

For a first-generation college student, the son of two Salvadoran-immigrant parents who tenaciously championed education, taking a detour is scary. Actually, it's outright terrifying. Coming from a family of seven living off of a household income of about \$40,000 a year, education became my golden ticket. It was a preset path; an opportunity to experience life outside of my under-resourced Los Angeles community. I never doubted my abilities. It wasn't until I was at Brown University, surrounded by privilege, that I began to feel like an imposter. That feeling never really subsided. It lingered in the back of my mind, manifesting itself in irrational self-doubt despite my academic and social success at one of the best institutions in the country. I suppressed these feelings, unwisely believing that continued success at elite institutions was the antidote to my imposter syndrome. So, when I began law school at USC in 2018, I had to adjust to a professional environment that evokes intense feelings of anxiety and alienation. After receiving the worst grades of my life, I made the personal decision to take time off from school. It was one of the best decisions I've ever made.

During my medical leave of absence in the spring of 2019, I immersed myself in things that genuinely make me happy. I continued working for Rhymes with Reason, a cutting edge ed-tech company utilizing hip-hop lyrics as a valuable teaching tool. I began journaling, started practicing meditation, and most importantly, I began seeing a therapist. He helped me unlearn harmful cognitive distortions that had been holding me back for years. I would be lying if I said over the span of the following months, I had this "Rocky Balboa" type of comeback. I didn't. It was the hardest period of my life. I had to confront and ultimately reinforce notions of who I am at my core. At the end of the day, I'm grateful that I made this decision.

Moving forward, I learned an important life lesson: success is not linear. It ebbs and flows. I am more than a prestigious internship or numbers on a transcript. These things are important, but they do not define me. Ultimately, my tenacity and resilience are what define me. This is what it

means to be a first-generation college student in my view. It means unconditionally believing in yourself. It means understanding that you will not have access to the same resources as your privileged counterparts, accepting that you will need to work twice as hard as the next person if you want to succeed in your field, and committing yourself to making it happen at all costs. Additionally, being a first-generation student means paying it forward to the next generation of scholars. For example, as Co-President of USC Gould's First-Generation Professionals student group, I spearheaded our first "1L Survival Guide" - a comprehensive manual for first-generation students that provides valuable information about stress management, study tips, exam strategies, and other information about key resources available to first-generation students at USC Gould.

As a future first-generation, Latinx attorney, one of my goals is to promote more Latinx representation in the entertainment industry as an entertainment attorney. Last summer, I had the opportunity to intern at HBO. I learned a lot about the legal aspects of dealmaking as well as cultural aspects of the industry as a whole. However, I did notice that there were no Latinx attorneys at HBO. Not one. That's a systemic issue and I want to be a catalyst for changing the way entertainment companies recruit diverse candidates. Additionally, another goal of mine is to champion mental health awareness within the Los Angeles first-generation professional community. Mental health is a hot-button topic in the legal industry. My upbringing conditioned me to regard mental health as a taboo talking point, that all I needed was *ganas* or grit. Although I'm grateful for the words of my supportive parents, I recognize the shortcomings of such guidance without other forms of support. As first-generation Latinx professionals, our intersectionality puts us at a higher risk of feeling undeserving or alienated at elite institutions. We must be proactive in supporting each other to maximize our potential. I will advocate for increased mental health support and resources as I progress through my legal career. We deserve to be here, and we deserve to feel that way too.