I mean, that was a lot of motivation for me.

MG: From the class that you—which high school did you graduate from?

JP: I graduated from South Miami Senior High.

MG: And I assume that were—must have been a very diverse population in your graduating class. Was there a group of people that you were—you know friends that you all in discussion with about what you were going to do about college? Did you come with anybody else? Where did your friends end up going to school?

JP: I have a big, diverse group of friends. Most of my friends went to UF. Some of them went to the University of Chicago. Some of them stayed in Miami. And I came up with one of my friends, Denise Hernandez. She started in the fall, so what I learned in the summer, I helped her out in the fall, so she wouldn't be so lost. But the discussion about universities was very, very big in high school. And basically they were the ones that helped me out and made sure that I wouldn't give up just because what one person was telling me not to do.

MG: The fall came around and obviously the university exploded in size. There were a lot more students. What—first of all, what kind of classes were you taking? What were your interests when you enrolled? And then I'll ask after that, what other non-academic things did you get involved in?

JP: My interest was pre-med. So I started taking a math class that I had to take, Prep Algebra, through HCC [Hillsborough Community College]. Um, I took Comp 1101, and I took World Regional Geography, and a whole bunch of different classes that kind of showed me about the world and different things. What changed my major was that Prep Algebra was so hard. I was telling my advisor, I don't think I can do pre-med. It's a lot of math. I am ready to switch majors. Obviously there were was 39 thousand students. I never thought that there would be 39 thousand students in the school that I would attend. And you would see them walking around, and it's just like, everything was alive. The whole university was alive.

Academically, I did really good in the fall semester, continuing in the spring. And I learned a lot of things. I got involved in an organization called CAB, Campus Activities Board. And they have movies on the lawn, all these events that go on in the university, but I was still feeling kind of lonely. But I was getting used to the university when I came about a woman by the name of Norma Cano-Alvarez, who was the coordinator for ENLACE³, and she took me to what is LASA, the Latin American Student Association. They greeted me as another family member. They made me feel like I wasn't missing anything at all. So, by working with LASA—I started doing community service with ENLACE, and I went to the middle schools and high schools and talked to the students about going to college, which is very important due to the fact that not too many Latinos go and pursue—in the pursuit of a college education.

³An initiative that links the resources of multiple organizations for Latino student from California to Florida. The word, *enlace*, means to link, tie, or weave in Spanish, which aptly describes the mission of the group: “‘weave a blanket of support’ for Latino students.”

MG: Um, we'll come back and we'll pick up little parts of what you've been talking about. The campus activities board, how did you get involved in that? Did you—was there something about that particular organization that appealed to you?

JP: What appealed to me about the campus activities board is that I thought of it as the big activities department that we had in high school, and I mean events obviously were ten times bigger because in high school we had about 5,000, 6,000 students. Here, we have 39,000 students. So they had movies on the lawn. They had concerts. Basically, it was just trying to help out and learn how the whole campus works, and you know take out the fun. Put some fun—other than just studying 24/7, something different.

MG: Right. And how about dorm life? Had—did you remain in Castor? Are you still in Castor?

JP: I was in Castor for the summer. For the fall, it's not coed. So, I was moved into Beta Hall. Dear Lord. That I think was the worst hall I have ever lived in because it was pretty old, but still the RAs and the resident director tried to make it the best of the best. They would throw activities on the weekends. So we would decorate the hall for Halloween, and children would come trick-or-treating, and we would have candy for them. So, I did run into maybe roommate situations, which we all have. And um, by the end of that semester, I was ready to move somewhere else.

The only sad thing about Beta was that the day before I had to take my math final, there was a fire in the building around one o'clock in the morning, so there goes all of my studying. And when we finally got back into the hall, it was around three thirty, four o'clock in the morning. [I] had to get up the next day, and I took the test. I don't know how I did. I guess I did pretty well, and then they told me, Oh you could have told your professor that there was a fire because we sent out an email. And [I thought], How come nobody told me this?

And then, from the end of that semester, I moved into Mu Hall, to a single room. Also the state of, like the carpet and the way that the building looks, it's not that great, but you know, you try to make the best out of it. You do meet a lot of people in the dorms, which is surplus because if you want to be roommates with them maybe in the near future living off campus, that's how it can work.

MG: Right. And you got introduced to ENLACE and then to LASA. What were the kinds of things—? Tell me a little bit more about ENLACE. You mentioned some of the things that it did. Can we talk a little bit more about the schools that you went to and who

you've been working with? You must have a relationship with Donna Perino. Talk a little bit, maybe, about that and the importance of ENLACE.

JP: Well, ENLACE is engaging the Latino communities for education. And how I became involved with ENLACE was through Norma. I also met Donna Perino. And I would go to Marshall Middle School or Tomlin Middle School, Plant City High School, Leto High School, and they would take me to a crowd of ESOL⁴ students, and I would talk to them about how important is going to college. And told them my story on how, when I told my family [that] I wanted to go to college, they opposed because I was leaving home. I wasn't staying at home to help out the family. It was a hard step that I had to make, a hard decision that I had to make, but they kind of saw that their families would be in the same situation.

So, my perspective of viewing this was, if they could see that I was capable of making it to college, that they could do it too. And I always liked to finish with a story. I would tell them, you know, I'm handing down the pen to you. And now it's your time to write your story. You're the ones that are going to write the end of the chapter in your book. You either take the easy way, which you don't want to go to college. You end up working at McDonalds [and] getting a minimum wage [job], or you can go to college, get a degree and help your family out in long run.

MG: What is (sic) your family do? When they didn't want you to go to college, what did they imagine for your future?

JP: My grandfather imagined for me, maybe getting a job and working and going to Miami-Dade community college part time, but basically helping out my grandmother economically. Obviously because she's of age and um life hasn't been easy for us since we came to the United States. So that was his mentality. And I just got very angry at him, and he told me, "Well, if you go to college, you're no longer going to be my son or my grandchild." And I just told him, "Well, if you prefer me working the rest of my life saying, 'Can I take your order at McDonalds', well then we have a very wrong conception—misconception. I'm not going to do that. So if I have to leave, and you won't accept me as your grandson or your child, then that's what it's going to have to be."

MG: Yeah. Had there been anyone in your family who had gone to college?

⁴English for Speakers of Other Languages

JP: I am the first generation to go to college. Unfortunately, we lived in Columbia, and I was the only child from the marriage. My parents passed away and then my grandparents took over, and my uncle didn't go to college. He just went to high school, and in Columbia we had everything because my grandfather was very well in politics, and he made some money. So, we really didn't have to worry about college that much.

MG: Had your family left for political reasons? When did they come to the United States?

JP: We came to the United States after I started asking for Grandma, and I would call her Mom. And said that I wanted to be with her. I was two and a half years old. So he basically packed our stuff, and we came to the US and because he didn't want me to away from my mother. Here in the US, we encountered problems with immigration and other stuff. We had to live in the streets for about two, three days because my grandmother's brother, he threw immigration on us because his daughter didn't want to go back to live with him. And my grandmother told him, "Over my dead body, you're going to take her." And those were the consequences. I mean, I have to say, that I'm very proud of my grandmother and all this stuff that she did. She worked very, very hard, and she's still working hard. And what I want to do is to succeed and take be able to take care of her.

MG: Those are wonderful goals. We'll come back and talk a little bit about LASA. One of the things that occurs to me is, it's the Latin American Student Association. You're Colombian, of Colombian heritage. I'm sure there are students whose nationality is different. What makes LASA, LASA? How do the various students with the different national backgrounds come together? What do they share?

JP: What makes LASA, LASA? The first day I walked in to the LASA meeting, what they thought is that I was another Anglo, a Caucasian. And when I started speaking Spanish, they were like, Whoa, you're Latin? And I'm like, Yes I'm Latin. And they welcomed me. But even though they didn't know that I could speak Spanish before, they still welcomed me as the person who I am. Because I wanted to go and learn about different cultures.

Now, if you're Latin, you know that there's a big diversity within the Spanish community of *colombianos y venezolanos*, Mexicans all over. So basically, if you're Latin, you're learning about the different cultures. If you're not Latin, you are welcome and you learn about everything. So instead of just knowing about one culture in specific, you're learning about a whole bunch. And at the same time, you're educating us about what your culture is and how it works.

MG: So what sort of things does LASA do?

JP: We have tons of events. For example, this semester I have to say was the most challenging, and um the year that—this semester is when we've made the most change compared to the past. We had an event called Salsa Giving, which we turned it into a community service event, and we asked students to bring canned goods so we can donate them to needy families for a Thanksgiving feast. We had an event during Welcome Week that was Salsa Con LASA, and we teamed up with the Spanish Club and the Salsa Club, and we were teaching other people how to dance salsa, merengue, bachata, you know, give them a little more of a culture experience.

Um, we had an event with um, Hillel and Sigma Lambda Beta, so we stepped out of the Latino community and decided to do homecoming with them, which is a first for LASA. But as soon as I became president, I wanted to start stepping out of the Latino organizations and kind of going towards the other people to see—so we can show them, okay, we're LASA. Just because we're Latin doesn't mean that we can't work together. Because LASA stands for Latin, which is everyone who can speak Spanish or is of Latin descent; American, everyone in America; students because we're at USF; association, we come all together. That's what some people have a hard time understanding.

MG: Yeah. Besides the different activities, one of the things that I've asked when I've spoken to different students, especially students who are immigrants or are the children of immigrants, did you find USF a welcoming place when you arrived?

JP: Yes. Due to the fact that when I got here, there were Asians, there were people from Europe, from South America, from Central America, from Canada. There were people from all over. It's a very, very diverse university. And you get to meet different people, learn about different cultures. Just like I, never in my life, thought that I was going to go a mass that the Jewish have. I never thought that I would be in one, and I stepped out of my boundaries and they invited me to one, and I went. And it was pretty interesting. I couldn't understand what they were saying, but it was fun. And then you learn from the Islamics [sic]. I mean, you learn so many different things. You learn about the Qur'an, you learn about salsa, you learn about belly dancing. You learn about so many different things. It's a very, very diverse university.

MG: Is the administration responsible for that or [are] the students responsible for that? Or is it a combination of both?

JP: I think it's a combination of both. By the administrative part because they are the ones that that accept the students into the university, and they kind of want to mix a variety of nationalities into the university. And then it's also up to the students because if they close up and they don't want to open up, and teach others about their culture, then you're not getting anywhere.

MG: Good point. You're the president now of LASA. How did you rise to the presidency? Tell me about your movement through the organization.

JP: Well, I started as coordinate—um representing LASA in the ENLACE core meetings, and what happened was—

MG: What does that mean?

JP: ENLACE core meetings are basically, different student organizations come and they—we usually have every two weeks a meeting with Norma Cano Alvarez, and we talk about events that we might want to throw. Like, for example, ENLACE day, that we bring students from ninth through twelfth grade into the university to have a workshop on grants and classes and a student panel, so they can know what college is really about. And they can pursue their higher education.

So I started off in that position and doing homecoming and all these other events that they had. And at the end of the spring semester, the ex-president of LASA, he comes up to me and he asks me, "So what are you going to run for LASA." I'm like, "I'm not thinking of running. I'm a freshman next year. I'm going to be a sophomore. There is no way in this world that a freshman is going to get elected into office for his sophomore year. Forget about it." And so he thought that I really wanted to do it but then at the same time I didn't.

So when the nominations came in, he asked, he said, "I would like to nominate Juan Pineda for president of LASA." And just turned around, and I'm like, "Are you crazy? I'm not going to win this." And I'm like, "Okay, I accept the nomination." We had elections and then when you least expect it, congratulations Juan Pineda. You're the new president of LASA. I'm like, "What!? Is this even possible in the history of student organizations that a freshman becomes president for his sophomore year." They're like, No, you're the first one. Congrats.

MG: So you do you think it was?

JP: I guess what it was is because they saw my involvement and my commitment to the organization and how much I appreciated all the things that LASA had done for me, and how I work with ENLACE. And through that, through working with LASA and ENLACE, I got a job with the SSS program during the summer as a peer counselor.

MG: SS—?

JP: Student Support Services. Which was the same program that I had come in that summer before. And I got to do the same thing that the peer counselors did for the students. You know, have activities for them, cheer them up and tell them about the homesickness and how they can overcome it. And after doing all that, another position opened up for a job, which was a tutor and mentor for ENLACE, which I obviously accepted. And now I tutor and mentor in the high schools and middle schools. So I started as a freshman working at the College of Arts and Sciences dean's office, for Dean Khator⁵—who's really great person—and ended up in the ENLACE office working as a tutor and a mentor.

MG: How did you get hooked up in the dean's office with Dr. Khator?

JP: What happened was that I went to the communications department, and I was looking for an FWSP job. And they told me, well we don't have the listings here. You can go check out in the College of Arts and Sciences in the dean's office, and they'll have a list of all the positions open. So obviously I went, and I talked to Joyce Waterman, who was the person—office manager at the time. And they had a position open, and I went through the interview, and they liked me a lot, and then they hired me. And I got to work with Dean Khator who—I mean at the beginning I didn't know that much about her. And she looked like a real serious person. I'm like, Oh I don't want to get in trouble with her, but she is a serious person but she cares a lot about her staff. And she likes to make sure that, if her people are happy, she will be happy. She wants to make sure that everything goes the right way, and make sure that everything is correct, and that if you do something wrong, you pay for the consequences.

MG: And then from the College of Arts and Sciences, you ended up working with—doing some work with ENLACE.

JP: Uh-huh.

⁵An interview of Renu Khator is available as part of the USF 50th Anniversary Oral History Project collection.

MG: And tutoring and mentoring and that sort of stuff. You're still taking classes. So what kind of classes are you taking? What is your kind of goal for your degree?

JP: My degree right now, I'm trying to get an international studies degree, so I can go to law school hopefully. This semester, I'm taking 15 credit hours. I'm taking Italian, American History II, Intro to Art, and there's another class that I just can't remember right now. I'm taking four classes for a total of 15 credit hours, and I have to say, this semester is kind of tough. But I'm still hanging there.

MG: And this is your sophomore year.

JP: This is my sophomore year.

MG: And it's the first semester of your sophomore year?

JP: The first semester of my sophomore year.

MG: So you've got a—so where do you go from here? You're already the president of LASA. I should probably ask also, are there any other student organizations you're involved in?

JP: I'm involved in the Italian club. I'd have to say that also through LASA and ENLACE, another opportunity opened to be co-chair of Hispanic heritage here at the University of South Florida, which was really a shocker because in high school I did it for 2000, the most of Hispanic students. And I'm coming here to a big university, which is so diverse, and throwing celebration for not 39 thousand students but 41 thousand students, which I believe is the new amount of students that we have here at USF.

MG: Are there statistics of how many students are Latin on this campus?

JP: There are statistics on what percentage are Latin and what percentage are Black, but I'm too sure about those statistics

MG: But, it's in the thousands.

JP: It's in the thousands. There's a lot of minority students here at the university, especially Latinos.

MG: So where do you go from here? What's next? Can you be president for multiple years? Would you want to?

JP: You can serve as president for two terms just like a regular presidency, meaning this year and next year, if I would want to. Obviously there's been a big change in LASA and its reputation is getting bigger and better. So, if I see that there is someone that I can train and they want to step in, and help them out to be there. I'm willing to step down, so that person can come up and help LASA be even bigger and better. What I see myself doing, maybe in a couple of years, is running for student government president and being the first Latino student government president here at the University of South Florida.

MG: Now that's interesting. I did not—I hadn't thought about it, but I didn't realize there had not been a Latino student president up until this point.

JP: There hasn't been and Norma Canno Alvarez, who's basically my mentor—we were talking about all the things that were going on and all the stuff that I had done so far. And she was telling me, "Why don't you consider for the near future becoming president of student government?" And I'm like, "Well that's something that I have to take into consideration." And as I went to the Marshall Center on the second floor and I looked at picture of all the presidents and started reading last names, I was looking and I'm like, There hasn't been one Hispanic president for the student body yet? And there's so many Latinos here at the university. So I told her, "You know, maybe I would like to run to make a difference and to show that Latinos can do it, and they can succeed in college."

MG: Will you get more involved in student government, do you think, to kind of lead up to be running in the next couple of years?

JP: In the summer, when I first start—came into USF, I began attending senate meetings. So, for the near future, I would like to attend more senate meetings and get more involved with student government, so when I run for president of the student body, I have some awareness of how the system works.

MG: Good. Your graduation date, as it sits right now is when?

JP: Well, hopefully, it's 2006. But you never know that because due to all the budget cuts, some of the programs are being cut, so some classes that go towards your major, you can't take them the next semester. According to USF statistics, in order for you to graduate in four years, each semester you need to take 15 credit hours, which is not a lot of credit hours but it sometimes—you can't afford it. Like, for example, I can't afford 15 credit hours next semester. I can only take 12 [credit hours] and hopefully two or three classes will be towards my major.

MG: Okay. Have you—but you've been able to work pretty much all semester. Has that helped a lot, to be able to afford school? Because my bigger question is, is USF affordable? Have you found with LASA or in some of your other networks of friends, difficulties that students are having affording school?

JP: I had, like I was a peer counselor, I had one of my students, and I saw her last week, and she was telling me that she felt that she was working so hard in school and out of school to try and pay for her tuition that she was going back home. And that really, I mean it hit me hard because, you know, we worked so hard for her to be here at the university but then at the same time, she can't afford it. So she's going to have to go back home.

I have found myself in really tight economic situations here at USF. In the fall semester, I wasn't given a meal plan because I didn't have enough financial aid, and then according to financial aid, my family made a whole bunch of money, which we really didn't. And then to this point, it's still affecting me, the financial aid situation. It is an affordable school but like every other school, you have your little problems with financial aid.

MG: The hope then is to graduate in 2006 and to go to law school.

JP: Mm-hm.

MG: Why law school and what do you want to study, what would you like to see as your career as an attorney?

JP: I picked law school because most of my family, they're involved in politics in Colombia. I want to make a difference in people's lives. For example, I might study corporate law or I might study for family law. Those are two fields that I like. Corporate law I like due to the fact that I might get to travel all around the world, and then family law is because there's a lot of problems within the family. And if you can be a lawyer and try to settle the things down in a calm way, then everything would be better. One of my

dreams is [to] maybe go back to Colombia one day and run for senator or governor or maybe even president and make a change in my country. Because if there is one thing that I am proud of, it is being Colombian, and what is going on over there is just—breaks my heart.

MG: I want to come back and talk a little bit about LASA again, about the diversity. Where are the students from? Tell me about the people who belong to LASA, where they're from, and what kinds of programs you've done to celebrate the different nationalities or backgrounds of the different Latino communities?

JP: LASA is very diverse. When I started working with our listserv, I realized that there's about 300 members in LASA including members from the past that still want to know what is going on with LASA. We have a vast majori—variety of students. We have African-Americans. We have Latinos. We have Anglos. We have Asians. I mean, they're from all over. How we participate in celebrating their heritage is through the Office of Multicultural Activities. We have—we are—we signed up to be part of the Office of Multicultural Activities, and we take part in the Martin Luther King celebration. The holiday celebration which we had, not on Monday, that basically explains how Christmas is celebrated all over the world.

So if there's—for example, the Indian Student Association might want to do an event with LASA, or the Black Student Association wants to do an event with LASA, all they have to do is send us a paper telling us the date and what they want us to do, and we would happily do it if it fits our calendar. We've done a lot of activities with Greeks. For example, a *Caliente* picnic with them, the Theta Alpha, and then a Latin Fest with Sigma Lamda Gamma. In that Latin Fest, the Caribbean Culture Exchange also participated, and the Black Student Union. So we kind of combine our efforts into one big family.

MG: Have you thought about Greek life? Are you a member of a fraternity?

JP: I am not a member of a fraternity, and yes, I have thought about Greek life. I don't know. Sort of. After I got to interact with the different fraternities and I got to travel with one of them to Chicago through ENLACE—that some of the guys are tutors and mentors—I learned a lot of things about Greek life and how it really is. It's not the picture that people try to throw out there that, Oh they're the big tough ones. And then during rush week they treat you really bad. And I mean, some people just try to terrorize you about what Greek life really is when that's not it. It's not it. And, um, what attracted me about the Greek life is that they try and help each other out. It's not that you're buying your friends because I already know all of them.

So if I want, and I join a fraternity, it's not that I'm buying my friends. I already know them, and it's just like brotherhood. And what I find very amazing was when Shannon Mohammed, who belonged to Lambda Theta Phi, passed away, how all his brothers came together and they went to his family's house, and they were there with the family and they did a memorial. I mean, for me, that was just incredible on the union and the bond that Greek life creates.

MG: As you look towards LASA in the future. What sorts of things would you like to see LASA doing that it's not currently doing or to continue doing? That you've started or was started before you?

JP: I would like to see LASA working more with different organizations, more community service. That's obviously something that I have kicked off this semester. Last semester—I mean last year we didn't have as much community service, and that's one thing that I wanted to change during my presidency. Fortunately, we've done about six community service projects, which not too many student organizations do in one semester.

MG: What are they?

JP: We did *línea de ayuda* with ENLACE. Basically it was in Univision⁶, and it was answering phone calls regarding HCC and USF on how to get in. We did volunteer USF's community plunge to go and plant trees in the east side of Tampa. We did, uh, one for homecoming. I don't remember the title of it, but we went and we painted a house for a group. What just got me was how happy they were when we were done, and we had gone and we had also planted some plants in their backyard. And I mean, just the hug is enough of a compensation. Salsa Giving was a community service project. I mean there's been a lot during this semester. And, what I like about community service projects is I don't care what people say or if you need to get paid. When I do it, and I see the shine in people's faces—in people's eyes, the smile in people's faces and that big hug that they give you, that's enough compensation for me. Because I'm making a difference in someone's life.

MG: You've done a lot of mentoring work and have been really involved with younger students of Latin background who are having to decide, like you did. You know, what are they going to do when they graduate from high school? Based upon your experiences or what you've seen at USF, does the Latin community, you know, student community, face different kinds of problems or issues that maybe are unique to Latin students at USF, or in general anywhere in the country?

⁶A Spanish language broadcast television network headquartered in New York City. The major production studios, production facilities and business operations are based in Doral, Florida.

JP: I think in general students face the same problems as students being Latino, being Blacks, being whatever they are. They face the same problems, just that some problems might be more inclined one way than another way. For example, the Mexican-American student association, they were banning Taco Bell because of the tomato pickers, which I believe it was a good fight that they were doing. And now Lamda Theta Phi, LASA, and MASA⁷ are working on a project to stop—well, not to stop because the merger already took place between Clear Channel and Hispanic broadcasting stations. We kind of want to split that apart due to the fact that they are trying to invoke one vision of what a Latino really is when there is not one Latino, there's all sorts of flavors and tastes and nationalities, and we're very diverse. You can't just put us as one. What the merger is doing is just showing one side of Latinos really are, which is wrong.

MG: Well, I've run out of questions. I want to thank you for coming today. I appreciate the time that you spent with us and look forward to your history being part of the official record. I think that students down the road will come and they'll watch this oral history and, like I think you said earlier on, that they may surprise their parents and surprise themselves and go on to do great things with their careers, and I certainly hope that for you, and I know the university hopes that for you too. So thanks Juan. I appreciate you being here.

JP: Thank you very much for having me.

End of interview

⁷Mexican American Student Association