Ximena Barbagelatta Grau oral history: October 20, 2020

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Victoria Villaseñor: OK, so the day is October 20 is 11:03am. I'm with Ximena, and we are going to talk about our experiences dealing with COVID 19 as students so...I want to get some general information from you: your name, where you're from, what major you're-you're pursuing, and how you got to St. Mary's

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Well, so I'm Ximena Barbagelatta Grau. I'm originally from Lima, Peru. I'm a marketing major, I'm a junior at St. Mary's, and how I got to St. Mary's well, basically I went to a Marianist high school here in Peru and they—St. Mary's came offering scholarships. So, I applied to one of those scholarships and after, you know, like in a process I-I got the scholarship. So now I'm, I'm at St. Mary's.

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Victoria Villaseñor: Oh, nice. How long have you been studying here is this your third year?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Yeah, yeah, I'm a junior

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Victoria Villaseñor: Cool. So, what, what was your, your situation like last March—March 2020? Like, kind of before everything kind of broke loose and went downhill a little bit in San Antonio...what was, what currently, or at the time, where were you at as a student?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Well when everything like happen, I was in McAllen, Texas. I was with my roommate for spring break. And yeah, it was surprising for both of us because we're supposed to stay only one week there, but they extended spring break for two weeks. So, it was surprising at first. And that's when I was like, well, I feel like it's a serious thing.

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Victoria Villaseñor: So, did you did you stay—when you came back to San Antonio, what was, what were your plans, really? Or what-what was going through your mind like about your family back home and in this situation here? Like, how were you feeling?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Um, well... You know, we-we received an email saying that they were going to extend for-for one more week the spring break. And I believe in that same and that same email, they, they said like, after the end of the spring break everything was going to be online, but some students were allowed to stay. So, I was going to stay, you know, until the end of the semester, like May. But then the—probably two days after they, said they said like, "Well, no one can stay unless you have like a pretty good reason." And then, I mean, I-I thought I'm, I, I, you know, like I applied to a situation because I was an international student and I didn't have anywhere else to go. But, you know, my parents at some point we're like, "Okay, but what are you going to do? Like, you're going to be like basically by yourself in the university so...we don't want you to like, you know, like get sad or get depressed or get anything you know like if you're alone over there." So yeah, that was our thoughts, like my parents and I were like, we were concerned about like my mental health and, you know, apart from that, being like alone, like what happened if I was infected with COVID, you know, that was the situation.

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Victoria Villaseñor: Did you feel unsafe at all on campus? Like this looming idea like, "oh, like is there COVID on campus? I don't know." Because there was a lot of unknown really in the city.

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Um, well, at that time, not-not really because it wasn't like that big of a thing yet. Um, especially, I wasn't that worried because, you know, like, not a lot of people were going to stay. Because I feel like only like 20 people was staying on campus, you know, who actually really needed to stay. So, at the time, I wasn't concerned about you know that much. Um...but I was more concerned about my-my mental health, like just being by myself. Everything was closed. That was the main concern for both me and my parents.

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Victoria Villaseñor: *Everything* was closed? Like entirely?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Well, I mean, there were restrictions, I guess. Like they—like the cafeteria, like they-they took some stations out, I think they spread the-the chairs and tables, so... everything was super weird. Yeah.

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Victoria Villaseñor: Yeah, I bet. Were you able to at least leave campus at any point? Like just to get out

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Yeah, yeah, actually. Actually, I did, um, well, thank God I-I have some friends that let me stay at their house in Fulsher, Texas in the Houston area. And also, that's something I'm really grateful for, um...because, they actually let me stay longer than expected because they also cancelled my flight in May, because everything just like spiked and it

was really bad. So, they let me stay there until probably July. So yeah, I actually got to leave like two days after or three days after I got back from my McAllen.

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Victoria Villaseñor: Okay, so where were you, were you planning to fly to? Were you flying home?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Um, yeah. So, I mean, I, I was planning, you know, if COVID didn't happen like I was supposed to fly back to Peru just for the for the holiday, you know, for that for summer break. Like, normal time like May till August. But, um, they canceled my flight in May, so I wasn't able to leave. And then they close the borders in Peru. So, no one, no one could go out and could come in. So, it was all a mess.

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Victoria Villaseñor: Have you been back since, or have you just stayed here?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Yeah. Actually, I'm back. I'm in Peru right now.

Victoria Villaseñor: Oh!

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Yeah. Yeah, so I actually got to, to come back in July, as I was telling you. Because um—well the Peruvian government was offering charter flights so, I actually signed up for one. So, that's how I came back. Because that was also a concern of my parents. You know, like, once we received the notification that we were-we could stay on campus, you know. My parents were concerned, like, "Okay, but now you know like COVID is such a big thing. What if you get infected?" Like, you know, like...And they were like, "You know, we know you're going to be with your friends." So that was a concern of theirs. And like, what if I got infected? I was going to be there by myself. And at least here in Peru, I can be with my parents if I get, you know, like COVID or anything. And here I have insurance and everything that covers even more than my student insurance covers in the U.S.

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Victoria Villaseñor: Oh, nice. How did you feel flying back in terms of your, your safety? Like how was how was that experience being a plane?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Uh...it was, it was weird. I'm not gonna lie. It was weird, but at the same time I was impressed because the airport, you know. I left from-I left from Houston, and

the airport was pretty empty so there, there were not a lot of people. And on the domestic flight, it was pretty much empty as well. I—probably like...I don't know, 30 people in the plane. But we...it was just weird. I mean we-we had to have our mask on all the time in the flight, everything was packaged—the food, water, um...But, um—and then it was really weird when I had to fly in the, you know, in the international flight because it was it was full. It was like extremely full. And it was weird, just like sitting next to people, like we were really close. And I was like, "Oh my gosh, what if what if one of us have it?" You know? Like what if one of us pass it, and like we all are infected? So, it was just a weird experience.

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Victoria Villaseñor: So, you had to take two fights? Like a domestic flight somewhere..?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Yeah, yeah. So, I had to fly from Houston to Washington D.C., and then to D.C. to Panama, and then Peru.

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Victoria Villaseñor: Interesting, huh, I was Florida because it's closer, maybe—I don't know.

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Yeah, so they were offering, you know like, I thought the same. Because they, they were offering pretty much like frequent flights and some of them would leave, would leave from Florida, some of them would leave from Houston and—but this one left from Washington DC. So, I don't know, I just went because I wanted to leave!

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Victoria Villaseñor: Right. Did you, when you landed in Peru, did you quarantine?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Yeah, yeah, it is mandatory. So um, the Peruvian Government—I don't know if they're doing that right now. Um, you know, like in October, but in July, they-they did that, like we...we got off the plane, they put it in, like, like a tent at the end and they would take our temperature, like check our-our legal paperwork...then after that, they would take us to a hotel in town and make us quarantine there for—so I've heard people saying, yeah, that they had to stay but—because some of my friends also came back, that studied at St. Mary's, also came back. And some of them said, "Yeah, I had to stay one week." Other said "I had to stay two weeks." And some of my other friends told me, "Well, yeah, they, they took a test, you know, and if you were negative, you could leave." And that's what happened to me. So, I took a test, and then I...it was negative, so I got to leave in five days or four days. So it wasn't that long.

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Victoria Villaseñor: Well cool...interesting how different it is there than it is here. So that's nice, that they-they're taking those precautions for you, you were able to go home. How has, how has virtual learning been? Like what is, what is the time difference like in Peru than it is here? Or is there..?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Well, thank God, thank God it's the same! But I feel like at some point in November it changes, so San Antonio goes one hour behind. But it's not like that bad, so...

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Victoria Villaseñor: Nice! How has—so the classes that you're taking right now, are they all fully online? Or are some of them doing that, that thing where it's like some people can come in or some people can choose to be online or...How, how, how have you had to adapt to that?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Well, all of them are online. I'm lucky that are online, because I have heard some complaints, you know, from—coming from my friends saying, "Yeah, when it's in person-virtual, it's like the professor, when you're online, they're not even paying attention to us." So, at least that's not my case. Everything is online for me, so I log in there on regular time like real time. And I mean, it's been...I mean, I feel like I already got used to it...because, you know, they switched everything online in in the spring. So, um, it's been-it's been weird for sure. Like, I'm not having, you know, like that interaction with other people. But I think you just learn to deal with it. You just cope with it and um, well, like academic wise I feel like I'm doing pretty good. I don't know, maybe it's just like a personal thing because I have, you know, my own time to-to study here. I have my own place to study here. At least I have interaction here with my parents too, and they help sometimes so...I feel like for me it's...it's not like, you know, like the best possible way that I would like to learn, but I mean it hasn't been like as bad as um for other people that have been experiencing that version like that class. You know, like that switch.

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Victoria Villaseñor: How is it? How do you think it's changed since, since after Spring Break—the extended spring break. I think the University was trying to figure things out, still. Do you think it has gotten better, the virtual learning?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Um...well, um...Yeah I mean, I feel like the University was trying to figure out some, some, you know, like some measures, you know, like safety, health, health measures to, you know, like to protect the students and we're going to stay at the time. So, I can understand why they extended it. And also...what was the other question, sorry?

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Victoria Villaseñor: Do you think the quality of learning online has, has gotten better or different in any way than it was at first last semester?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Um, well, it was...I'm just going to speak for myself because I know like other majors, could you know like think otherwise. But in my case, since I'm a marketing, major, I don't have that much of, you know, like for example labs or like physical, you know, like job to do. So, in my case, my professors have been pretty like, pretty good at, you know, adapting everything to virtual. But, for example, in some classes that I have—for example, I was talking to you, like I was in Marketing for Services, you know...Just—my professor was like "Well guys, I wish we could you know like go out and experience, you know, for example, a restaurant service." You know? But, this time we have to do everything online, you know. Like experience the service online. But I feel like in my case it's been like an eye-opening experience. Just to realize how other, you know like—I'm just talking major wise right now. You know how like other businesses can also adapt; you know? And you can learn and adapt in your future career, you know, like if you want to open a business. You know like how, you know what-which measurements you have to take if anything like this happens. So, for me it was eye opening, actually. It's not as bad as I thought it was going to be. And I'm surprised, I'm even getting better grades now. (laughs)

Victoria Villaseñor: Have, have you been keeping up with any of the-the emails that the Office of the President are sending like through St. Mary's?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: You mean like regarding the COVID situation like the cases?

Victoria Villaseñor: Yeah.

Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Yeah, yeah. I recently like this morning, I got one and...I mean I feel like St. Mary's—it reflects like I feel like the good job that St. Mary's is doing on campus to keep everyone safe. Because it's only three cases on campus. I mean, reported. But three cases and there's zero active. So, I'm pretty sure like they're already—they're already good, they feel good, they feel better. But I feel like that only shows that St. Mary's is, I mean is taking the-the, you know, like the health advice that the CDC offers. And well, I also—I would like to think that also the students are, you know, like are starting to be aware that this is a real thing that actually can affect everyone.

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Victoria Villaseñor: I've gone to campus a few times and there's nobody there during the week. And were you ever involved on campus like throughout—like before all of this, we ever in any clubs or anything?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Yeah, yeah, I'm actually part of the Marianist Leadership Program—MLP. So...that was definitely, that was definitely such a big change.

Victoria Villaseñor: Right

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Um, for example, something that we really change was a CTH "continuing the heritage." The, the service day. Um, and we—I mean like on a normal day without COVID, we would gather you know like on a Saturday morning and divide groups to go out and do, you know, service to different places in San Antonio. But of course, we, we couldn't do that this year. So, we had to do...So, you know, like the Office of Community Engagement, the one in charge of CTH had to switch completely to virtual. And they did a CTH teach-in version. So, it was more like educational sessions. And then followed by different reflection questions and reflection activities. And the same with MLP, we, we always have our fall and spring retreat and we go to [Tecaboca.] And, but of course, again this year we couldn't do that especially because some people were not even on campus and some people weren't even in the country—like me. Um, and everything had to, had to be online. And we had to like do several activities just online.

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Victoria Villaseñor: So are you still like meeting with them online like still trying to be participating in any way.

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Yeah, all the meetings and we have our online. So, yeah.

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Victoria Villaseñor: How have those organizations adapted the services, or have they? Are they, are they just like done—not done, but they're just stopping doing community service activities or...What, what are the-what are they doing now? What are they up to?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Um, well, I am I suffering now MLP is not requiring, you know—because as MLP students, we have a an amount of, you know, like a number and amount of hours that we have to complete—service hours that we have to complete a week but as of right now, MLP is not requiring, you know the service hours because of these, like, you know, situation and we don't want to put anyone at risk of going out. I mean, but if they, if they, if people actually want to go on and do service, it's okay for them. It's not a requirement for MLP. And also, there are few sites that are offering you know um, you know, like virtual services. Because most of them, you know, is just like go out and paint, paint this, are go out and just hang out with, for example, the Marianist brothers. Or go out help the elderly or read to kids. So, it's, it's—it has to do with interaction with people. So, some services are not letting you know anyone get that

contact you know, like in person contact. But instead, we're working on social-social justice modules. Which is like kind of the replacement for that.

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Victoria Villaseñor: Well, nice. Have you been, been keeping up with the news—United States news, or any changes in San Antonio in regards to the number of cases, or just the situation in general here?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Um, not really. And I think I should actually because, you know, like I'm planning to go back. So, I think I definitely should. But, I mean, the most that I've done is just asked my friends like "Hey, so how's the situation going?" I know they're, they're not like, you know, an official source, but I feel like at least I can get some information from their point of view, you know, on how the situation is going.

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Victoria Villaseñor: How do they describe the situation to you?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Well, they told me it's, it's pretty bad still. Um, you know, like cases are not really going down as much as they would expect. Especially at that time—at this time in the year, um...But I mean, people are just, you know, like continuing their, their lives. Like, apparently like COVID is not like a thing for them-for them anymore. And they tell me, "Yeah, some people were masks, some people don't. So, it's just it's just weird." That's, that's basically the only thing they told me it's just weird. I, I just want to go back to normal. But, uh, yeah.

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Victoria Villaseñor: In, in Lima are they...is there like a mandatory mask order? Or how are they, how, how...how are the regulation different in Lima than they are here in San Antonio?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Ah, well, basically, when you go out, you have to wear a mask. So even if you're just walking down the street because—okay so. Something that is really different from Peru in general and the U.S., I've noticed that in the U.S. people drive a lot and they don't walk as much. But in Peru, like people walk everywhere like because it's not that common—you know, like cars are not are not that affordable for the economy, you know, for like a regular person in the economy than it is in the U.S. But since a lot of people walk everywhere, they tend to be closer to each other. So that's why we are required to wear a mask, um, everywhere. Like even if you step out of your house, you need to have your mask on. When you're at the mall, when you're in a place—you know, like store, you have to wear your mask. And when you are in the public transportation, you have to wear your, apart from your mask, you have to wear your face shield. So, if you are not wearing that shield on, you cannot like going in the bus.

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Victoria Villaseñor: Interesting. Does it...Do you feel more safe being at home, in terms of the, the possibility of getting infected than you would in San Antonio?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Um, yeah. I know, in a sense, I do, especially because I was, as I was telling you previously here I have my insurance and this insurance covers—if I get infected by COVID, the insurance covers like 100% for it. So, and I would have the opportunity to go to a clinic and not like a public hospital, you know, so that's maybe like an advantage that I have here in Peru that I wouldn't in San Antonio. So, in that, in that way, I feel more safe. Especially with my parents, you know. Like they're the ones who are going to take care of me like 24/7. So, so yeah, in a way, I feel more—I feel better here. You know, like COVID wise, you know, like I feel more safe.

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Victoria Villaseñor: So how many—how open, I guess is Lima now? Things are reopening like across the world, and is it like the same—you talked about malls and malls are open here too and restaurants are open, gyms...

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Yeah, so I mean for example supermarkets like grocery stores were always open. Then I—so I mean, I'm not that aware of the process that they follow you know opening things because I at a time, I wasn't hear in Peru. But I believe then they started with, you know, like small market, then I think some restaurants are open now. And then they started doing, what else...Well, malls were open because usually the grocery stores are in the mall. And right now, they're, they want to open bars and some gyms because gyms are still closed. But something that is not opening yet are movies. You know, like, movie theaters. So, they're still closed. Um, but it's really, it's just a process of opening up, you know. Like there are some things that are not open here in Peru that are open there are in the U.S. as you were saying, like for example gyms. Gyms are not open here yet.

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Victoria Villaseñor: What about schools like for elementary school...?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: I forgot about that. Yeah, all schools, universities are fully online like they're not doing anything.

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Victoria Villaseñor: That's different.

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Yeah, yeah 'cause I know, I know some, some high schools in the U.S. are doing in person classes.

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Victoria Villaseñor: Do you know if any sports were kind of going on during this time? The way that—right now baseball is going on, basketball just finished. I know that soccer was going on. And I don't know if Lima or Peru participated in that.

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Um, yeah. Um, so, you know, like, you know, like we have soccer leagues. But I feel like the only league, you know, like that is going on right now is soccer. You know, like the Peruvian Soccer League and also recently we had um, you know, like, oh my gosh, what is this called? You know like the qualifiers and national teams just played for the World Cup, the soccer World Cup. So, we recently had those. But it's like just, just the actual game. It's not like—it's without people like the stadiums are empty.

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Victoria Villaseñor: Mm hmm. For—in baseball recently, it's the end of it, like they're going to determine who's going to win the whole thing right—they started allowing people back in. And so that makes me a little bit nervous. So, but that's another difference between Peru here in the United States. You said that you you're gonna, you're planning on returning to San Antonio. When exactly, how-how exactly did you make that decision to return? That's a little risky..

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Um, yeah, I know it's a little risky. Well, first of all, it was because I wanted to do an internship over the summer, so I need to be there in the U.S. So that's kind of why I wanted to go back as well. But apart from that, I feel like I'm also...So for example, I have some jobs on campus like coordinator of social events when you UPC. So sometimes that requires me to be in the office, even though we adapted to-to be only you know, like online office hours.

Wait. I'm just gonna wait till the plane passes. (laughs).

And so sometimes I...I feel like I need to be in the office, sometimes you know like in the actual office to help out with some stuff. And at some point, it's easier to organize events when you're on campus. You can, you can just like direct people. "Oh yeah, just call me at that time and," blah, blah. But apart from that, my—the internship that I was planning to apply to was the first thing that made me, you know, like, say, "Okay, I want to go back to the U.S." Um, so yeah. Oh, and I was trying to, you know, like regular time probably January. But, um, I mean the borders in Peru are still closed to the U.S. So, I mean we—like you know Peruvians can go to certain countries in South America but not the U.S. So, I'm just waiting for that to, you know, to like I just—I'm just waiting for the U.S. government to say, "okay, you can go to the U.S."

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Victoria Villaseñor: Has um...throughout all of this, have you ever been like affected by, like, COVID in any way, like with your family? Or do you know of any friends on campus that have contracted it or have parents or family who has...?

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Um, not that I know because you know usually COVID can be asymptomatic as well. But I mean like, my-my mom took you know took a test and she, she tested negative. My dad, usually at his, you know, at the workplace he frequently you know like takes tests for COVID. And it's negative. Um, I haven't taken any test, apart from the one that I took at the hotel and it was negative. Um, so I, I mean I want to assume we're fine. Um, but then my friend—with my friends, I haven't heard anything. You know, like getting you know, like testing positive from them. Um...So I feel like at least my environment is pretty safe. We try to keep everyone safe in my, in my family. So, we don't go out as much or we don't you know like gather in, you know, we don't like organize family gatherings.

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Victoria Villaseñor: Yeah, that's hard.

00:29:44.160 --> 00:29:44.490 Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: I know

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Victoria Villaseñor: Well, I think those are really all the questions that I had for us. Thank you so much for sharing and talking to me. I think you gave really good insight on how it's different from where you're at, versus where we're at here. And thank you for your service on campus before, before things got really bad but that's awesome that you still trying to continue that in some way.

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Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: And sometimes it's different—it's a little difficult, especially for example with events that I was telling you like um... like now I have to organize everything online. You know, like the events have to be virtual, and sometimes I feel bad because you know like we have to do virtual but at the same time in person, ab in person portion. And I feel bad because you know like me not being able to be on campus, I need to like delegate those tasks to other people in a team that are on campus. So, they're doing basically the job that I would have to do, and I feel bad. You know, like they do me that favor but still it's like. It's like, I feel I could be there.

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Victoria Villaseñor: So, I have a just a random question. With, with your degree—you're pursuing marketing, right? What, what exactly like are you going for like or like hope to get out of that?

00:31:14.250 --> 00:31:14.730

Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Huh. That's a good question. Well, as of right now I really like you know like the advertising portion...kind of digital marketing and social media marketing. Um, but something that really you know that grabbed my attention from, you know, like the area of marketing that I would like to like, be in—and you know some people would be like, "Okay, so you're going to use marketing for that?" is um, I would like to get into ministry. Um, you know, because I work at—I am a social media intern at the University of Ministry and I basically, you know, like run the account, try to come up with more content for the account that is, you know, resourceful for the students. Um, so ministry is something that, you know, like, not a lot of people think of when, when you're studying you know business especially. Um...But it's something that I would like to, you know, to apply the marketing knowledge into, into ministry. You know, like any archdiocese or other ministry out there. Because I feel like it's an interesting field that not a lot of people like, you know, think of as a career. Um, so, I mean, that's one of my main options that I would like to do, you know advertise for ministry or organize you know like campaigns—marketing campaigns for ministry.

00:32:32.610 --> 00:32:35.310

Victoria Villaseñor: I think you have a lot of connections at St. Mary's I mean. That's a good way to start, yeah.

00:32:40.110 --> 00:32:40.560

Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Mm hmm.

00:32:40.920 --> 00:32:43.590

Victoria Villaseñor: Well, good job. That's awesome. I don't do numbers.

00:32:46.140 --> 00:32:48.720

Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: You would be suppressed, not as many numbers as you would think!

25400:32:50.670 --> 00:32:57.030

Victoria Villaseñor: Nice. Sometimes we need to do some sort of marketing for our—because it's public history. So, we need to know how to reach people talk to people so someday I'll get into it. But that's a good skill to have, communication.

00:33:06.960 --> 00:33:10.680

Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Yeah, definitely. I mean, you have to do email marketing, you know, to reach out to people

00:33:14.280 --> 00:33:16.980

Victoria Villaseñor: Well, thank you very much me thank you for talking to me. Thank you for taking time out of your day.

00:33:17.190 --> 00:33:17.730

Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Thank you, thank you. Thank you for inviting me.

00:33:21.630 --> 00:33:33.360

Victoria Villaseñor: Yeah, of course! I'll send you a link with everything once everything's kind of curated and up on, on the website we're working with. So, I'll keep you in the loop.

00:33:34.290 --> 00:33:34.680

Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Sure! Sounds good.

Victoria Villaseñor: Thank you, again. I hope you have a really good day.

00:33:39.510 --> 00:33:40.950

Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: You too. Thank you so much.

00:33:43.170 --> 00:33:44.100

Ximena Barbagelatta Grau: Thank you, bye.

Victoria Villaseñor: Bye bye.